

**Once Preferred, Now Peripheral:**  
**the Place of Poetry in the Teaching of English**  
**in the New Zealand Curriculum for**  
**year 9, 10 and 11 students**

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Thanks to the human heart by which we live  
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, its fears,  
To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

*William Wordsworth. "Ode on Intimations of Immortality." X1 (200-204).*

## Abstract

A poet is somebody who feels, and who expresses his (or her) feeling through words.

This may sound easy. It isn't...  
It's the most wonderful life on earth.  
Or so I feel.

e. e. cummings: "A Poet's Advice". (1-3, 27-28)

Fifty years ago poetry was a key element in the English programme in most secondary schools. Today it is marginalised, with many teachers avoiding teaching poetry as far as possible. The consequence is a cycle of disadvantage whereby many students, never having studied, let alone attempted to write a poem in school, leave without having encountered literature at its most intense and concentrated. Since the study of poetry can also be avoided almost entirely in university English departments, such students will, in their turn, when they themselves become educators of the next generation, similarly avoid teaching poetry.

This thesis investigates the pedagogical and curricular contexts within which English has been taught in New Zealand since 1945, and within which poetry has become increasingly marginal. Surveys of and interviews with students past and present, teachers and teacher-educators enable me to identify a range of reasons why this has happened, and a cycle of deprivation has developed.

The thesis also identifies, however, ways in which the cycle of deprivation can be broken, and the teaching of poetry made central to the teaching of written, oral and visual language in accordance with the principles of the current New Zealand curriculum for the teaching of English.

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## Prologue

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost: "The Road Not Taken". (Last lines)

I was aware of rhyming words and the musical rhythm of language from early childhood. This primitive power has continued to flow like a current throughout my life. I was fascinated by jingles and story poems that were easy to memorise. John Barrinton Wain says that "Poetry is to prose as dancing is to walking", and, like most young children, I loved to sing skipping rhymes and make them up myself. I loved speaking poems aloud even before I went to school. Elocution lessons were an extension of the poems, spoken stories and voices exercises we practised each school day. Poetry gave me a chance to perform – to act.

I loved dancing and I loved poetry. I practised hard for my teacher and memorised every poem. I was taught to speak a poem truthfully and to take ownership of each poem as if I were the poet. The rhythms, the words, the far-away places such as England and Ireland (where Mum and Dad's families lived), the moments of beauty or sadness or excitement, the cleverness of rhyme and figurative language, all animated me and lived in my memory. Poems fuelled my imagination and broadened my vocabulary. I didn't understand the poems fully at first, but with time, came to a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the inner essence of the texts. Although I was a shy child, when I engaged with an audience I forgot my nervousness and was totally involved in the performance.

My experiences were not unique, but I did have a privileged education. Many of my friends also had elocution lessons, and family entertainment, concerts, and participation in festivals of speech and drama were regular events for us. We all learned poems in the classroom, and our school day began with breathing and voice exercises. It was part of our curriculum. I am not aware of the content of primary school teaching in other schools in those days, but many of our younger Sisters of Mercy were qualified in teaching elocution and music, and were trained in teaching practice by the older Sisters, sitting the required fifteen papers and the practical requirements through national extramural examinations. Our Foundress, Catherine McAuley, believed in education for her Sisters for whatever work we had to do.

Although there were few books in some homes in those depression days, many of us were surrounded at home and at school with poetry, story and music. In most Catholic schools, from Standard One onwards, our English classes stemmed from literature. Authors, especially poets, and their writings, were our models for descriptive, poetic and informative compositions. While we had some text books (William Balch: *Sentence Structure and Hints on Composition: Standard Three*<sup>1</sup> was one of them), literature was a model for drilling us in correct punctuation, correct spelling, correct grammar, correct use of parts of speech, sentence structure, the derivation of and correct use of words, figurative language and style – not as ends in themselves, but to better write our weekly compositions in a fluent, legible style. To write well and to speak well were the outcomes of listening well and practising regularly. Poems were *heard*, rather than read silently. Sometimes they were written on the board in coloured chalk in beautiful printing,

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<sup>1</sup> Christchurch: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1930.

and illustrated. The *School Journal*<sup>2</sup> was a great source of poems. At every concert, classes would perform choral speaking of poems presented sequentially, cumulatively, in parts, with music, movement and action. And I revelled in it.

In our Catholic secondary schools, poetry was more important than fiction. Libraries were not well stocked in the war years, but most teachers had poetry collections, and poems were accessible as hand-printed copies. Group speaking was a popular method for teaching poetry using poems such as John Masefield's "Good Friday" and G. K. Chesterton's "Lepanto". *H.M.S. Pinafore* and other Gilbert and Sullivan operas were often used as productions in schools, and the patter songs, the choreography and the clever language of these operas engaged everyone. We began to learn how poetry, music and dance supported and complemented one another.

For those of us who sat Trinity College examinations, poetry was learned exactly and set beside prose extracts, original stories and drama selections for a recital. Pages and pages of the theory of speech and a thorough research of the authors of the selections and the periods from which they came, were part of the preparation. In school, the chosen poem – for example, William Cowper's "Boadicea", H. W. Longfellow's "The Slave's Dream" or Lord Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib" – needed contextual research. We learned about derivation, allusions and copyright, not the terms, perhaps, but the application. Opinions must be justified, we were told.

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<sup>2</sup> Printed from 1907-1989 by the New Zealand Education Department School Publications Branch, Wellington, the *School Journal* is currently published by the state-owned enterprise, Learning Media.

Poetry was a necessity rather than an option that our class studied for both School Certificate and University Entrance examinations. While there were set texts for drama and novels, poetry was selected by our teachers. Some schools used class copies of E. J. S. Lay's *Poets and Poetry*. As well as containing poems, these books had useful notes. But we didn't stop with just those notes. Our teacher, well into her sixties, would stride solemnly into the classroom, beads rattling and cincture swinging, moving to the rhythm of "The curfew tolls the knell of passing day ..." or march in to "Effingham, Grenville, Raleigh, Drake; Here's to the bold and the free!" or skip in to "Spring, the sweet Spring, is the year's pleasant king!" We were ordered: "Find the page and join in, you ninnies!!" And she would talk – not from lecture notes but from years of close reading. Special moments were when she read us extracts from Francis Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven", Robert Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra", R. Louis Stevenson's "The Celestial Surgeon" or Cardinal Newman's "The Dream of Gerontius". Often she didn't need to refer to the copy. Her voice was filled with the richness of meaning. We were captivated.

By referring to past papers, our teachers understood what the exam questions might be like, but we knew far more than we needed to merely answer questions. Poetry was not studied just for an examination. It was studied to broaden our knowledge of the treasury of literary works. In studying Oscar Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest*, for example, we also read "The Selfish Giant" and "The Ballad of Reading Gaol". Topics also, in plays, poems and fiction were presented in an interconnected fashion. Shakespearean plays were read aloud, sections acted and speeches learned. Sometimes we stood in a circle on the tennis court and spoke out loud, taking on the roles, and hearing the words ring out, as though in the courtyards of Elizabethan days. We beat out the blank verse rhythm with our feet on the court, or with our hands on our desks, and

sang Elizabethan songs. We knew Shakespeare wrote poetry. And all our class passed School Certificate English.

University Entrance in 1947 demanded the study of poetry, drama and fiction as well as essay writing and comprehension. Our teachers marked our homework meticulously and our corrections were made painstakingly. We did not, however, become slaves to the examination system. On every possible occasion, poetry writing was encouraged. Poems were written for St Patrick's Day, Easter, Anzac day, V.E. day and the seasons. We wrote parodies, limericks and ballads which we read aloud and published in our Form Six self-printed school magazine. The effectiveness of our contributions was judged, not only on the printed version, but also on their performance value. Verses also became songs for concerts. We wrote in every kind of metre and experimented with different kinds of rhyme and figurative device. Passages from Isaiah, psalms, parables and passages from the epistles (Corinthians 1.13: 1-13) were committed to memory. The "mock" exam papers (taken from previous years) were bigger events than the final examinations because we knew every word was marked with diligence, and every error had to be explained and accounted for. I wrote that Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" was an allegory written by Cowper. I won't do that again. I had to learn several stanzas of the "Elegy", "The Listeners" and much of "John Gilpin".

Although our teachers were demanding and ruthless, they spoke with authority, and rarely relied upon text books. Poems in English, extracts from Virgil's epic, the *Aeneid*, in Latin, and the "Marseillaise" and Victor Hugo's poems in French extended our knowledge in both elocution and class subjects. Preparation for these examinations contributed to an enduring

knowledge and love of English and New Zealand literature. We were not so proficient in mathematics and the sciences.

Singing with Ernest Jenner and drama with Neta Neale were highlights of my Teachers' College course in the forties. It was a primary course and was very different from the one that I observed in 2005. In the second week all students had to report to a speech language therapist to read aloud, speak a selection aloud, preferably a poem (it was a bonus if you could recite from memory) and hold a conversation with the therapist. We were graded, and those who were unsatisfactory had classes with the therapist in voice management and reading aloud, before they were allowed to go into a classroom on section. Fronting up confidently to a class and managing one's voice were important for prospective classroom teachers.

It was a two year course and apart from lectures in child psychology, teaching methods and education, there were practical lessons in Art, Music, Physical Education and Nature Studies, but the other subjects had little relevance to primary school teaching. I don't remember being taught how to teach language skills. It was on section that we observed and learned about teaching reading and written and oral language, especially in the junior school. There was plenty of poetry, drama and song in the classes I observed and taught.

One particular programme I encountered in the late forties included many positive strategies for language and reading. I do not remember any non-readers in that school. One remarkable outcome of the reading programme was that every Friday the pupils from the Primer Four class, in turn, went round the twelve classrooms and read a story, and sometimes a verse narrative, to

each class, while the teacher marked and balanced her register. The reading was always well practised and most effective. The whole junior school practised rhythm songs and chants together every morning, followed by individual-based progressive reading, word building, printing and number games. Afternoons were devoted to group work in poetry, music, folk dancing, art and nature study. The school day began and ended with spoken verse and singing. There was a similar pattern in the programmes in three junior schools where I taught in 1949 and 1950.

In the mid-fifties, poetry in many Catholic secondary schools was an integral part of the literature programme. Students were aware of the history of literature and understood the differences between poetry in rhyme and metre, blank verse and vers libre. Narrative poetry was popular for group speaking and it was exciting to hear an enthusiastic group perform for an audience or examination – voices resonating together and faces alive with meaning. In many Mercy<sup>3</sup> schools the English programme included in mid-year and end-of-year examinations a compulsory literature paper for each level. Poetry questions consisted of the placing of quotations, interpretation of an unfamiliar poem, a short essay on a chosen poem and relevant information about an author. (This was part of the annual Mercy exams held in Canterbury and the West Coast schools for all years 8 to 10 students until the late 50s).

Poetry teaching spread its wings even wider with the arrival of free text books for schools and brand new copies of *Verse for You*<sup>4</sup> for every student. These books provided a turning point in the availability and accessibility of material. Each poetry book covered different material so that

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<sup>3</sup> The Sisters of Mercy have been teaching in many primary and secondary schools throughout New Zealand since 1858.

<sup>4</sup> Books 1, 2 and 3, edited by J.G. Brown, head of the English Department at Mt Albert Grammar School.

by year 12, students had studied a full range of poems with examples of every sub-genre. New Zealand poets began to organise events for reading their work. Students were always invited and were able to match the poet with his poems. Eileen Duggan's "The Bush Feller", R.A.K. Mason's "On the Swag" and Basil Dowling's "Canterbury" and "The Early Days" were linked into social studies lessons to supplement material about Christchurch and pioneering days. Poetry found its way into many niches and corners of the school day.

Examination results were important for students in preparation for their future employment prospects or professions. But employers also put much emphasis upon the interviewee's self-confidence, pleasant manner, courtesy, communication skills and general knowledge. Students profited from opportunities for responsibility and leadership by involvement in concerts and productions which required poise, commitment, accountability, memorisation and confidence. No one was excused from performing. I do not think anyone wanted an excuse. There was always plenty of back stage work making props and costumes, programme production and ushering. To be word perfect at the final dress rehearsal was simply expected.

An enthusiastic teacher can change students' reluctance to poetry. My class of 35 boys and girls performed *The Boy with the Cart* at a regional drama festival. Here were boys, in particular, some of whom might or might not pass School Certificate in other subjects (but they did in English) who were their happiest on a football field, enthusiastically involved in Christopher Fry's play with its beautiful poetic language. There was no compulsion. Once involved in verse drama like that, students are energised by poetry.



As a teacher, I have not met any adverse reaction to poetry in any class of students that I teach, boys or girls. Perhaps it is the manner of presentation which is always to discuss the poems, speak them aloud and allow students to hear the sounds, rhythms, rhymes and music which reinforces meaning in the lines of the poems. These teenagers like to be consulted about the choice of poem, the interpretation and the method of presentation.

Poetry is part of the literature of all cultures. Poetry stakes its claim on the one who takes it seriously. Poetry took me overseas to examine candidates in speech and drama. The sad but beautiful poetry of Sri Lanka was spoken simply, almost reverently, but so powerfully about the country and its beauty. The students understood the misery of poverty and the unease in their country which their poets compared with the situation in Poland and other European countries during World War II. In Australia, it was often the humour of the poets' narrative style, or the plight of the aborigines or the vastness of their land that caught the imagination of the speakers and mine. Different again was the poetry at a preparatory school for ages three to six years in Guilford, a Salvation Army training school for ministers at Croydon, and a small country school in Arklow, Ireland. Poetry was spoken and shared in many accents. Back in New Zealand, examining in Gisborne and in Rotorua, I was impressed by the poetry speaking of people of other cultures. Now, working in Christchurch with immigrants and refugees, I include poetry in the courses, and listen to theirs.

Everywhere I travel, a place, a building, a monument, a scene, a meeting, an adventure or a journey evoke a loved poem which heightens the awareness of the occasion. My peer group is

familiar with this experience. It may not be the same for students in the future if deprived of the gift of poetry.

Knowing the influence, the spiritual power and magnetism of poetry before, during and after my school days, and how poetry can make a difference in the lives of students, I want to find and publicise methods for changing attitudes to the teaching of poetry in schools at every level for every student. Poetry has underpinned my study, my teaching, the groups to which I belong, my career and my faith. While poetry is alive outside school, there are students who do not hear or study poetry in many New Zealand schools. These are the students I would like to reach.

Emily Dickinson said: “If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry”. My mission is to persuade teachers that such an experience is possible for students, too.

Poetry is something essential to you, something you recognise instinctively as a true-sounding aspect of yourself and your own experience.<sup>5</sup>

Seamus Heaney

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<sup>5</sup>Bardsley and Sanderson. *Journeys: Poetry and Literacy at 11-14*, 7.

## Chapter one

Where is the life we have lost in living?  
 Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
 Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?  
 T. S. Eliot: "The Rock" 1. (14-16)

### Introduction

The social science concept of the cycle of deprivation describes a situation where poverty, violence or disability in one generation produces poverty, violence or disability in the next generation. It is more likely to be referred to as a cycle of disadvantage, linked to theorising about an underclass.<sup>6</sup> It can also, however, be applied, with advantage, to other circumstances. When students, who have had little exposure to poetry at school, go on to University they are likely to avoid these courses that include poetry. And indeed, students graduating with a BA degree in English in New Zealand universities can usually avoid poetry papers altogether. They may well, in their turn, when they become teachers or lecturers, avoid poetry in their English teaching or lecturing programmes. With the many options now available for internal and external examinations for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), it is apparent that the teaching of poetry is less favoured than other options. This factor is contributing to a cycle of deprivation of poetry for teenagers in this generation.

But if poetry becomes marginalised in schools, students are limited in a significant way in their response to literature in its most concise and intense form. I regard this as

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<sup>6</sup> Sir Keith Joseph, U.K. Health Minister, used this concept in public in 1974 in reference to the field of human health. A workshop on the wider context of the term was held in September 2002 to discuss inter-generational implications of the term concerning "behavioural and structural factors in the causation of deprivation" (Alan Deacon).

more than unfortunate since, by disregarding poetry, today's students become disadvantaged in their development of oral and written competence and lack a comprehensive appreciation of poetics. They leave school without having encountered literary study at its most crafted and refined, with the most concentrated use of language, and highly valuable access to the imaginative dimension of language, which the study of poetry provides so well.

The principal aim of my thesis will be to demonstrate the value of teaching poetry positively and dynamically, showing how poetry as an imaginative experience can promote the personal, social and intellectual development of students at all levels with lasting outcomes.

The teaching of poetry as an essential part of the English programme, as it was thirty or more years ago, is still, as former pupil, Sara, says: "not only a means to better writing and speaking, or a useful pedagogical tool to develop knowledge of self, others, history, nature and teenage issues, but is also experiential learning".<sup>7</sup>

In the first chapter of *The Crafty Reader* (2001),<sup>8</sup> Robert Scholes begins by quoting Arnold Bennett:

There is a word, a "name of fear", which rouses terror in the heart of the vast educated majority of the English-speaking race. The most valiant will fly at the mere utterance of that word. The most broad-minded will put their

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<sup>7</sup> P.176.

<sup>8</sup> "Reading Poetry", to which he gives the sub-title, "A Lost Craft" (1-75).

backs up against it. The most rash will not dare affront it. I myself have seen it empty buildings that have been full; and I know that it will scatter a crowd more quickly than a hose-pipe, hornets, or the rumour of a plague. Even to murmur it is to incur solitude, probably disdain, and possibly starvation, as historical examples show. That word is “poetry”.

Bennett made this statement in *Literary Taste; how to form it ...* (69) and Scholes states that, although Bennett was, perhaps, exaggerating a little, English teachers, including Scholes himself, are teaching and studying poetry less, “and when it is taught it is seldom taught effectively” (6). Scholes emphasises the contribution poetry makes “to our lives as individuals and our society”. He continues: “[Poetry] offers us textual pleasure in its formal qualities ... expressive pleasure, in that it expresses our concerns and situations ... and because of its memorability and brevity it is a powerful medium of communication ... and sometimes, even, a means of persuasion”. Louise Rosenblatt, professor emeritus of New York University, who specialised in comparative literature and literary theory, also writes of a response to poetry through synthesising sound, rhythm, image and idea vocally, urging teachers “to keep alive this view of [a poem] as personal evocation, the product of creative activity carried on by the reader under the guidance of the text.... The reader performs the poem ... as the violinist performs the sonata. But the instrument ... from which he performs the work – is himself”.<sup>9</sup>

I became aware of this situation through my attendance at conferences of the New Zealand Association of Teachers of English (NZATE) and conversing with my colleagues in the Speech Communication Association (SCA (NZ) Inc.), many of whom

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<sup>9</sup> *Literature as Exploration* (1995), 266.

teach English in schools. I also compared notes with colleagues in the Society of Teachers of Speech and Drama (STSD) in the UK and spoke with my speech and drama students, as well as with those candidates whom I examine at Trinity College London examination centres in New Zealand and overseas. During my MA studies, as a tutor for first year University students studying English, I noticed a negative attitude towards poetry in many of those students. I realised that there had been a shift in pedagogy from poetry being preferred as part of the English programme to poetry becoming peripheral. This realisation required research.

### **Poetry – a work of art**

Before focusing upon my investigation into the place of poetry in *ENZC*, I shall define the term, poetry, and comment briefly on the advantages of teaching English through poetry and the role poetry plays in the imaginative development of students. These last two points are further developed in chapter eight.

In *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, J.A. Cuddon defines poem as: “Gk. *Poiēma*, ‘something made, created’. Thus, a work of art”. Cuddon states:

What makes a poem different from any other kind of composition is a species of magic, the secret to which lies in the way the words lean upon each other, are linked and interlocked in sense and rhythm, and thus elicit from each other’s syllables a kind of tune whose beat and melody varies subtly and which is different from prose. (721)

Other writers offer amplifications of Cuddy's definition. David Crystal,<sup>10</sup> in discussing the language of poetic movements in different eras, gives more space to the many ways in which a language expresses a person's individuality or social identity through the major literary genres of drama, the novel and poetry, defining the latter, as a visual form in which the "lines, verse structure, the use of white space and textual shape define the semantic structure of a poem and identify the weight to be attached to its various elements. They also control the tempo of a reader's interpretation and the pace of an oral performance". (417)

Poets have defined their craft in more poetic terms, such as "current language heightened" (Gerard Manley Hopkins), "the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings" (T.S.Eliot)<sup>11</sup>, and "the rhythmic, inevitably narrative, movement from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision" (Dylan Thomas). All these poets would no doubt conclude with Babette Deutsch in *Poetry Handbook: A Dictionary of Terms* that a poem differs from prose as it is

usually metaphorical and often exhibits such formal elements as metre, rhyme, and stanzaic structure. It is chiefly distinguished by the feeling that dictates it and that which it communicates, the economy and resonance of language, an imaginative power that integrates, intensifies and enhances experience. These qualities are found only intermittently in prose, and one of the notable features of a poem is that it cannot be paraphrased without injury to its full meaning (107)

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<sup>10</sup> *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (1995).

<sup>11</sup> *Four quartets* 'East Coker' (1940) pt 2.

In his paper, “Verbal Energy: Attending to Poetry”,<sup>12</sup> John Gordon develops his contention that “the current English curriculum does not adequately acknowledge the potential of poetry to make meaning through sound”. He explains verbal energy as “a conflation of the linguistic, semantic power of poetry and the less tangible energies of sound”.<sup>13</sup> Gordon refers to Marsh (2003), who describes poetry as a communicative event that “may involve one or more communicative forms. For example, the reading of a poem can be a visual, literate, oral and corporeal event”.<sup>14</sup> This idea reflects the term “making meaning” which is central to the new literacies project<sup>15</sup>, which insists that communication “makes meaning” with resources that include the energies of sound. The idea of multimodal means of communication relates best to poetry where, according to Gordon, there must be an “understanding of what [poetry] can do not only visually or semantically, but also what it does – how it means – with sound, the part of sound in verbal energy”. A contemporary New Zealand poet, Michael Harlow, also makes reference to “making meaning” when he speaks of the “deep, individual histories and multi-levels of meaning [when] the language of the poem is busy searching to create its own reality, making meaning with the interaction and associational fluency of words, sounds and images”.<sup>16</sup>

Cuddon’s definition of poetry as different from prose, reinforced and expanded upon by other writers, illustrates the advantages poems have for the student, in that “they offer a complete context in (usually) compact form. In short, a poem is a self-contained

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<sup>12</sup> *English in Education*, 31.1 (2004): 93.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid* 94.

<sup>14</sup> “Contemporary models of Communicate Practice: Shaky Foundations in the Foundation Stage”, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Kress, Gunther. *Literacy in the New Media Age*, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Author’s own notes when interviewing Harlow for MA thesis.



world.”<sup>17</sup> Such compressed and refined forms are convenient for asking pertinent questions “about what exactly a text is and how it works, and about what exactly a reader is doing when he/she develops a meaning out of a text” (Ray Misson)<sup>18</sup>.

Poetry has undoubted value in the English programme as a literary text and plays a major role in the imaginative development of students (as stated above) and in stimulating in them the ability to interpret layers of meaning in a brief text. Having taught poetry for nearly sixty years, I am convinced that depriving students of this essential aspect of the English programme condemns them to a narrow range of skills in speaking, writing and reading English.

## **Methodology**

This PhD thesis investigates the place of poetry in schools within the current English curriculum, as cited in a series of Government publications, *ENZC, The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (The Framework)* and the *National Certificate of Educational Achievement* (NCEA) introduced into New Zealand schools for year 11 students in 2002. I shall be looking specifically at the place of poetry in programmes for years 9, 10 and 11 students, crucial years for students either about to leave school, or advancing towards senior exams and tertiary education. I shall be doing so both to determine whether there is a cycle of deprivation with respect to literature in general and poetry in particular, and if so, to argue what can be done to break it.

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<sup>17</sup> Maley, Alan and Alan Duff. *The Inward Ear: Poetry in the Classroom*, 1989.

<sup>18</sup> Misson, Ray. *A Brief Introduction to Literary Theory*, 1998.

My principal source of information was surveys and interviews with teachers, teacher-educators, student teachers, current students, former students and university students who are the products of and providers for the practice of teaching English. Pertinent also was my research of current material from the New Zealand Ministry of Education, and journals for teachers published in New Zealand, Australia, the UK and the USA to investigate what teachers and educationalists say about the teaching of poetry in the English programme. As a background to my research I needed to understand the relationship between curricula and examination systems, and how and why changes have occurred since 1945 when I was a student in Form V in a New Zealand school and poetry was taught thoroughly as part of the syllabus for English and for external examinations.

### **Surveys**

My investigation is based on a qualitative study for which I utilise the following sources as data:

(a) I posted surveys<sup>19</sup> to the Heads of Departments of English (HODs) of 36 schools with return envelopes and a time frame for response. These schools were all those in the Canterbury and West Coast area of the South Island of New Zealand. Encompassing the fourth largest city in New Zealand, the area chosen is typical of most other New Zealand education regions. My purpose was to get a current overall picture of the teaching of poetry in a variety of schools: post-primary schools of different sizes, deciles<sup>20</sup> and compositions – state and integrated, urban and rural, private of both sexes, large and

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<sup>19</sup> Copy in Appendix A.1.

<sup>20</sup> An education term used to describe the extent to which a school draws its students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 refers to the 10% where the greatest number of low socio-economic families is found. Decile 10 refers to the 10% where the lowest number of low socio-economic families is found.

small, with students at levels 1 to 13 and 7 to 13. The nature of these papers invited HODS to respond personally, to delegate the response to a colleague or to complete the paper at a staff meeting. By leaving space for comment I hoped to determine the attitudes of the teacher/s or the department of English towards the teaching of poetry and how the curriculum informs assessment. Individual teachers as well as HODS responded with 58 replies from 34 of the 36 schools. Two schools returned the forms as a staff response. Several teachers requested a follow up with personal interviews.

(b) I handed out written response questionnaires<sup>21</sup> to first year University students enrolled in English 102 (a course designed as an introduction to English to teach basic skills in academic writing and literary analysis) at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, in the third week of the Wednesday and Friday lectures of the first semester. I wanted to discover from the wide range of students enrolled in this course their experiences of poetry before they came to University and their current attitudes to poetry. 172 students were enrolled in this course. 150 attended lectures that week. 105 of these students had left school between 2001 and 2003. The remaining students had left school between 1954 and 2000, or had come from Law, History or Commerce classes to sit this course. Papers were collected after the eight to ten minutes allowed for completion. Students were assured their responses did not affect their grading for the course.

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<sup>21</sup> Copy in Appendix A.2.

(c) Survey papers with return envelopes were sent to former students of mine to investigate why studying, learning and writing poetry worked so well for these men and women to whom I taught English, and poetry in particular, in schools and in classes for individual or group tuition in speech and drama from 1954 to 2000. I wished to compare their attitudes with those of the current students and teachers. Using “off-the-top-of-my-head” addresses, initially, I sent papers to twelve former students whom I taught at post-primary schools between 1954 and 1965. As these students responded by return mail, I sent out a further 48 papers<sup>22</sup> to students to whom I taught English in school between the years 1954 and 1973, and students to whom I taught speech and drama from 1973 to 2000. I selected these students from those of whose current addresses, and married, single or religious names I was sure. I randomly covered the age groups, selecting every third or fourth entry. The selection did not depend upon occupation/profession or scholarship. I had not been in touch with 25 of these students since I had taught them. Responses indicated all except four were keen to reply. As some respondents distributed copies of the survey to husbands/wives and friends who had not been sent copies, I received 72 responses.

(d) I sent written response questionnaires<sup>23</sup> to 15 teachers trained with teacher educator, Ronnie Davey, at the Christchurch College of Education (CCE)<sup>24</sup> four to six years previously. These were selected from addresses available. Others had either resigned from teaching, had moved outside New Zealand, or we had no means of contact because

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<sup>22</sup> Copy in Appendix A.3.

<sup>23</sup> Copy in Appendix A.4.

<sup>24</sup> Teaching English or EN311 describes this course for those wishing to teach English in post-primary schools.

of the privacy laws. My aim was investigate if they were still teaching English as demonstrated at the CCE when they were trained. All 15 replied, six of them by email.

### **Interviews.**

Interviews were planned to clarify and further develop hypotheses that surfaced from the survey papers. Each interview required a different set of questions and a different time frame. In these interviews (except in 3 and 4) names were changed for privacy reasons.

### **Procedure**

(1) In-depth informal interviews at schools for about an hour were prearranged with nine teachers of senior English, two teachers of Junior English and two year 13 students. I alerted interviewees to three open-ended questions:

- (a) What was their practice of teaching/learning poetry?
- (b) What effects had the current curriculum and assessment process upon their teaching/learning practices?
- (c) What were the attitudes of students towards poetry?

I indicated there would be time for discussion of any other areas of significance. Interviews were to be recorded and copies available to interviewees if requested.

No one requested a copy.

(2) Six student teachers enrolled in the CCE EN311 2005 course were interviewed individually, and seven students in two small groups. The purpose was to discover their

response to the course after two weeks' work. I was also able to interview five of these student teachers individually, after they had experienced two sections at schools with associate teachers.<sup>25</sup> Three students chose to email me their comments.

(3) In-depth interviews of about one and a half hours each were held with Ronnie Davey, a teacher educator at the CCE. Questions were set concerning the CCE course and teaching practice in general. In a café in Newry, I interviewed Kate O'Hanlon, teacher educator in Northern Ireland regarding the teaching of English in the UK and Northern Ireland. Interviewees had been notified of the general points to be discussed (similar to those sent to teachers). I requested copies of course material and relevant matter used in teaching practice.

(4) An informal half hour session to discuss poetry in *English in the New Zealand Curriculum (ENZC)* and its place in the National Certificate for Educational Achievement (NCEA) was arranged with Dr Graham Stoop, at the time Principal of the CCE. Stoop was formerly HOD of English of a very large Christchurch post-primary school and is currently chairman of the Education Review Office (ERO).<sup>26</sup> His wide experience as a teacher of English with a passionate interest in poetry is invaluable for my research.

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<sup>25</sup> 1. To assist and check the planning and design of student teachers' lessons.

2. To supervise the student teacher's implementation of lessons.

3. To provide written and oral feedback to student teachers.

4. To identify strengths of the student teacher and to highlight areas that they still need to develop proficiency in. 5. To make transparent decisions about unit planning and grouping.

6. To offer opportunities for student teachers to be involved with a range of school activities and to be part of the school communities. 7. To show procedural features connected to the running of a school.

<sup>26</sup> The Education Review Office is a government department which reports publicly on the education and care of students in all New Zealand schools and early childhood centres.

(5) An hour and a half was set aside for an interview with two students: a year 11 student and a year 13 student. I selected these students from those I teach because they attended the same schools, but had different teachers for English in those schools. I asked them to bring their English portfolios and end-of-year reports. The discussion centred on the teaching and learning of poetry from year 7 to the current work at year 11 and 13, and its application to answering sections in English levels 1 and 3 of the NCEA.

(6) To add a wider dimension to my case study I had spontaneous informal discussions with four groups of speech and drama students currently at post-primary schools throughout New Zealand. These students study, memorise and perform poetry at examination centres for Speech New Zealand and Trinity College London, and at Performance Festivals. I wanted to discover if these students could cross-credit material prepared for speech and drama examinations and performance towards NCEA 1, 2 and 3 assessments, as is the case in assessments in Australia and tertiary study in the UK.<sup>27</sup> I also inquired about the depth at which poetry was studied in their post-primary classes at years 9 to 13 when compared with their study in speech and drama classes.

(7) Emails sent to the HODs of English in six New Zealand Universities inquired whether or not a poetry paper was a requirement for a candidate studying towards a BA degree in English.<sup>28</sup>

### **Personal Observation**

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<sup>27</sup> Cross-crediting does not occur in New Zealand.

<sup>28</sup> In all New Zealand universities, a BA English degree does not need to include any poetry paper.

In conjunction with the interviews with the Christchurch College of Education (CCE) student teachers, former and current, I was present at and participated in activities during the first five weeks of classes at the CCE for graduates enrolled in EN311 course 2005 – the teaching of written, oral and visual language, and an examination of *ENZC* and NCEA assessments. Reference to this course is found towards the end of this article

Analysing my data, I have been able to identify some of the problems teachers encounter in teaching poetry as an essential part of the English programme. I recognised also how teachers are endeavouring to put into practice the principles embodied in *The Framework*, which states:

The curriculum for English provides opportunities for students to explore, challenge, think critically about, and clarify ... attitudes and values [through] oral, written and visual texts. This is an essential part of the process of thinking critically about literature. (8)

In the section on literary texts (16), *ENZC* states that “Programmes at all levels should encourage enjoyment, breadth and variety of reading in different literary genres, such as drama, fiction and poetry”. Poetry, thus, is included equally with other genres as a means of teaching students to explore language, think critically and process information from year 1 continuously to year 13.

I have chosen year 9, 10 and 11 students for my investigation mainly because of the influence of the NCEA examinations on teaching and curriculum decision-making. Students progress from year 1 to year 8 with the 1996 *ENZC* as a school-based



assessment, but without any New Zealand approved external examinations. Years 9 and 10 students also do not have external examinations. It is, therefore, up to the teacher at those levels to concentrate on whatever texts are deemed to suit the class and conform to the principles of the present curriculum. Until 2002, when NCEA level 1 was introduced, students sitting School Certificate examinations could pass most options (including English) with internal assessment. Sixth Form Certificate was internally assessed. Those who sat Bursary and Scholarship presented for their first external examination experience, but English, and therefore poetry study, was optional. Because of the internal nature of the assessment where it is up to the teachers to decide what to teach, and because poetry is an option in external examinations, teachers can choose to, and often do, avoid teaching poetry from year 9 to year 13. NCEA level 1 is now in its fifth year of implementation. There is sufficient material in chapters three to six of this thesis to support my argument concerning the undervalued place of literature, and especially poetry in the curriculum, as teachers prepare their students for the internal and external examinations administered at year 11.

By way of comparison, I still have in my possession my marking schedule for School Certificate English 1964. In this workbook I have not only the format of the paper for that year but also the statistics that indicate the preferences of 650 candidates for the five optional questions (three of which were literature questions) in part 2 of the paper. In 1964 a pass mark of 30% in English was compulsory for gaining a national School Certificate.

## Route map

Chapter two focuses an investigation of the development of the curriculum from 1945 to the 1996 document currently in use, *ENZC*, noting, in particular, references to the teaching of poetry in New Zealand curricula over this period. I refer also to recent reviews such as *Learning and Achieving* (1986) and *The Curriculum Review* (1987), *Educating for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A South Australian Perspective* (1990) from which sources were drawn the principles of *The National Curriculum of New Zealand* (1991). From these sources I may determine how and why poetry, well established in the curriculum until the seventies, appears to be being jettisoned today.

Chapter three examines the results of surveys which I conducted among teachers and first year University of Canterbury students enrolled in English 102. The responses indicate how teachers include or exclude poetry as part of the English syllabus, and what pressures the examination system places upon teachers.

In chapter four I present material gathered from interviews conducted with teachers and interviews with students themselves. I quote from articles written by teachers in New Zealand, Australian and United Kingdom journals for teachers illustrating today's pedagogy for teaching poetry to years 9 and 10 students. This chapter also examines the effect of the NCEA assessments on the teaching of poetry to students at these levels.

Since NCEA 1 is a key year in secondary school education, my focus in chapter four is on the influence of NCEA 1 on the teaching of poetry at year 11. This chapter also

documents the structure of the internal and external achievement-based assessments, how the assessments are moderated and marked within the schools and externally by moderators appointed by NZQA, especially in regard to poetic writing.

Chapter six focuses upon the connection between writing poetically and the study of poetry. Poetic writing is a function<sup>29</sup> in the achievement objectives at all eight levels<sup>30</sup> in the written language programme in *ENZC*, and creative writing is an internally assessed achievement standard at NCEA 1 level. I argue that, if poetic writing is well taught, crafted, as *ENZC* states, “to convey ideas, thoughts, feelings and sensory qualities to evoke a response from the reader”,<sup>31</sup> the study of poetry will prosper. If expressive<sup>32</sup> and transactional<sup>33</sup> writing dominate in the written language programme, it will be more difficult for students to produce poetic creative writing at NCEA 1 level. Likewise, if poetry, both canonical and modern, is not taught, few achieve well in the writing of poetry.

In chapter seven, by way of contrast, I look back over fifty years of teaching and evaluate the material sent to me by former students whom I have taught over those years. A distillation of their responses indicates how poetry was taught in schools in 1954 and the two decades following, and draws attention to the attitudes of teachers and students

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<sup>29</sup> Poetic writing is a writing function as on Written Language: Achievement Objectives; *ENZC* page 35.

<sup>30</sup> See diagram page 56.

<sup>31</sup> Selected Glossary. *ENZC*, 141.

<sup>32</sup> Personal writing which reflects the writer’s immediate thoughts, feelings and observations. *Ibid.* 140.

<sup>33</sup> Writing which is intended to convey factual information or to argue the validity of a point of view with objective evidence. *Ibid.* 143.

influenced by recent curriculum changes compared with the attitudes of those who taught me and who were taught by me.

Chapter eight focuses on an investigation of the course for the teaching of English in secondary schools conducted by Ronnie Davey, teacher-educator for the student teachers at the CCE. Observation at the CCE and interviews with the students after their teaching practice at various schools gives me insight into a way of giving prominence to poetry in the English programme. I also report upon surveys of some full-time teachers of English who were previously trained at the CCE under the same teacher educator. The chapter includes an interview with Davey. Examples of material she uses in the course are cited in Appendix 2.A.

One example of a similar research programme, which reinforces my contention about the lack of poetry in the curriculum, was conducted as early as 1980 by New Zealand teacher and poet, Rachel McAlpine. She describes in *Song in the Satchel* a study she undertook arising from “a strong suspicion that poetry was one of the most unpopular parts of the secondary school English syllabus” (1). She continues:

Casual remarks from teachers hinted at a sense of frustration and guilt about poetry. Classes encountered for the first time were likely to groan and protest when poetry was on the agenda. And educational articles on the subject began by assuming that students must be converted to poetry from their habitual attitude of antipathy.

The key questions for the research programme were to discover: “How widespread in the secondary schools is hostility to poetry?” and “What are the causes and cures?” The programme focused on asking “How do [teachers and students] feel about poetry? What ideas do they have about poets and poetry? And what happens in the classroom?” The programme was directed to “fifth formers”<sup>34</sup> and their teachers. McAlpine observed that, at this level students are “gaining some intellectual sophistication and can begin to appreciate poetry in new ways. External examinations dominate the year for most bringing a new level of anxiety” (2). The number of schools involved in the research was 6, and lessons, discussions, questionnaires and students’ own recorded poems were included in the data.

McAlpine reached interesting conclusions from all these sources, including that

- Poetry was not popular.
- Teachers were “frustrated with fifth form poetry classes”.
- Students were “dissatisfied with poetry in a school setting”.
- Students were often “so apathetic or contemptuous about poetry that teachers felt thoroughly disheartened”.
- “School Certificate was seen as a culprit”.
- A teacher who was passionate about poetry “could exert an influence lasting for years”.
- Students who wrote poetry revealed “impressive integrity” in their work.

The recommendations were:

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<sup>34</sup> Year 11 students in today’s schools.

- To integrate the reading and the writing of poetry in English programmes;
- For teachers to give specific praise rather than negative criticism;
- For teachers to demonstrate interest in the student-poet as a “real individual”;
- For teachers to demonstrate an interest in the personal response of the students.

My research revealed similar conclusions although a more comprehensive methodology was employed.

Research papers in the UK and the USA also indicate a concern about the need for students to be given opportunities in school for writing and speaking poetry. The opening article from *English Education* 37.2 (2005) by Cathy Fleischer and Dana L. Fox,<sup>35</sup> reflects on the intersection of poetry and the spoken word in poet slams and performance poetry. The essays included in that issue, they suggest “help us to begin to consider not only the theoretical connections among literacy, democracy and oral language, and the written word, but to provide us with fascinating examples of this work in action. We hope their work will inspire you, as it has inspired us, to attend more carefully to these connections and consider how to incorporate them into our work with pre-service and practising teachers”.<sup>36</sup> Other articles from *English Education* and *English Journal* are discussed in chapter six, pp. 174-176.<sup>37</sup>

In chapter nine I draw together the threads of my investigation.

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<sup>35</sup> *Literocracy: A New Way of Thinking about Literacy and Democracy*, 91.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Heather E. Bruce & Bryan Dexter Davis. “Slam: Hip-hop meets poetry: A Strategy for Violence Intervention”. Asher & Michael Hoyles. “Moving Black Performance Poetry”. Mark Pike. “Boys, Poetry and the Individual Talent”, etc.

My intention, using all this data, is to determine from writers, teachers, students and educators their views on the value of including poetry in English programmes, or their reasons for replacing poetry with other genres and texts, and to compare them with those of teachers and educators outside New Zealand.

Paradoxically, there is currently an enormous interest in poetry in New Zealand and elsewhere. Poetry is part of the youth culture and the pub scene. Poetry contests draw numerous entries. Opportunities to read original poems at Festivals and Poets' Collective evenings entice many students, as well as adults, to present their own work. There has also been a huge growth in creative writing programmes for all age groups, with web sites that can be accessed by students to which they can contribute original poetic writing and receive feedback.<sup>38</sup> Most of these opportunities, however, take place outside the school scene and concentrate upon writing original poetry rather than reading, interpreting and appreciating poetry written by acknowledged poets.

I shall argue that what works so well in this extracurricular activity in New Zealand can be incorporated into the school curriculum. I shall also suggest that the current trend to exclude poetry be reversed, and that a fresh approach will lead students to a deeper appreciation of poetry in its widest terms, exposing them to poetry requiring different kinds of reading response, high and low, traditional and contemporary, local and foreign.

Through this thesis, then, I hope to discover the extent to which poetry as part of the study of literature appears to have become discarded in New Zealand schools, especially

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<sup>38</sup> See Appendix C.1. Websites.

for years 9, 10 and 11 students, and the reasons for this. This thesis will also seek to adumbrate strategies for halting what seems to be a serious cycle of deprivation in teaching poetry to students as part of the English programme.



## Chapter Two

Something more near  
 Though deeper within darkness  
 Is entering the loneliness ...  
 A widening deepening greenness,  
 Brilliantly, concentratedly,  
 Coming about its own business  
 Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox  
 It enters the dark hole of the head...  
 The page is printed.

Ted Hughes: "The Thought Fox". (6-8, 18-22, 24)

### Curricular Reform

In this chapter I shall outline the development of the curriculum for English in secondary schools from 1945 to the present day, in order to draw attention to ways in which curriculum developers have, or have not, included poetry as an important component in the English prescription. As the curriculum documents are issued with the approval of the Department of Education (now the Ministry of Education) nationally, schools are expected to implement the directives stated in the document. These directives alter pedagogy and subject content as approaches to teaching and learning change over the years.

The influence of technology, of the mass media, radio, film and television, the reception and production of modes of language and the cultural diversity of our society have all challenged the developers of the English curriculum in New Zealand over the past forty years to produce documents that encourage new core pedagogical practices. From the publication of *The Education (Post-Primary Instruction) Regulations* (1945) to

the *Statement of Aims* (1983)<sup>39</sup> and the current *ENZC* (1996), groups of teachers, writers and educational advisors have redeveloped the English curriculum in line with world-wide trends in teaching. Modern terminology, such as oral, written and visual language, has replaced the old familiar terms of poetry, fiction and drama in the English literature programme. Other texts, such as extended hyperfiction, novel, drama, print media including newspapers and magazines, as well as film, television and radio scripts and short hyperfiction, sit side by side with short stories and poetry as extended and short texts. Research into the changes in the English curriculum in New Zealand over the past five decades will reveal how poetry, once on a par with prose and drama,<sup>40</sup> is now peripheral in the English programme. Other types of texts which students encounter in their language events, teachers told me, are generally easier and more accessible options for today's students.

In this chapter I shall show how some curricular changes, such as the choice of multiple texts, a focus on skill-based training and independent learning, with structures emphasising targets and results – all valid pedagogical strategies – have affected learning and teaching processes so that there is little or no time for teaching poetry experientially.

### **Reforms, 1945 – 1969**

*The Post-Primary School Curriculum* (Thomas Report)<sup>41</sup> was influenced by the critical writings of the Cambridge scholar, F. R. Leavis,<sup>42</sup> and his ideas on literary criticism.

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<sup>39</sup> Reprinted Ministry of Education, 1990.

<sup>40</sup> School Certificate English, 1964.

<sup>41</sup> New Zealand Department of Education, 1942.

This document, upon which the 1945 syllabus for Forms 3 – 5 was based, noted that:

[a]s a result of his (sic) reading, and the discussions and other activities arising out of it, the pupil's sympathies should be widened and deepened, his perceptions quickened, and his sense of values clarified and corrected; and he should develop the power to discriminate between true and false emotions and between straight and crooked thinking (1944: 19).

The 1945 syllabus, *The Education (Post-Primary Instruction) Regulations: Syllabuses of Instruction and Prescriptions for School Certificate Examinations*, quoting often from the Thomas Report (1942), aimed at encouraging among the students an acquisition of “a knowledge and appreciation of literature” by “systematic training in the use of the library” and a “knowledge of the development of English literature”. Further, “constant oral and written expression” was stressed, with “attention to good speech”. The syllabus discouraged emotive writing which produces “colourful writing of little value [or other writing] without any clear purpose” and which may lead to “self-deception [and therefore] mental and moral suicide” (14-22).

In the years following 1945, various primary and secondary documents were issued by the New Zealand Department of Education, including *Reading*, 1953; *Oral Expression*, *Written Expression*, *Spelling* 1954; *Language in the Primary School* 1961 and *Elements*

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<sup>42</sup> Frank Raymond Leavis, Cambridge scholar, “sought to instil a mode of critical discrimination ... to distinguish between worthy books and those which constituted a threat to civilization”. He made a distinction between critical reading and “a soft-option flavour”. (Stoop, 62)

*of the Teaching of Reading* 1971. In the last-named is found the following, first occurring in the 1953 booklet, *Reading*:

Every teacher eventually finds his (sic) own way of “teaching” poetry. His interpretation, when he reads a poem to the children, is usually all they need by way of introduction. Comment, discussion and explanation will follow readily enough, and should never be forced or contrived. The teacher’s success ... depends upon the degree of satisfaction the children derive from ... listening to it, reading it or writing it. To restrict the choice of poetry to whimsical rhymes or minor poets is to deprive children of the emotional experiences which the great poets are able to convey (13-14).

It was asserted that “social competence, and full intellectual and emotional growth” (*Reading* 1953) depended upon the ability to read well. Children were encouraged to make their own anthologies and read from these to the class. If students read well in primary school, they would flourish as persons, citizens and workers after secondary schooling, the authors of the booklet declared.

In response to concerns expressed by teachers about the shortcomings of the 1945 syllabus, a committee, the National English Syllabus Committee (NESC), whose task was to reform the 1945 English prescription, was established by the Department of Education in 1969, with R.G. Aitken as Director. It included six members from the Department, six post-primary teachers and other part time committee members who aimed at making “English more relevant to the needs of the students”, as was later reported in *Developing*

*a New English Syllabus*: 1983. The 1945 syllabus was criticised by NESC for its narrow focus on routine written work, “the history of English literature”, “old hat” authors, and grammar which “can’t be made useful” (Department of Education, *Guidelines for Revision*, 1970: 1-3). However, English literature during the fifties and sixties did include the names and works of certain 20<sup>th</sup> century novelists and dramatists, and gave examples of New Zealand poetry (such as that of Blanche Baughan, Ursula Bethell, Thomas Bracken, Basil Dowling, Eileen Duggan, Jessie Mackay, R.A.K. Mason and Arnold Wall) by the inclusion of these writers for the comprehension question in the optional section of the examination papers for School Certificate.

### **Reactions to NESC reforms**

During the sixties and early seventies, Leavis’s ideas were seen as outdated in that they reflected a different age and pedagogical approach. A new emphasis was being placed upon a more inclusive canon, with students’ own work (including creative poetry writing) as “an experience to be shared and talked over” (Dixon 1975:55).<sup>43</sup> In his book (xii - xiii), Dixon quotes the views of two curriculum researchers, James Nimmo Britton and James R. Squire, who were promoting “a new model of curriculum reform” (Stoop, 58), the Growth Model in English, defined as:

the sum total of the planned and unplanned experiences through language by means of which a child gains control of himself and of his (sic) relations with the surrounding world (Squire and Britton, in Dixon 1975: xviii).

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<sup>43</sup> *Growth through English*, 1967.

This model became the inspiration of the new curriculum, indicating the importance of English studies as language-oriented, and seeking, as Stephen Ball later described it, to shift the canonical tradition from the centre of the English stage and replace it with the pupil, the learner. In other words, replace the emphasis on second-hand meaning, in the text, with first-hand meaning, in the daily life and authentic culture of the child (Stephen Ball *et al.*, 1990: 58).

To achieve this goal, lessons were to be structured around a “theme or aspect of human experience” and more attention to be paid to drama (Dixon 1975, 33). Warwick Elley, at that time (1970) on the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, observed in *Guidelines: 2*, that “there is no research evidence which shows that grammar has any appreciable effect on children’s writing ... sometimes [it has] a harmful effect ... we are best advised to have him write, and to introduce any labels and principles incidentally, when the need arises”. Elley’s paper commented also on prescribed lists of books, urging more attention be paid to “media studies, original writing, ‘the primacy of oral work’, creative drama, and contemporary literature”. Elley observed that “a gaping chasm has existed between children’s expressed interests and the prescribed book lists” (17). The NESC *Newsletters*, referring to the same issues, promoted the idea that “guided talking and writing, listening and reading rather than grammatical analysis will assist the growth of good language habits” (Stoop, 71).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> In summarising the development of the curriculum, I am indebted to Graham Stoop’s PhD thesis, “The Management of Knowledge: Text, Context and The New Zealand English Curriculums, 1969-1996” (1998).

Consequently, there was a trend away from a “structured pedagogy” as recommended in the Thomas Report, to a “student-oriented” approach as described in the Growth Model; and “a movement from the literary-critical content focus to an emphasis on personalised reading, creativity, production and the electronic media” (Ibid, 72). While a student-oriented, personal response approach was valid grounds for change, the word “literature” lost its significance when replaced by “reading” and “writing”. When presented with a poem, therefore, students would discover for themselves what the poet was saying, and express the ideas using their own words. Some teachers felt such an approach would lead to “a vagueness” (*English in New Zealand* September 1973: 43) as the classroom became a place of conflict between “teaching as the focus ... and learning as its main *raison d’etre*” (Stoop, 73).

### **Debating the new approach**

Between 1969 and 1983 a new English syllabus for junior forms was developed, culminating in the *Statement of Aims, English: Forms 3-5*, 1983, the result of a ten-year dialogue with secondary teachers. Under the new syllabus teachers were to be given sufficient scope to use “appropriate methods and materials to meet the specific needs of a wide range of students, including the handicapped, the gifted, and the culturally different”. A handbook (*Resource Book, English: Forms 3-5*) was to be a source of material, guidelines and practical advice for teachers.

During those ten years, two camps of teachers and educationalists continued the debate over the format and content of the new English curriculum. One camp

approached the topic from the conservative angle: the retaining of the canon, grammar and set books. Among the proponents of this view was C. K. Stead. The other camp, notably Aitken, supported the Growth Model paradigm, which concentrated upon the process, reader response, context and relevance. NESC *Newsletters* defending the centrality of language study, papers concerning the new syllabus statement about pedagogical and content-based change were distributed to schools. Responses came from teachers, politicians and University academics questioning a lack of resources, a fear that “English” would disappear altogether, the absence of clearly defined educational tasks and a concern for the classroom teacher when the emphasis is upon the student rather than on the quality of content. However, changes to the syllabus were outlined in the *Statement of Aims*, published in 1983 after many revisions, supported by a series of booklets providing material for teachers on implementing the aims outlined in the syllabus.

Within and beyond the teaching community the debate continued. The *Statement of Aims* claimed to be written “in the light of views on the teaching of English which have grown out of the experience of New Zealand teachers” (Foreword:4) rather than being influenced by authoritative statements from the UK. The Director-General of Education of the time, W.L. Renwick, wrote in the *Statement of Aims* that

the main task for the future is less one of gaining consensus about what teachers of English ought to be doing, than the very practical one of assisting teachers to give greater reality to these aims in their day-to-day work with their students.

(50)



In general, by the early eighties, “dissent had given way to a genuine measure of acceptance” of the reforms indicated by the *Statement of Aims* (Stoop: 76).

As Bill Green later reflected (*A Dividing Practice: “Literature”, English Teaching and Cultural Politics*: 149), referring to education in the UK, there were concerns about the place of literature (poetry, drama and fiction) in the new approach to English, just as “Reading” and “Writing” were substituted in the *Statement of Aims* for “Literature” in New Zealand. The mode of reading, for example, was defined as not merely “extracting meaning from the printed word” but also “giving meaning to it” (Department of Education 1983b: 8). However, Stoop pointed out that “though literature was excluded from the modal description of English, it did receive its own heading in the *Statement of Aims* document (87). The statement read:

Through literature, students can encounter language in its most complex and varied forms.... [S]tudents can come to know the thoughts, emotions and experiences of people beyond the circle of their immediate knowledge. An experience of life through literature is of great value, for with it can come an imaginative insight into other people’s lives, an extension of the individual’s own *awareness and a development of that empathy which is part of the civilizing and humanizing tradition of literature* [emphasis added by Stoop]. (1983b: 21)

While accepting the continued place of literature in the curriculum, academics in the Universities, such as Roger Robinson<sup>45</sup>, regretted “jettisoning the critical approach to literature”, and argued:

We have a duty to our students’ potential for initiation. And we have an equal duty to do our best to pass on the tradition of the most wonderful body of literature any language in the world has ever produced ... we must adhere to the basics of the body of knowledge and the discipline of reading which are implicit in the study of literature. (*Teaching English, Conference papers NZATE*, 1982: 57)

His views were supported by both teachers and linguists, some of whom regretted the language of advertising was replacing the language of fiction. If the language of advertising was supplanting the language of fiction, what was happening to poetry? The greater the range and variety of literature being offered, the greater the danger in Robinson’s opinion that the teachers would dispense with what he described as a “tradition of the most wonderful body of literature any language in the world has ever produced” (*Teaching English* 1982: 57) and, of course, a significant part of that body of literature is poetry. Yet another English teacher declared that “we can build almost all our English programme around literature” (*English in New Zealand* September 1973: 15). Literature continued to be studied in the new teaching programmes as it was possible “to maintain conservative, and especially literary-based study, within the more progressive pedagogic framework” (Stoop, 90).

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<sup>45</sup> Professor Roger Robinson, Department of English, Victoria University of Wellington, later contracted by Lockwood Smith, Minister of Education, to write a new syllabus supposedly in consultation with teachers of English.

The *Statement of Aims, English: Forms 3-5* was published after fifteen years of curriculum development, but the Universities Entrance Board still had control of the prescriptions for sixth and seventh forms. Literary analysis was still a requirement for those students who chose to study English as a subject for Bursary. A focus upon a literature content, therefore, was still in favour with the teachers at that level, although “a language, response-based programme was defended on a number of grounds” according to *NESC Newsletters* (Stoop, 94). Objectives in the “Draft Syllabus for Schools, English: Forms 6 and 7”, published by the Department of Education, 1983, recommended that students should:

- Read and appreciate a balanced and wide range of literary texts, giving a significant place to New Zealand writing, and including a play by Shakespeare at form 7
- Draw on relevant information regarding historical or social context, gender, genre, or change in literary form.

Once again, teachers should “decide their own priorities and emphases according to their own views and experiences” (Ibid 1983). An important part of all programmes was to include listening, speaking, reading and writing as in the 1945 syllabus. There was hesitancy in naming literary genres. Teachers could concentrate upon teaching drama, the novel, non-fiction or short stories for essays on extended texts and short texts, but preparation was still required for an unseen poetry text. Students who chose subjects other than English were not exposed to the English programme.

### **Revisions, discussions and drafts**

With the abolition of the University Entrance examination in 1986, the Department, and later the Ministry of Education sought to review the English curriculum to link the Forms 3-5 English syllabus with that of Forms 6-7, in order to ensure continuity. As might have been expected, many form 3, 4 and 5 English teachers knew English would not be compulsory for all those students who progressed to Forms 6 and 7, and that some students would leave school before form 6. Consequently, teachers prepared the students for a narrow range of literary texts in order to concentrate upon topics related to debating, discussion and reporting techniques, the language of advertising, print media, theme-based studies of national and international issues, and static images. With a wide syllabus to cover, teachers were motivated by the pressure of time. The shift towards oral, written and visual strands in *ENZC* was anticipated.

Discussion papers questioned whether literature should be a compulsory component of English courses; whether the canon should be included; whether film should be classed as literature or experienced in its own right; whether school literature study should be ethnically more inclusive; whether students should be exposed to more New Zealand literature and whether contemporary fiction should replace established literature. Emphasis was placed upon “response” as opposed to critical analysis. The traditional textuality of literature was opened up and emphasis placed upon a “response [which] includes using language that the student is most comfortable with” (Discussion Papers 1989). It was understood that literature study included poetry with fiction and drama in oral, written and visual strands.

Stoop notes that the then Minister of Education, Dr Lockwood Smith, made many revisions to, and there were several interventions in, the senior English syllabus between 1983 and 1990. Eleven discussion papers and several drafts followed until the final statement (Draft 5) was let for public tender and released to the Christchurch College of Education Review Committee of 15 members, chaired by Elody Rathgen. Meanwhile, some conservative Auckland teachers lobbied Dr Smith, arguing Draft 5 was unsuitable for national English-teaching guidelines. The College of Education Draft was therefore revised by another group under Professor Roger Robinson. Criticisms were raised about the composition of Robinson's group, some of whom were opposed to the draft syllabus, and of the Minister's own involvement; questionnaires were circulated to secondary schools and other interested parties, and finally, after six years of drafting, debating and discussion, the *Draft syllabus for Schools: English Forms 6 and 7* was issued by the Ministry of Education in 1992.

Later, Discussion Papers, especially paper 6, for example, noted that "there are a number of key issues and questions [about literature] that must be addressed. Chief among them is whether literature should be a compulsory component of English courses" (*English News*, July 1987). By 1992 the new Achievement Initiative curriculum statement for English Forms 3-7 (published by Ministry of Education) drew all previous documents and drafts together, requiring a focus upon learning objectives according to *The Framework*, 1993. The Ministry's final draft, *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (ENZC), 1994, was seen by some teachers as "an attempt to sideline

literature” (Stoop, 203). Margaret Bendall<sup>46</sup> noted that the developers were “uncomfortable with the current dominance of literature in programmes that should be meeting the needs of an increasingly wide range of students”. However, she urged that “the place of literature was seen as unique, and explicitly protected” (Bendall 1994a: 7).

### **Curriculum developments: post 1992**

By this time, however, an Achievement Initiative had been launched with new objectives for Form 7 bringing about the demise of the Bursary exam and a consequent review of all national subject syllabuses.

The Draft syllabus, then, after many intensive hours of work by the Draft committee, proved to be just one of many syllabus documents which would “provide a basis for the development of the new Achievement Initiative curriculum statement in English for junior classes to Form 7 published in 1993 ... as outlined in *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework – Te Anga Marautanga o Aotearoa*” (Stoop, 169). This document sets out “the government’s policy for teaching, learning and assessment in our schools ... the principles which ... underpin all teaching and learning ... [and] identifies knowledge and understandings and essential skills” (10). *The Framework* was to be introduced over a period of five years and would encompass eight groupings of skills: communication, numeracy, information, problem-solving, self-management and competitive, social and co-operative, physical and work and study skills. Where C. K.

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<sup>46</sup> Lecturer in English at Auckland College of Education, contracted as co-ordinator to develop the English curriculum within *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework*, 1992.

Stead<sup>47</sup> (*A Submission on the Draft*, 1994: 5) criticised the English statement for insisting on “the acquisition of ‘skills’ rather than knowledge” the Ministry of Education declared the various skills were “integral”, “essential”, “important”, and to be “strongly encouraged”. Following the release of this document, schools were asked to respond, and the resulting submissions were analysed.

In the meantime, the title of the curriculum document provoked disagreement among teachers and educators, particularly about the words “English” and “Language”. Primary school teachers, it seemed, described themselves as language teachers. The contract team similarly argued that “language skills ... make an individual fully literate in English” (Margaret Bendall, *Achievement Initiative: English Language* 1992: 40/41). To call the statement “English” was to link it with “literature” and the Universities’ prescription for English as a subject, and this, Bendall believed, was to make it “restrictive”.

### **Language versus literature**

There was also concern that the words “English language” reflected an absence of literature. Stead, among others, argued that the syllabus failed to “trumpet [literature’s] worth ... resign[ing] itself to becoming an intellectual and cultural backwater” (Education Forum, 1994: 28-29), and whereas the NESC document and the senior syllabus statements included the word “literature” and stated that it was central to an English programme, the national curriculum statement made no mention of literature, except as a “wide variety of texts”.

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<sup>47</sup> Christian Karlson Stead, (1932 - ) novelist, literary critic, poet, essayist and Professor of English at the University of Auckland.

Stead took up the cause for those who felt a sufficient emphasis on literature was missing when he argued that

The crown of English studies ought to be the encounter with literature which offers the best, richest and most exciting examples of language use, the folk stories of our inherited European culture as well as the tales of our own settler and post-colonial experience ... the very best of poetry or fiction exposes readers ... to the influence of minds and sensibilities finer, more developed, richer than they are likely to meet ... in real life.

(Education Forum 1994: 28-29)

The debates continued, but that the conservatives had lost was finally signalled when the Ministry noted a shift in the teaching of English by including the word “image” as a part of language. The developers had given prominence to “visual language” as a new skill in interpreting “dramatic conventions, signs, symbols and symbolic elements of language” in modern communication and modern technologies. In the introduction, therefore, to the visual language strand, the curriculum statement reads:

Our language environment is rich in signs, symbols, and other forms of visual language in which words and images interact. On the page, on the stage, on television, and on the computer screen, visual and verbal elements are combined in increasingly global systems of communication. (*ENZC*, 39)

The statement further stresses that the sub-strands of viewing and presenting will “develop the skills and knowledge of ... exploring language, thinking critically, and processing information” (39) as is expected in written and oral language programmes.



Educationalists such as Michael Peters and James Marshall were joined by the policy analyst, Michael Irwin in criticising the emphasis on skills-based training. They also joined with Stead in criticising the trend in the English programme towards “independent learning” rather than “teaching”, and “training” instead of “education”. Stead in his *Submission to the Draft*, April 1994, questions the structures and artificial frameworks that, while they may help the insecure teacher to plan an English programme, lumber him/her with unnecessary rules in implementing it. In particular, Stead criticises the eight levels, mentioned by Dr Maris O’Rourke, Secretary for Education, in her foreword. According to Stead, even allowing for the fact that students of the same age achieve at different levels, the administrative problem of eight stages of progress fitting into thirteen years of schooling, without any direction as to how this is to be done, is a matter for concern.

A diagram in *ENZC (20)* demonstrates how levels of achievement and class/age bands overlap.

	(1996 terms) Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
<b>L</b>													
<b>E</b>												.....8.....	
<b>V</b>											.....7.....		
<b>E</b>											.....6.....		
<b>L</b>											.....5.....		
<b>E</b>											.....4.....		
<b>L</b>											.....3.....		
<b>S</b>											.....2.....		
											.....1.....		
	(1970 terms) J1	J2	J3/S1	S2	S3	S4	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7 F8
<b>Of Achievement</b>													

(The dotted lines indicate the overlapping of levels)

Following the release of the draft document, Elley wrote in the *Sunday Times* (19 September 1993):

What could possibly be wrong with a neatly structured curriculum, with clear statements of progressively more difficult standards, to be attained by all pupils? Surely the levels could only provide greater purpose and incentive for pupils to work harder? Surely standards would improve? Alas, no.

Along with other academics and analysts (Education Forum 1994), Elley deplored the ideologically neat and extremely “utilitarian” approach outlined in *The Framework* which sets out precise and measurable goals by which students will reach the “highest levels of literacy”. Elley argued that if the focus of teaching and learning is on the outcomes, it is questionable that performance levels will be raised. In this he was agreeing with Stuart McNaughton (Auckland University), who stated that “a view of teaching/learning which compartmentalises, codifies and quantifies, which makes processes lockstep and is driven by short term objectives, contributes to commodification ... [and limits] the ways in which teachers and students can be dexterous and adaptable” (“The Development of Dexterity and Adaptability and the Draft English Curriculum”, Dunedin conference paper, 1994: 33).

Further, McNaughton believed an outcome model not only affects performance levels, but also limits the expertise of both teachers (who may narrow their aims to focus upon what is easily measured) and learners, who tend to learn in different ways. Students are being denied the opportunity to develop interpretative and critical expertise, he argued.

Consequently, there was a conflict between outcome models and process models.

McNaughton comments upon the new “culture of enterprise, innovation and competition in the curriculum” (1994: 26). Where the curriculum insists upon “a personal growth model of English teaching”, McNaughton believed the text discourse is that of the market: achievement targets, goals and outcomes. (Stoop, 185)

Another bone of contention was the eight levels of achievement for each of the three strands in the English curriculum: oral, written and visual language.

In each strand there are eight objectives, set out in pairs (1 & 2; 3 & 4; 5 & 6; 7 & 8) to “help teachers plan their programmes, to indicate what students should aim for, and to help parents see how their children are progressing”. For year 9 and 10 students, for example, teachers work at levels 5 and 6 (although work at levels 4 and 7 may be included depending upon the students’ needs). Teachers plan activities using achievement objectives “from the most relevant strand or strands”<sup>48</sup> as given below.

### **Achievement Objectives.**

**Oral** Language: listening functions = interpersonal listening, listening to texts.

**Oral** Language: speaking functions = interpersonal speaking, using texts.

Listening and Speaking Processes = exploring language, thinking critically, processing information.

**Written** Language: reading functions = close reading and personal reading.

**Written** Language: writing functions = expressive, poetic and transactional writing.

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<sup>48</sup> An Approach to Planning, *ENZC*, 23.

Reading and writing processes = exploring language, thinking critically, processing information.

**Visual Language:** Viewing and Presenting functions = viewing, presenting.

**Visual Language:** Viewing and presenting processed = exploring language, thinking critically, processing information.

### **The functions and processes**

The functions specify what students at each level are able to do, and the processes “underpin the language functions and are crucial for students’ language development”.

Teaching, learning and assessment examples are given for each level. For example:

**Speaking functions**, interpersonal speaking, at level 4, reads:

Talk coherently in small and large groups about experiences, events, information, ideas and opinions, organizing material effectively and questioning and supporting others.

The appropriate **processes** for levels 3 and 4 read:

Students should (processing information):

Select, assemble, and interpret information, using appropriate technology.

One example given for processing information is:

*Context:* preparing for a class visit to a place of interest such as a museum.

Chapter 4 explains strands and objectives more fully.

In *ENZC* the functions and processes are set out with four examples at each pair of levels from which teachers may plan programmes for their classes.

To explain the curriculum an information leaflet was published for parents and trustees explaining *What's New? English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (1995), how English fits into the curriculum, how a parent can determine the progress of the child and how the parent may help the child at school. A diagram illustrated the relationship between language and languages and the other essential learning areas. Also stressed was the connection between the curriculum and *The Framework*. The leaflet explained the all-inclusive nature of the curriculum, the three strands of language, the processes by which their functions are achieved and the interconnectedness of the strands.

A small paragraph ensures parents that grammar is not forgotten, although the word “language” is the key word in this pamphlet. The word “grammar” is replaced in the curriculum by the term “language features” (30).

Stead, in *A Submission on the Draft*, makes a further point about language, which is that it is “apprehended normally (Braille is the exception) through the ear and the eye” (6). He goes on to explain that, for some readers and listeners, meaning is received “silently and internally” from the written word as a visual image before it is translated into an aural meaning. He adds that poetry, in particular, is appreciated for its sound as well as its meaning. Therefore, Stead argues, to introduce a third strand, the visual strand, as “an equal partner with written language and oral language” (6) is confusing and

misleading. According to the dictionary a “text” is written or printed. To describe a text as “visual” – “reading visual and dramatic texts” (*ENZC*, 40) is unhelpful, and, as Stead points out, the authors of the Draft are not totally happy about it themselves. In the paragraph entitled “Responding to Text” is the following statement: “Following theoretical precedents, [this curriculum] uses “text” to describe any language event such as a conversation, a poem or a poster ... suggesting that similar language skills [are] involved in “reading” a film, interpreting a speech, or responding to an advertisement” (*ENZC*, 16). Stead points out in his *Submission to the Draft* (6) that “theoretical precedents” are not explained, and that the curriculum affirms that it “draw[s] upon contemporary research and successful teaching practice”, but gives no references.

Eventually, the Ministry agreed on the title of the document, calling it *ENZC* (draft). The Curriculum set out national directions for all schools providing schooling from new entrants to year 13, so that all students had opportunities to develop “essential skills”, receive the best quality of teaching and learning through a progression of standards of international acceptance and linking school-based learning with the world outside school.

*English in the New Zealand Curriculum*, therefore, was to replace *Language in the Primary School: English* (1961) and *Statement of Aims, English: Forms 3-5* (1983) and the University Entrance, University Bursary and University Scholarship examinations. The Foreword asserts that this curriculum

- gives special emphasis to continuity and progression in English programmes by specifying clear learning goals expressed as achievement objectives at eight levels through all the years of schooling.
- It focuses on developing the highest levels of literacy and understanding of language for a variety of purposes to enable students to participate fully in society and the world of work.
- The statement includes a range of diagnostic and formative assessment procedures to enhance the learning of all students (5).

A noticeable omission in the foreword is to any reference to literature. O'Rourke states: "[ENZC] focuses on developing the highest levels of literacy and understanding of language for a variety of purposes to enable students to participate fully in society and the world of work". In the brief description of the "attitudes and values, along with knowledge and skills, [which] are an integral part of the New Zealand Curriculum",<sup>49</sup> an afterthought states that "an essential part of the process is thinking critically about literature, for instance" and refers to the students "clarify[ing] both their own values, and those of others" (8). The general aims reiterate that the students will "think critically about a range of texts, including literary texts" presumably inclusive of prose, drama and poetry.

The English curriculum states categorically that the Essential Learning Areas and the Essential Skills are derived from the principles which give direction to the curriculum.

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<sup>49</sup> *The Curriculum Framework*, 21.

These principles “affirm and reflect New Zealand’s identity” to allow for “local direction”, direct all schools to ensure the skills are “embedded in their programmes”, and ensure that the “day-to-day practices ... reinforce the formal curriculum” (7). From the “broad, recognisable categories of knowledge and understanding [the seven essential learning areas of language and languages, mathematics, science, technology, social sciences, the arts, health and well-being] ... the essential skills, attitudes and values are developed” as well as an understanding of “the environment, culture and heritage”. An important facet of this curriculum is spelled out in *The Framework* as the interrelatedness of the learning areas that will result in a “broad and balanced education [being made] available for all years of schooling” (3).

A final statement was given ministerial sanction in November 1995 (*The Education Gazette*, 15 December: 5-6).

*The Framework*, therefore, and the companion document, *ENZC*, claim to be a major step in meeting the challenges of social and economic change, rapid and comprehensive technological developments, trade relations moving towards the Pacific and Asia, as well as New Zealand as a bicultural nation, and making students aware of the increase in the level of crime, suicides and teenage pregnancies by stressing the importance of education for the individual, community and the nation (28).

***English in the New Zealand Curriculum – Gazetted 1996***



An end came to the years of controversy about the nature of an English curriculum, and after notifications in the *New Zealand Gazette* of the legal status of the document were in place, *ENZC* was released in February 1996 as the gazetted curriculum for the learning and teaching of English from new entrants to year 13.

In his thesis on curriculum reform Stoop points out that “the lack of theoretical underpinning to English curriculum reform in New Zealand has meant that statements which appear to follow progressive thinking but which are in fact, integrated into a technicist document, can lead to expressions of general acceptance as that noted in the English teachers’ journal”<sup>50</sup> (246). Stoop develops his argument concerning the “scant theoretical base to English curriculum reform” with reference to the debate over language versus literature as “the great books have been set against contemporary fiction”. He adds, “A syllabus which therefore incorporates the insights of linguistics and broadens the notion of ‘text’ (as the national curriculum statement certainly does) thus appears progressive!”

Stoop concludes his thesis (1998) with these words:

Within the New Zealand context the focus has been “the redevelopment of the English curriculum ... as part of a broad initiative aimed at improving primary and secondary school student achievement” (Ministry of Education 1994a:5) That this has been done without even an attempt to forge a consensus on the pedagogy central to meeting this aim is nothing less than extraordinary. It may appear that with the publication of the English

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<sup>50</sup> *English in Aotearoa* 26, September 1995:44.

curriculum statement that 30 years of syllabus and curriculum debate are over. However, given the inadequate pedagogical direction, for those English teachers who have not lost sight of a subject which espouses truly democratic values, the debate is surely only just beginning (258).

Other sources from journals of associations of teachers outside New Zealand, such as NATE UK, and texts by UK practitioners, also regretted the fact that current English curricula failed to acknowledge an overt reference to poetry in the programmes for the study of English. John Gordon (*English in Education*, 2004), for example, says that “the current English curriculum does not adequately acknowledge the potential of poetry to make meaning through sound ... [which] may embody or communicate meaning”. Peter Benton expressed a hope that “the development of a methodology based on reading and response rather than ‘conventional narrowly conceived ideas of comprehension and criticism [was beginning to] give poetry back to its readers’ (Benton, 1990: 31). He urged \*this process to continue”.<sup>51</sup> Other practitioners, such as Dennis Carter, claimed that “the emphasis was firmly with transactional writing and poetry was perceived as ‘a kind of fair-weather visitor’ (Carter, 1998:1) to the curriculum”.

Throughout all the debates concerning *ENZC*, the place of poetry in the curriculum, while never a compulsory text for study, has always been in the curriculum for those who study English. Traditionally, teachers incorporated poetry with prose and drama into the English programme. In external examinations such as School Certificate, University Entrance (until 1986, when it was replaced by internally assessed Sixth Form Certificate)

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<sup>51</sup> Dymoke, *Drafting and Assessing Poetry*, 2003.

and Bursary, papers offered options of literature questions equally on poetry, prose and drama. Recent changes in the curriculum, however, have placed emphasis upon the terms “text” and “language” rather than on “literature”. “Text” is described as “any language event” and students are encouraged to use a “full range of texts representing a wide variety of functions”. “A literary text” therefore, is considered “a language function”. Examples of language functions given in *ENZC* for level 5 include

1. “Listen to and interact appropriately with others to clarify understanding of narratives, information, ideas and opinions”<sup>52</sup>.
2. “Write regularly and confidently to respond to a range of experiences, ideas, observations and texts developing a personal voice”.
3. “Respond to and discuss various meanings, ideas, and effects, describing how verbal and visual features are combined for different purposes”. Poems, as well as dramas and novels are possible sources. Yet if poetry is not a priority for the teacher and the students, then, in some cases, it could be disregarded by that class.

With the introduction of the NCEA 1 in 2002, and NCEA 2 and 3 in 2003/2004, examinations designed to replace School Certificate, Sixth Form English and Bursary, poetry (while still part of the literature content for those who choose to do English for Scholarship) is on the periphery. To investigate the reasons and consequences of this I undertook surveys of and interviews with teachers and students in 2004.

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<sup>52</sup> *ENZC*, pp.28, 35 and 40.

### Chapter Three

Some people go their whole lives  
 without ever writing a single poem.  
 Extraordinary people who don't hesitate  
 to cut somebody's heart or skull open....  
 They contribute to political campaigns  
 that have absolutely no poetry in them  
 and promise none for the future....  
 Their children get caught shoplifting at the mall  
 and no one admits that it is poetry they are missing  
 James Tate: "Dream On". (1-4, 10-12, 15-16)

#### What teachers and students say

The purpose of this and the following three chapters is to introduce material obtained in an empirical study, collating and analysing answers to questions posed to teachers and students of English in schools and tertiary institutions. In introducing this material I am investigating: 1, the place of poetry in the English programme according to those currently teaching English in line with *ENZC*; 2, the effects of NCEA 1 internal and external assessments upon pedagogy; and 3, the products of this teaching, the students, some of whom I was tutoring, who in 2004/2005, enrolled in Engl. 102, an introductory course in English at the University of Canterbury.

In this chapter I include the actual words of both teachers and students as recorded on the survey papers. My analysis of the results is brief, as similar questions were directed in interviews, the collation of which follows in chapters four and five.

Chapter three reports on a qualitative study for which I used the following data:

- Written response questionnaires returned from Heads of Department (HODs) in English from 33 of 36 secondary schools in 2004.
- Written response questionnaires returned from 150 first year University students in 2004; and 15 in 2005 (tutorial classes in Engl. 102).

I directed my questions to teachers and students through survey papers aimed at measuring replies to short, primarily open-ended questions.<sup>53</sup> The material collected from the surveys, together with in-depth and semi-structured interviews, provides experiential evidence of the case this thesis makes for a cycle of deprivation in the teaching of poetry in schools.

### **Part one: Survey of teachers**

From the survey papers sent to teachers, I sought

- to gain insight into the extent to which poetry is taught in the curriculum
- to ascertain the opinions of teachers with regard to the whole English programme in the New Zealand curriculum
- to discover both the incentives and the problems teachers negotiate in engaging with the teaching of poetry
- to get a broad picture of the training, experience and qualifications of teachers of English
- to identify the attitudes of teachers towards the teaching of poetry

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<sup>53</sup> Copies of the survey papers are printed in the appendix 1 A and 1 B.

- to gauge something of the influence of the schools' English Departments and the whole school policy over subject priority in each case
- to detect the balance teachers endeavour to achieve in working within the demands of the New Zealand Curriculum and in meeting the multiple needs of teenagers while educating them in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- to seek the teachers' reactions to NCEA 1 as an achievement-based assessment.

The questions focused upon the teaching of poetry as part of the English programme to years 9, 10 and 11 students. I asked the respondents to identify the effects that *ENZC* and the introduction of NCEA 1 had upon their own pedagogy; to consider the reasons for including poetry in the English programme; to name any barriers that prevent the teaching of poetry; and to evaluate the attitudes of their students towards poetry. Leaving space for further comments, I hoped to draw from the teachers insightful material to support their opinions and give a comprehensive view of the importance of teaching poetry in schools.

58 responses were received from 33 schools. The papers were posted to the HODs of a range of secondary schools: single sex (both boys' and girls'), private and integrated, large co-ed schools, urban and rural schools, small co-ed schools, those that included students from years 1 to 13, and those that taught only years 7 to 13 students. Teachers from two small private schools not catering for students taking NCEA 1 exams chose not to be included.

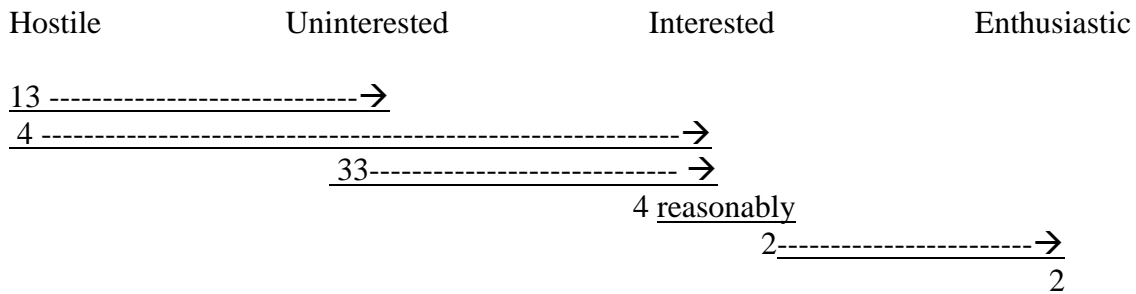
Of the 58 papers returned from schools, 16 were from HODs. 42 (including HODs) came from full-time teachers and 16 from part-time or relieving teachers. Qualifications were stated as follows:

MA Engl.	9
M.Ed.	2 (and English papers)
BA(Hons) Engl.	12
BA Engl.	16
BA. (English stages 1 or 2 plus other papers).	19
Additional papers: Education, French, History, Japanese, Linguistics, Media Studies, Music, Political Science, Science, Theology.	
Other: TESOL, LTCL/LSB, ATCL/ASB (Sp. & Dr, Dip. Sp. Needs	10.

The 21 teachers with MA and BA (Hons) degrees in English said that they were mainly employed with senior English classes; four of these stated that they also teach English to years 9 and 10 classes sometimes. In the junior classes there were usually some teachers who have a BA in English, but other teachers of junior classes had only stage 1 or 2 English, with majors in other subjects. Eight teachers of years 9, 10 and 11 classes admitted that English was not their favourite teaching subject. One HOD observed that they preferred to have teachers qualified in English teaching year 9 classes, but it was not always possible. Another HOD remarked that, in recent years, fewer teachers with MA and BA (Hons) in English have applied for jobs and some who graduated with double majors preferred to teach the other subject at senior level.

### Attitudes to poetry

When asked to assess the attitude of their students towards poetry on a scale of one to four, teachers rated their students as follows:



Teachers were hesitant to be more specific as they said the attitudes of their students depended upon the level and ability of the class in any particular year, the prior experiences of the class and the teacher's personal interest, attitude and experience.

Teachers were honest in stating the reasons for these attitudes. Classroom teaching has undergone many changes in recent years, they said. 14 teachers mentioned that they have noticed a change in both the approach of the teacher and the attitudes of students since the introduction of *ENZC* and NCEA level 1. Work has become more examination-oriented. Strongly expressed, also, is the fact that many New Zealand students today struggle with simple written and oral expression. Moreover, several teachers claimed, schools enrol an increasing number of students for whom English is a second language, who need to concentrate on basic written English language and pronunciation; poetry is beyond the comprehension of these students, they observed.



Eight teachers stated that the proportion of time depends upon the class level and the particular class and it can not be calculated. However, others endeavoured to be more specific:

27 teachers of senior classes teach poetry one week per term, or the “occasional” period when opportune.

19 teachers (who did not mention levels) teach a block of two to three weeks a year.

7 teachers teach one week in preparation for the Unfamiliar Text in NCEA 1 (achievement standard 1.6).

6 teachers of year 9 students teach one period a week for six weeks.

1 teacher said: “I use it wherever I can in an English unit”.

More time, they added, is not available because of the comprehensive nature of the curriculum and the other topics to be covered at years 9 and 10.

Several teachers referred to poetry taught over their years of teaching, not necessarily currently. The kinds of poetry they teach vary according to the level of the class (9 – 13), whether students are top-level students, boys, girls, a mixed class or a literacy class in a low decile school.

Most year 9 students, according to the teachers, are exposed to some or all of these: haiku, concrete and “found” poetry, limericks, clerihew, sonnet, and the traditional ballad. Several teachers explained that they endeavour to relate poetry to themes, e.g. school or animals; occasions, e.g. Anzac Day or Waitangi Day across the three strands across the curriculum. Three teachers “relieve the boredom” with humorous and narrative

poems, such as reading those by Hilaire Belloc, Roger McGough, A. B. Patterson, Pam Ayres, Lewis Carroll, Rudyard Kipling, Denis Glover, and Brian Edwards's collection of limericks.

Teaching year 10 students involve revising sonnets and haiku, and briefly studying examples of figurative devices, which, according to the teachers, are helpful in answering the NCEA 1 Unfamiliar Text question in year 11. Poems other than these are usually not studied.

Four of the 58 teachers stated they explore War poetry, Shakespeare sonnets, lyric from pop songs and some New Zealand poetry briefly at year 10 and relate the poems to the Social Studies programme.

Two teachers said they introduce poems that express controversial and teenage issues in connection with religious and human development studies across all levels – if there is time.

Four teachers, currently teaching only years 9 and 10, admitted to attempting to introduce a poetry unit with unsuccessful results.

Teachers mentioned certain poets whom they have included in past years (especially at years 11, 12 and 13) such as: Aboriginal poetry, Fleur Adcock, W. H. Auden, James K. Baxter, William Blake, Ruth Dallas, Lauris Edmond, Robert Frost, Robert Graves,

Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, Cilla McQueen, Sylvia Plath, Christina Rossetti, Apirana Taylor, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Brian Turner, Hone Tuwhare and Haare Williams.

Teachers expressed their appreciation of these poets, said they have studied their works and indicated there is plenty of material available to give substance to their teaching, “if there is time”. Teachers added that, more recently, they have paid great attention to the reports from the previous years’ examination papers, where markers speak of material that achieved the “best” marks. They admitted, of course, that time, the particular class and other curriculum choices dictate how much or how little poetry is able to be taught. One teacher added that it is customary to omit the poetry unit if events such as sports’ day, class camps, exchange visits from schools, anniversary days, ski trips, problems with adverse weather conditions and flu epidemics interrupt the normal routine.

Several teachers included, as sources, their own University notes, and wrote that they rely heavily upon English Online for material and ideas.

One teacher, S15,<sup>54</sup> wrote as follows:

[There is a] decline in the amount of literature being taught, and ... in the extent to which students are experiencing poetry. I am unable to say whether this situation can be attributed directly to NCEA, but it has clearly exacerbated it. Students driven solely for the required number of credits ... opt out of the poetry section. Their lack of experience in reading poetry means that they are ill-prepared for the poetry in the Understanding Unfamiliar Texts Achievement standards. However, as it is easy to

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<sup>54</sup> See explanation on p.70 about numbering.

achieve these standards with little understanding of poetry, the requirements of these standards do not act as an incentive to study poetry. The implementation of level 3 NCEA means this situation now pertains to the whole senior school. In addition, we are increasingly gearing our junior school teaching to match what we do in NCEA Achievement standards, with obvious consequences for poetry.

This statement summarises the comments of many teachers who spoke of the effects of NCEA upon their teaching of poetry, not only at year 11, but from the junior classes upwards.

### **Reasons for teaching poetry**

Teachers, on the whole, wrote extensively, earnestly and positively in this section on the value of teaching poetry as an important component of literature, although some did not see it as “an integral part of the English programme” as stated in the questionnaire.

The following reasons were given by the teachers. As some reasons were repeated by several teachers, I have selected twenty statements that reflect the principal values of teaching poetry. Poetry

- as text, is accessible
- has validity
- is the ultimate in word craft
- requires precision in shaping and editing and can demonstrate this
- is a great vehicle for exploring language and building vocabulary

- is concise and so requires a sophisticated interpretation and “higher-level” thinking
- can impinge upon written and oral skills – “ignore it at your peril!”
- can be accommodated to all ability levels
- is useful for extension students
- encourages creativity
- contains relevant issues
- has more than one interpretation – the students don’t have to be wrong
- helps students express their own ideas and emotions
- aids students in linking writing to speaking
- can be enjoyable, fun, and contains beautiful language
- inspires with its strong imagery
- can raise the spirit
- provides a range of themes that overlap into other literary works and film work, e.g. Gallipoli
- provokes reflection on human foibles within a thematic study
- is good for teaching poetic techniques.

These affirmations of the value of teaching poetry are similar to those found in the responses of my former students (chapter seven).

Teachers also wrote personally: “I like it”, “I have to do it”, “It’s on the curriculum”, “It must be seen to be done”, “I get it over while the class is fresh”, “It gets the figure of speech thing done” and “I don’t at years 11 and 12 because I don’t have to, sadly!”

While teachers acknowledged the many values in teaching poetry, they said that they sometimes refrain from teaching it because other texts in the curriculum, such as the novel, short story, non-fiction, drama, film & television viewing/writing, electronic texts, newspapers, short and extended hyperfiction, radio and advertisements have more appeal for today's students. Teachers also declared that many other factors put up barriers, such as these ten collated from many papers:

- The level of commitment required from student and teacher to study poetry at depth.
- The level of close reading required from the student.
- The assessment of poetry essays is too 'cabined, crimped and confined' to do justice to the work entailed.
- Those students who don't read much and want instant answers turn off poems.
- Inappropriate choices of poems disenchant students.
- The question 'what does this mean?' which permits several equally valid responses confuses students.
- Those students who are literal don't see it as 'workplace' related.
- Many students are intimidated by the format of a poem.
- The policy of the department and the school sway the debate in favour of other choices.
- Examination preparation and wanting good results preclude time spent on teaching poetry.

Teachers see these as obstacles to whether they do or do not teach poetry.

10 of the 58 teachers recorded that they prepare their students for the poetry question as well as for short stories for NCEA 1, but none of their students actually used poetry as a short written text in the previous examinations. The comments included negatives, several relating to the questions on the paper:

- It's not as easy as short story.
- Some students struggle with diction, syntax and meaning, all required for a successful essay-type question.
- There's not enough ground work in the junior school to build upon at year 11.
- They just don't do it.
- Few questions address technique or language; this disadvantages students who might otherwise choose the question.
- Students find questions demanding because of form and complex ideas hidden beneath apparently straightforward ideas.
- Disappointing results; I won't do it again.
- Questions are inadequate and limiting for poetry.

On the other hand three teachers wrote:

- I use rote learning of terms (sorry to say) but it works! And use of Achievement English workbook helps immensely. We have the choice IF the question is fair.
- I select appropriate poems and drill students on a sustained basis in terms of answering technique. Therefore, they have an option.
- If only HOD would say: "Include poetry. Students should appreciate it. Analyse it. Write it! Do it!" Fitting it in spoils it! I'd do it instead of other choices – at least, as a promising option.

### Comments and suggestions

The final section of the paper invited from the teachers comments, clarification and suggestions. As the survey papers that I sent arrived in teachers' pigeon holes at the busy time of the week before the Easter break, teachers felt they had covered everything in the twelve questions. Several expressed an interest in knowing what everyone else had written.<sup>55</sup> One teacher expressed his reaction: "Just one more extra thing that had to be done – and, if I hadn't been interested in the topic, and in you, the researcher (Good for you!), this would have gone in the rubbish!"

Several final comments from teachers, however, substantiated the facts and opinions expressed in the papers. These comments were so personal they could not be classified in groups as the previous answers were. As I allotted a number to each paper received, I shall use these in recording these particular comments. (S2 = Survey paper 2)

- (S2) "Small children love word games and rhymes. If teachers continue this from the first year of school, with enthusiasm all is well for poetry teaching in later school years".
- (S6) "I would love to include more poetry in my courses, but time and policy dictate otherwise. If I were HOD – now, there's a thought"!
- (S7) "Unfortunately, NCEA 1 short answer text question, which I hoped my bright students would attempt, taxed them. They struggled with comparing and contrasting – higher level thinking. I do hope a standard is set in the future. If they don't do essay-type poetry questions in year 11, poetry is lost forever".

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<sup>55</sup> An edited version of the distillation of responses was published in *English in Aotearoa* 55 (April 2005): 17.



- (S10) “While more students find the short story option more accessible, a significant number, even of low-ability students, would opt for poetry if war poetry were to be included”.
- (S15) “Many students do not have the ability to retain the intricacies of poetry to the extent that they could write about it in an exam. A novel has a story, characters and conflict. If they don’t read it, they at least have the film! However, having taught Bursary, I found many students were disadvantaged when poetry was part of section 1. Having written this I feel like a philistine!”
- (S17) “Poetry has been set aside in preference to the study of the word ‘arts’ and drama. Visual language is art; speaking is drama; literature is English”.
- (S19) “I do not teach poetry as a separate unit in the junior school because it is easier and more efficient to integrate it into the programme. Poetry can be used in a variety of ways in the classroom – and it is”.
- (S20) “I love poetry and I love to teach it. I find having to fit it in and assess it as directed spoils it. I would love to include it throughout the year”.
- (S27) “I would like to see a programme in place where, over the course of high school, students were exposed to the ‘classics’ so that they did know, or at least have read, works that were important – in-depth study”.
- (S28) “Poetry is an art form. Many teachers avoid it because of perceived difficulties. However, the teacher’s passion and attitude, will, in my experience counter most problems. Poetry can’t be rushed and we often don’t have time”.

- (S29) “Poetry at my school (an all boys’ school) is not a common choice for unit standards 1.4 and 2.4. Students enjoy, retain knowledge of, and apply it in essay form better using short stories”.
- (S30) “Personally, I adore poetry and try to convey this passionately in my teaching. We must keep poetry alive!! One of the reasons poetry has had less attention ... is that students found essay writing [of poetry] demanding to write”.
- (S32) “If English teachers think poetry is important in terms of assessment, they need to pressure NZQA to offer an Achievement Standard solely for poetry instead of ‘short text’. I’m not sure I would select it as a standard we would do. It would depend upon the class”.
- (S34) “I do think there is a place for speaking poetry aloud – the cadences and rhythms bring poetry alive. It is fundamentally an oral form of literature. Perhaps in the classroom it is not possible for teachers to add the oral dimension. They are scared”.
- (S35) “I would so love to do poetry at year 11. It’s too hard for the students to answer well in exams. Ours is a decile 4 school. Exams count. We don’t do it. That’s that!”
- (S40) “Poetry IS important but English is so broad and must include so much – something gets squeezed out – poetry, I suspect, is often the casualty – even for the able students”.
- (S45) “You need to take decile<sup>56</sup> into account. Poetry books are expensive. Poor children don’t get to read poetry at home”.

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<sup>56</sup> Decile 3.school.

- (S54) “Poetry DOES have a beneficial spin-off for pupils who persevere with it. It aids comprehension (esp. higher order thinking) AND it produces better writers”.

The responses revealed variations in the attitudes to teaching poetry because, as the teachers admitted, of the enthusiasm and years of experience of the teachers, the level of the class (at year 11 most teachers did not use poetry), the decile of the school (poetry was generally used less in lower decile schools) and the policy of the English departments in schools (poetry was favoured if the principal or HOD was in favour). These responses revealed how much the respondents cared about their teaching, and how willing they were to give explanations about the difficulties they were facing in their classrooms. Further comments expanding upon these points occurred in the recorded interviews, mentioned in chapters four and five.

Common threads emerged, however, such as the pressure teachers feel from the assessment processes and the prospect of the NCEA final examinations; the lack of time to cover topics in depth because of the many choices offered by the curriculum to provide for the multiple needs and talents of students; the changing attitudes of today’s students because of the raised leaving age, multi-ethnic classes and what teachers see as low literacy levels. These reasons, teachers stated, contribute to the disregarding of poetry in the English programme in the schools I surveyed. However, only eight of the 58 teachers indicated a lack of interest in teaching poetry, and all these eight teachers indicated their

qualifications were a BA, not necessarily in English but with some English papers, and had been teaching for fewer than six years.

### **Part two: Surveys of students**

I surveyed 150 students enrolled in English 102 at University of Canterbury in 2004, a one-semester course designed as an introduction to English to teach basic skills in academic writing and literary analysis. It is expected that students enrolling in this course be “able to write grammatically correct English” (*Undergraduate Handbook* 06, p.19). Three assignments worth 50% are marked by tutors and 50% marked in a final exam by the course lecturers.

The aim of this survey was to establish the attitudes to poetry of students who had recently left school. Responses to the survey would concur with or diverge from the attitudes indicated by teachers as recorded in the first part of this chapter. The survey papers for University students were handed out prior to their Wednesday and Friday lectures. Absent students did not have opportunities, therefore, to participate, although two students did ask for papers in the following week, not wishing to be left out. The survey was designed to be answered in about five to eight minutes. There was no time for hindsight, reflection or carefully prepared answers or comparing with a friend. The questions, therefore, were aimed at revealing attitudes and opinions as they are rather than what the lecturers might want. The purpose of the survey was explained, giving students freedom to write anonymously, without any weighting connected with their course work.

To discover the students' opinions I needed to ask:

*1. In which year and at what level did the respondents finish school?*

Of the 150 students who completed the survey (out of 176 enrolled) 105 had left secondary schools in 2001, 2002 or 2003. 80% of these students indicated that they had passed external bursary examinations. The remaining 45 students (who left school between the years 1954 and 2000) were first year University students or came from other departments at the University (law, history and commerce) to improve their essay writing skills. Three of these had left school before sitting School Certificate.

*2. How regularly was poetry taught in their schools?*

All but five students answered negatively to poetry being a regular part of the programme at school. 60% said poetry was taught occasionally at years 9, sometimes at year 10, hardly ever (depending upon the teacher) at year 11. 40% indicated "never", can't remember" or omitted to answer the question. Five said poetry was taught regularly in years 12 and/or 13.

*3. What kinds of poetry were studied and at which level?*

The kinds of poetry studied generally reiterated examples suggested on the survey paper: Wordsworth, war poets, sonnets, as well as Seamus Heaney, Romantics, modern poets, James K. Baxter, Hone Tuwhare, NZ poets and Pam Ayres. 25% of students said they couldn't remember; eight of these left school in 2003.

*4. Was poetry enjoyed in their classes? Why?*

Describing their enjoyment of poetry, students' answers varied from "No" to "depended upon the poems and/or the teacher" to "yes". Just five students indicated "yes". Where negative reasons were added, students blamed the teacher, the choice of poems, poems in general, or the difficulty or futility of the task. If in the affirmative, students expressed a love for poetry and/or respect for the teacher.

*5. Was poetry chosen for examination purposes?*

All students, except four who sat School Certificate and University Entrance and three who sat Bursary, answered in the negative about using poetry for examinations. Few gave reasons, but twenty-eight students indicated they were "not allowed" or "not prepared" or "had better choices".

*6. What place did the writing and assessing of poetry have in their schools?*

In responding to the question about writing poetry in school time, students wrote that writing poetry was not part of class work; they did it to fill in time; they did it because they had to. 90% said their writing was not assessed, was marked with a tick or a mark out of 10, or a comment such as "Good".

*7. What were the students' current attitudes to reading, writing, studying and enjoying poetry?*

While most students replied that they do not read, enjoy or study poetry, 40% indicated that they wrote poetry in their own time.

8. *What were their thoughts about studying poetry in their selected course, English 102?*

Fuller comments were made when asked about their expectations of the poetry section of the University English 102 course. Most of the students wrote: “apprehensive”, because they believed:

- I won't understand it.
- The lecturer won't be able to put it across.
- The choice will be nuts!
- I'll get a low mark.
- If I'd known we had to do it I wouldn't have enrolled.

However, some students felt:

- I'm more mature now I'll probably cope.
- I'm looking forward to it.
- It'll be a change.
- It will make up for what I've missed out on at school.
- I've loved the lectures so far this will probably be great.

One comment was from a student who had left school in 2003 with Bursary English.

She/he said, and I quote just as it was written:

Poetry is a matter of one's opinion and hate it how something is interpreted by myself and I'm told its wrong. Everyone is different intellectually and emotionally, i.e. I wouldn't excecpt you to understand my poetry so why should I be expected to understand other peoples (sic) who are dead! I mean

for all I know you guys could be interpreting it totally wrong and people could be turning in their graves.

9. *What were the attitudes of their peers to poetry? Why?*

Answering the question about the attitudes of their peers towards poetry (on the same scale as that designed for the teachers, p.60) the 150 students rated their peers as follows:

Hostile                      uninterested                      interested                      enthusiastic

2 (hostile plus)

31

4 ----->

80

4 ----->

19

1 sort of

9

These responses were much more specific than those of the teachers, and students were candid in expressing their opinions as the following indicates.

A. Negative reasons

Reasons given for assigning these attitudes varied from brief general comments such as, “it wasn’t interesting”, “too hard”, “didn’t like it”, to those that were more detailed. I selected a sample of comments which relate to the class attitude, a personal response, or the style of teaching. Some students gave no reasons; others used similar phrases such as: “hated analysing”, “had no choice” or “couldn’t understand it”. Fuller answers included:

Class:

- We had to analyse it to death.



- Had no choice in the matter.
- We couldn't understand it or the teacher's ravings.
- We felt it was totally irrelevant to life or youth's issues.
- Too complex for us to concentrate.
- We turned off and fooled around and no one cared.
- We found the structure stuff boring. What was the point?
- We had one poet to study and we couldn't understand him. Can't remember his name even.
- It was a total waste of time and effort.

Personal:

- I absolutely hated it.
- I think poetry's silly.
- It's just not my thing.
- I missed a couple of classes so had no idea what was going on.
- Poetry's plain crap.
- Sadly, I didn't enjoy anything at school.
- The meanings of the poems were so convoluted and far-fetched. I'd like to study the classics not NZ stuff.
- I hated using a scalpel to tear poems apart.
- Awful selection. Awful analysis technique. Awful teacher.
- I loved it in Form three but it became so tedious and stilted it made me quit English altogether.

Style of teaching:

- Boring and hard to hear the teacher.
- She hadn't a clue what it was about herself.
- My teacher was hard to learn from – strange accent and full speed ahead!
- The most tedious part of the day – fortunately only a couple of periods in a couple of weeks.
- Badly taught, regurgitated (sic) notes, no input from us.
- The teacher obviously hated teaching it and skipped over it quickly.
- I thought the “hillbilly hype” metaphors, e.g. “death’s an explosion in the mind of love” !!! what !!! destroyed the poems and I was forced to pretend I liked it! Yuk!
- Poetry she said was “good” is actually crap!
- Excessive analysation (sic) annoys the hell out of me.
- Teaching inadequate, bad, limiting, too structural, discouraging (sic) poetry to be seen as an art form.
- The poems were dull as was the method of teaching. No time to understand or learn about them.

For the University lecturer (to whom I showed the papers) about to introduce poetry in the Engl. 102 course in which these students were enrolled, these answers must have been discouraging. In a more constructive light, however, this information might be very useful for tertiary teachers/and lecturers in terms of preparing themselves and adapting their courses to the needs of actual students. This could be one strategy for breaking the cycle of deprivation.

B. Positive reasons

Fortunately, some of the thirty students who had circled “interested” or “enthusiastic” made the following positive comments, such as: “Loved it”; “good teacher”; “found it relevant” or “loved hidden meanings” Fuller responses included:

- Loved the challenge of words.
- Our teacher made it so interesting.
- Best class of the day as it was refreshing after the logical stuff.
- It was so interesting researching the poets.
- Great stuff! Love it and the way it’s taught.
- Amazing how much meaning is conveyed in a small amount of verse.
- I just loved the imagery. Awesome.
- I loved the way ordinary things can be made to sound extraordinary.
- Loved the social relevance in the poems.
- Loved the hidden philosophical meanings and the allegories in Irish poetry.
- Sometimes difficult at first to understand, but I wanted to ‘taste’ the poems again and again.
- Had studied only Shakespeare sonnets in Malaysia before Form Six, so found poetry intriguing and beautiful.

These replies were made by students who had left school between 1998 and 2000 and included one student in 2003. It may be relevant that NCEA 1 was introduced in 2002, so the students who spoke positively about poetry may have been accredited English in schools where poetry thrived.

In general, therefore, 150 English 102 students enrolled at the University in 2004 gave more negative than positive comments about poetry than the teachers, but, interestingly, those students who left school in the 50s to 70s (when the English curriculum seemed more flexible) generally spoke favourably about poetry. Students who observed they had enthusiastic, knowledgeable teachers, affirmed their own love for poetry.

### **Tutorials**

There were forty-five 2004 English 102 candidates in my two tutorials. As tutor I marked 50% of the work from assignments set during tutorials and based on the lectures on J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Rings* from *The Lord of the Rings* and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, as well as prescribed poems. All tutors for English 102 are moderated by a senior tutor according to a range of selected scripts. Final exams, worth 50%, are set and marked by lecturers and cover the same texts. Grades for my tutorial members revealed that those who responded well to poetry in tutorials gained higher grades (A, B+ and B) in the poetry assignment marked as a tutorial exercise than those who were apathetic towards poetry or did not attend tutorials regularly. 70% of these students also gained higher marks for the poetry question in the final examination than they did for the other two questions on the set novels. Students who at first admitted they were hostile to or uninterested in poetry were led to respond to poetry by attending well-prepared and well-delivered lectures and regular small group two-hour tutorials.

## Conclusion

Analysis of the barriers to teaching poetry given the survey papers from teachers and students, revealed that these comments relate to various situations such as the sex of the class, the decile profile of the school, the choice of poems, the enthusiasm and experience (or lack of them) of the teacher and the pressures felt by the teachers from curriculum demands, examinations and assessments. There is thus a concurrence of opinions between the personal responses of the teachers and the students in these surveys. Those teachers who had higher qualifications in English and who had been teaching for more than 20 years, indicate that their students show more positive attitudes to studying poetry included in their English programme. These teachers speak of their concern for the manner in which poetry is being squeezed out of the curriculum because less emphasis is able to be placed upon literature. Students who recall positive experiences with poetry, express their disappointment in not being able to study poetry in depth during years 10 and 11.

Although I based my survey upon the teaching of poetry for years 9, 10 and 11 students, some senior teachers referred to the return of an interest in studying poetry at years 12 and 13, especially for students in extension English classes.<sup>57</sup>

Results from the surveys demonstrate something of the current state of the teaching of poetry in New Zealand schools, according to these 58 teachers and 150 students. Aside

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<sup>57</sup> Some schools place in the “top” classes the students who have the highest grades from diagnostic tests such as Performance Achievement Tests (PATS) and Standard Tests for Achievement in Reading (STAR). The progress of such students is monitored and extension classes are created for senior students who work at an advanced level often aiming at scholarship with NCEA 3.

from the personal comments made by the products and providers of English class teaching, two broad areas said to be responsible for omitting poetry are an over-full curriculum and the current examination system. In themselves, these factors are not necessarily problems. Teachers still have to find ways to use the system to its advantage. As a result of omitting poetry, however, some students leave school without a love for poetry.

I sent out the survey papers to busy teachers, unsure of the outcome and hoping to receive more than 50% back in reply. I was agreeably surprised at the number of responses, and the enthusiasm of the teachers to divulge their explanations and feelings about teaching poetry. Most of the teachers indicate by their responses that they are not averse to teaching poetry, but wish to express their opinions about the obstacles to giving poetry any or sufficient time to do it justice. I deduced that at that time, in 2004, they are still struggling with the demands of the curriculum, with NCEA, and with the changing nature of education in English for some students who are reluctant to be at school. Some of the teachers feel there is just too much to identify, administer, monitor, plan, check, cover and evaluate,<sup>58</sup> and too little time to actually teach.

I can understand how getting to grips with the new curriculum influences classroom practices, but the negative comments of the students disturb me. The speech and drama<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> An approach to planning: *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*, 23.

<sup>59</sup> In New Zealand approximately 944 students working in school at years 9 to 12 who pass Trinity College London speech and drama grades 5 to 7 exams annually, and about 2,640 students at similar school levels who pass Speech New Zealand grades 5 to 8 exams annually. There is no actual correlation between age and grade. Students sit examinations when ready to deal with the requirements of the syllabus. There are no prerequisites for any particular grade. Both syllabi require students to perform from memory one or two

students whom I teach and examine are familiar with poetry, like it, memorise and perform it. I was unaware there was so much hostility to poetry in the classrooms.

Needing to know why I searched for more answers through interviews.

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poems, a drama selection and a memorised passage of prose (depending upon the grade) freely chosen to suit the candidate, the programme and the level of the grade. Students attend classes outside school hours with qualified teachers paying fees for tuition and examinations.

## Chapter four

If you should dip your hand in,  
 your wrist would ache immediately ...  
 If you tasted it, it would first taste bitter ...  
 It is like what we imagine knowledge to be:  
 dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free,  
 drawn from the cold hard mouth  
 of the world, derived from the rocky breasts  
 forever, flowing and drawn, and since  
 our knowledge is historical, flowing, and flown.  
 Elizabeth Bishop: "At the Fish-houses". (1-9)

### Programme for levels 9 and 10

This chapter looks specifically at the place of poetry in the English programme for years 9 and 10 students. As these years are important formative ones for students, it is necessary to consider previous experiences, such as those they had in primary school in studying poetry as part of the English curriculum, and how the secondary teachers can put in place strategies to merge together students at differing levels of learning, literacy, motivation and ethnicity to enable a class to work together as a cohesive group. During this period of development as an adolescent, in the "search for ego-identity" and the "creation of the self-image"<sup>60</sup> the student is preoccupied with social interaction through talk, such as debating, discussion and argument;<sup>61</sup> through writing and reading poetry and fiction with peer review; and through improvised drama. Britton refers to Carl Rogers, who speaks of this as "commitment", in Britton's words: a "crucial, positive act in the process of becoming an individual".<sup>62</sup> As recorded in chapter three, some teachers used a six week unit of poetry early in the year to contribute to the achievement of a degree of

<sup>60</sup> James Britton, *Language and Learning*, 224.

<sup>61</sup> The Macquarie Dictionary (1992).

<sup>62</sup> Britton, 225.



both individuation and involvement required for developing critical awareness through literature.

In this chapter, I

- examine the programme for English for junior secondary classes as prescribed by the curriculum, and the significance of poetry in the programme.
- consider the implementation of the principles of *The Framework* in programme planning.
- apply the material obtained from the interviews with teachers and students to the practice of poetry teaching at years 9 and 10.
- look for possible threads to establish why poetry appears to have become peripheral in the teaching of English.

### **What the teachers say**

The interviews with the teachers began with three pre-arranged questions focusing upon personal experience (past and present), the value of teaching poetry, and the influence of technology, examination, assessment, the school-leaving age and future employment on their overall planning of the English programme. Individual interviews were recorded, but I took notes during the group interviews. Interviewees were invited to read the transcriptions later, but all were content with my documentation, although one teacher wished to hear the tape to ensure she was not identifying people and places prejudicially. All the interviewees and respondents were informed that I might quote from the papers and recorded interviews. With their agreement I am using pseudonyms or numbers when quoting directly.

Each set of data was transcribed or collated and connections made between the results. I looked for possible threads to establish why poetry appears to have become peripheral in the teaching of English as the curriculum has undergone changes in the past thirty years, and what effect this might have upon the study and use of poetry in the English programme for students and teachers in the future decades.

### **Planning an English programme for years 9 and 10**

*ENZC* (1996) became the basis for English programmes from years 1 to 13 (excluding scholarship) for all students in all New Zealand schools, providing continuity, but allowing for local variations. According to this curriculum, throughout their schooling students will be given “frequent opportunities to observe, learn and practise” (19) the three interwoven strands of language so that they may participate fully in society and the work force. Language growth is said to be a developmental process and not all students in any one class will achieve at the same level.

At years 9 and 10, for example, students may be working at levels four to six approximately, of the eight level band,<sup>63</sup> although most classes work examples from levels 5 and 6, according to teachers. There may even be students having difficulty in reading, working below level three. The curriculum urges teachers to use varying approaches in deciding on the focus for study, and reminds teachers that “responding to literature has always been central to students’ encounter with language ... through close and careful reading in different literary genres, such as drama, fiction and poetry” (16).

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<sup>63</sup> See page 56.

To understand better the difficulties teachers said they encountered trying to include poetry more fully into the English programme, I analysed the format and content of the curriculum to assess which examples for study refer to poetry.

*ENZC* has three interwoven strands: oral language, written language and visual language. Each strand includes descriptions of achievement objectives of two kinds, language functions and processes. Work for year 9 and 10 students may be pitched as follows:

#### **Achievement Objectives: levels 5 and 6**

**Oral language:** Listening functions = interpersonal listening and listening to texts.

Speaking functions = interpersonal speaking and using texts.

Processes: Exploring language; thinking critically; processing information.

**Written language:** Reading functions = personal reading and close reading.

Writing functions = expressive; poetic; transactional writing.

Processes: Exploring language; thinking critically; processing information.

**Visual language:** Viewing functions = visual & dramatic texts; static & moving images.

Presenting functions = using static and moving images.

Processes: exploring language; thinking critically; processing information.

An example of an activity at this level to test students' understanding is as follows<sup>64</sup>:

**BINGO!** (Written language – writing: levels 5 & 6) *Achievement Objective: poetic writing; exploring language.*

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<sup>64</sup> Other examples are found in the Appendix.

Context : Teaching poetic language. Prepared boards with names of types of poems: Lyric; ballad; epic; limerick; haiku; allegory; elegy; sonnet; found; shape etc. Teacher/student reads definitions from cards. Pupils match. Example:

<p><b>SONNET = poem of 14 lines; particular rhyme and rhythm</b></p>
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This activity is a way of empowering students in reviewing forms of poetry. Achievement objectives include identifying genres, exploring texts, developing language skills. This activity applies also to creative writing skills.

In *ENZC* the functions and processes are set out with four examples at levels 1 & 2, 3 & 4, 5 & 6, 7 & 8, from which teachers may plan programmes for their classes.

Achievement objectives for oral language are illustrated by the following examples summarised from *ENZC* (52-70) to show examples in each function.

#### Oral language – listening

1. Context: a study of a topical issue, such as health. Strategies for note-making techniques. Oral reports.
2. Context: learning about community meetings. Procedures and participation strategies. Class meeting.
3. Context: a study of the differences between written and spoken language. Listening to recorded speeches and recording own speeches.
4. Context: exploring a theme from literature, such as emigration. This study involves reading, current affairs programme, role play of an interview.

#### Oral language – speaking

1. Context: class or school radio programme or debate.
2. Context: advertising: language varies according to the situation.
3. Context: characterisation in a literature unit using any literary text.

4. Context: radio news; interview techniques and recording.

All these examples are valid ways of exploring language, thinking critically and processing information, but literature topics – with one exception – at this level are omitted. And yet poetry is particularly suited to teaching listening and speaking skills at this level. Characters from narrative poetry, such as Tim the Ostler from Alfred Noyes’ “The Highwayman”, Fiona Farrell’s heroine from “Charlotte O’Neill”, Robert Browning’s Duke from “My Last Duchess and Seamus Heaney’s story-teller from “Mid Term Break” – are poems suitable for this level and could be selected as texts. But according to the teacher interviewees, characters from novels tend to be the choices. Advertising jingles lend themselves to rhythm and rhyme, and here would be an opportunity to teach and practise the language, devices and forms of poetry.

Poetry *is* mentioned in the following:

Written language – reading:

1. Context: exploring language through poetry or song lyrics. (Each student selects a lyric poem set to music or a song lyric. Form and imagery are discussed. The text is read aloud. Small groups present to the class, and then listen to the musical version).

(Other examples for reading refer to short story, novel and information technology).

Written language – writing.

1. Context: writing a poem. (Students study different types of poems, such as haiku, lyric, ballad, sonnet. A group poem is written and evaluated by the class. Each student writes his/her own poem).

(Other examples of writing refer to personal experiences (journals or letters), the language of campaigning and advertising a school production).

Poetry is given here in both reading and writing as specific examples, but as the teacher may select one or two examples only in the teaching and learning sections, poetry may be excluded if the teacher so chooses. Studying song lyrics is a way in to studying poetry if the teacher and class select appropriate examples. Different forms of poetry are often taught at levels 3 and 4. At levels 5 and 6, therefore, this example for teaching the writing of poems is repetition for some students.

Visual language – viewing

The four examples given here for teaching, learning and assessing visual language features relate to body language in interviews; language associated with posters and videos for popular songs; a study of societies and stereotypes from television shows; and billboard advertising, shopping mall signs etc. Yet the layout of poetry, such as the examples given in Rathgen's *Poetry Works* and Harlow's *Take a Risk: Trust your Language: Write a Poem*, can teach visual language features effectively.

Visual language – presenting.

1. Context: a study of poetry. (Discussion centres upon filming poems – close up shots, high or low angles, voice-over, editing and sound effects. A storyboard is designed and the group effort is presented and evaluated).

While this study explores the language of poetry, the emphasis is on the skill of filming with a poem as the means to an end. The poem may be remembered, but the process and terminology of filming is important as suggested in the extension option when the task just completed is compared with scenes from drama, a novel or an opera. The emphasis is upon language features rather than upon studying a poem.

(Other examples in this section refer to designing a poster; newspaper or magazine advertisement for a television series; the dramatisation of a fictional or biographical text).

It is evident, thus, that reading, writing and speaking poetry can be omitted from English programmes if teachers and students so desire. There are so many options that narrative prose, interview work and transactional writing are more popular texts than poetry, as teachers admitted in interviews. While I applaud the variety of examples used at every level for writing, speaking and viewing language, I realise that teachers can accommodate only those that can be taught in the time available to help the students reach the achievement objectives required to advance to the next level.

### **Obstacles to including poetry as a part of literature in the English programme**

Both teachers and students recorded mixed reactions to pedagogical practices, availability of resources and educational experiences in following the aims and objectives of the curriculum during years 9 and 10. The education of students through the essential skills, outlined in *The Framework*, and developed through language functions, such as the ability to use language for poetic purposes, and processes, such as thinking critically, is detailed in the curriculum, and teachers are expected to conform to the plan taking in to account the varying learning needs of students.

#### 1. Students beginning at year 9.

Several teachers, including Helen and Josie,<sup>65</sup> spoke of the expectations they have of the learning goals reached by the time students entered secondary school. According to the Ministry of Education, *ENZC* aims to ensure that by year 8 all students should have been able to “engage with [and] enjoy language ... and respond effectively in a range of contexts, written, oral and visual” (9). The curriculum aims to provide all students with equal educational opportunities, fulfill the “educational needs and experiences” of all, “in its content, and in the language, methods, approaches and practices of teaching” (13). Maori students are expected to “achieve confidence and excellence in English” (14). Students from backgrounds other than English are offered “planned immersion experiences in mainstream English classrooms” (15). Learners with other special needs, as well as gifted students “are to receive access to additional opportunities for challenge

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<sup>65</sup> I am using pseudonyms in order to prevent identifying the names of schools and of teachers whom I interviewed.



and extension” (15). According to the eight level band<sup>66</sup> year 9 students ought to have completed level 4 and may have been introduced to some of the work at level 5.

Most of the teachers I interviewed stated that these expectations and opportunities are valid, but are rarely fulfilled in schools before year 9 because of a lack of funding, the unavailability of qualified staff, and large classes. Many students cannot read simple English prose, “let alone poetry!” according to Ron. Many students cannot even write simple sentences correctly. Ron and Sean both stated, “Sadly, we are constantly bottoming out, dumbing down – things have gone into a decline. We have become primary school teachers”. In most secondary schools there is, therefore, a learning support team, which often includes a reading recovery programme, a teacher of special needs as well as a teacher for ESOL. This depends, of course, on numbers needing help and the availability of staff. Being concerned with the poor standard of students’ basic written and oral English expression, teachers believe prose, rather than poetry, serves their pedagogy better.

## 2. Boys and literacy.

In general, according to the interviewees, poetry is omitted in boys’ schools. Teachers at these schools said that boys find poetry to be “girl stuff” and “effeminate”. Boys with literacy problems also lack the interest or understanding of the “subject matter of the poem”. Peter explains that “boys are not exposed to poetry in their daily lives” and therefore treat it as a “foreign language”. Geoff writes that “NCEA 1, 2 and 3 can be taught without going near poetry ... poetry can be an automatic turnoff for boys – so,

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<sup>66</sup> P.56.

why bother? All that is needed in English is enough to pass literacy at level 2.” Another teacher (no name) says that barriers to teaching poetry are the same as those that apply to the teaching of English. This teacher is concerned about “significant numbers of students [who come] from Intermediate schools and struggle with basic literacy. They cannot read books or fathom the meaning of questions”. Other teachers state that many lack the language skills necessary to explore figurative devices because they tend to think literally. Furthermore, they fail to see poetry as “work-place related”. Sean, who believes boys will enjoy poetry if it is read or performed aloud, explained, “The cadences and rhythms bring poetry alive but in a classroom (close to other classrooms) it’s not possible – nor permitted! – to add the oral dimension!” Finally, Ron, who would love to “sell” poetry to the boys, lists as barriers “A dearth of suitable poetry for that age group; a ‘dumbing’ down of content and expectations in English; and an environment where modern lyricists have superseded the bards of old.”<sup>67</sup>

Most teachers acknowledge that, while years 9 and 10 students do not face external examinations, the achievement objectives in oral, written and visual language strands from the current curriculum, for at least levels four and five, need to be covered. The English curriculum is devised to accommodate the needs of all students who seek to develop “high levels of literacy ... to participate fully in New Zealand society and in the international community” (*ENZC*: 6) from year 1 to year 13. In the schools the programmes written by teachers of English indicate what activities, learning resources and assessment procedures are planned for year 9 and 10 students. They refer teachers to the approximate levels of achievement students will have attained by the end of year 8

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<sup>67</sup> See also Kate O’Hanlon’s article on literacy in the appendix.

and in order to advance to a year 9 programme. Some teachers state that, in practice, the levels of development in the language functions and processes described in the achievement objectives reached by the incoming students span an extraordinary wide range of achievement. Incoming students in many schools begin year 9 with disparate degrees of proficiency in English language skills.

### 3. Preparation for secondary school

When enrolling at a secondary school towards the end of year 8, students sit a preliminary internally-designed examination to indicate degrees of competency in literacy and numeracy. All students are then assessed during the first term at secondary school by diagnostic and general achievement tests such as Performance Achievement Tests (PATs) years 4 to 9, in reading comprehension and vocabulary; Achievement Standards in Teaching and Learning (asTTle) years 5 to 10; Standard Tests for Achievement in Reading (STAR) years 3 to 10. The purposes of these tests are to identify problems, pinpoint difficulties, discover students with similar needs and abilities and evaluate progress, and as such they are helpful in grading students academically. Literary, creative and artistic talents are not assessed. Some students have been accustomed to working with the same teacher for the whole of year 8; in a sole charge school they may have had the same teacher for most of their schooling. Some primary schools have specialist or itinerant music and drama teachers and have been involved in more cultural activities than others. Students entering secondary school at year 9 have had varied educational, cultural and experiential opportunities. Teachers of year 9 students reported difficulties in meeting the needs of all these students, especially in the teaching of

English. Ron added that, by contrast, teachers of a foreign language, for example, usually have “clean slates” to work upon.

#### 4. Attitudes to poetry – finding a common ground

English teachers say that students now enter secondary schools at varying stages of competency in written and oral expression, but on the whole with a negative attitude to poetry. Primary teachers, they say, have really struggled with curriculum changes which involve extra administrative work – weekly running records, for example – and new “subjects” such as dance, music and extra emphasis upon physical education because of national guidelines about child obesity – so poetry and drama had little or no emphasis, teachers declared. It is difficult to find a common ground to teach basic poetry techniques. In some schools with low literacy levels language study is sufficiently challenging, so teachers concentrate upon transactional instead of poetic writing. Metaphorical concepts and visualisation of images are beyond many students, particularly the boys, some teachers believe.

Where students, girls and boys, have remained at the same school since entering there at five years of age, a planned progressive course has been followed, so poetry teaching (until year 11) is the practice.<sup>68</sup> These students begin secondary school with a distinct

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<sup>68</sup> There are similarities between young children’s speech and the language of poetry as Britton explains in *Language and Learning*. He says: “Poets tend to look for significant, evocative detail ... to carry their meaning. With young children ... ideas must take a relatively concrete form of expression”. Britton mentions also that children take great “pleasure in speaking” just as poets write to “celebrate, mourn and pay homage”. Children also, Britton states, have “strong feelings about people and creatures ... and a function of poetry is ... to bring back a little of the fire of undomesticated emotion” (155). Unless they discover and speak sounds, rhythms, jingles and nonsense words, children fail to grow with and through poetry towards years 9 and 10.levels.

advantage. Several teachers admit, however, that, on the whole, teaching the short story is “easier” and “it is a better exam topic” than poetry, students preferring it and performing better. Therefore, in years 9 and 10, teachers prepare students for short story study.

##### 5. The “too hard” basket.

In the survey answers, teachers and students describe poetry as “too hard”, “way beyond our (or students’) day-to-day living” and “written in outmoded (or unfamiliar) language”. Students’ experiences of poetry<sup>69</sup> are that poetry was “fed to them hurriedly or superficially” by “unenthusiastic” teachers. Unpacking these comments further in interviews, I deduced that those teachers who are more experienced and who declare a love of or fondness for poetry, like Elaine, say they are “up against a brick wall” in endeavouring to teach poetry because students want answers “handed to them as a done deal”. Other teachers, such as Helen, remark that students have insufficient background in referencing, language and linguistic skills to read and enjoy literature earlier than 1990. They are not competent in reading between the “gaps” to find what “Octavio Paz calls ‘the other voice’ – that voice that is at once both the voice of your grandfather and of your grandchild”. (Colquhoun, *English in Aotearoa*, 2005, 54)

Helen explains that there are 35 contributing schools to their girls’ school, so a teacher needs to work from the base line when teaching poetry. For some girls this is repetition, but nothing is taken for granted. Helen believes, however, that the apathy, hostility or enthusiasm of the teacher towards teaching poetry affects the students more strongly even

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<sup>69</sup> Revealed in the responses to surveys of University students, many of whom had passed Bursary English.

than their prior experiences. This applies most definitely to the teaching of poetry, she adds.

Teachers explained also that pre-secondary pupils have a wide range of prior experiences because of the varied decile<sup>70</sup> levels in schools, and the character of the schools. In the Canterbury region, for example, students may come from

- small primary schools where there are fewer than ten pupils in years 7 and 8
- intermediate schools enrolling year 7 and 8 students only
- schools obliged to send students from rural areas to board in the city
- large primary schools where teachers team-teach
- schools enrolling year 7 – 13 students
- private schools with pre-school intake as well as primary students
- primary schools which contribute particularly to (usually) a private school offering scholarships
- integrated primary schools which tend to contribute to similarly integrated schools
- home-schooling

Because of the different nature of these prior experiences, the socio-economic range of the students and the qualifications and experience of the appointed teachers, not every student has reached a similar achievement level in all areas of the curriculum in spite of the one New Zealand English curriculum. Likewise, some students transfer from school to school because of family occupations, commitments or emergencies and there is inconsistency in teaching/learning. The curriculum, therefore, promotes “good

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<sup>70</sup> See footnote, p.25.

intentions” which are often impracticable. Moreover, principals in schools cannot always appoint teachers enthusiastic about teaching English because of the shortfall in qualified teachers of English.

To cover adequately the material demanded for language development and recognise individual needs in implementing the principles of this very full curriculum, teachers declared that attention paid to serious study of poetry, drama and the novel suffers. Some students require reinforcement of language activities to prepare them for life skills in the work force, rather than literature study, as one teacher observed. In many schools, English study in years 9 and 10 is orientated towards passing examinations in year 11 instead of “developing personal, social, cultural, historical, and national awareness and identity ... through close and careful reading of literary texts” (*ENZC*, 16).

Many other factors impinge upon the standard of teaching English, such as the teaching of literature, especially poetry, at years 9 and 10. There are certainly schools where poetry flourishes in the primary classes. These are usually schools where the teachers are enthusiastic about speech and drama activities and write and direct their own musicals and plays. There is a consistent policy throughout the school for regular poetry-speaking competitions. Some teachers may have qualifications in Trinity College London or Speech New Zealand examinations. Some schools put more emphasis on sporting activities, or practical technology such as cooking, metal-work, woodwork, art and internet technology. Much depends upon the composition of the staff and their abilities, and the learning needs of the students.

Many variables, teachers point out, adversely affect teaching methods and the material taught to year 9 and 10 students. The students have a varied range of academic levels when they enter secondary school. The prospect of NCEA 1 at year 11 is intimidating for some students. On the other hand, teachers observe that many students come to secondary school eager to be independent learners, keen to explore new subjects and to confront adult issues. Sometimes they are disappointed because work taught in primary school is repeated to meet the needs of the less able students, or subject choice is limited because of lack of qualified staff.

Other obstacles to developing a progressive programme in teaching English through poetry were explained by Debbie, Penny and others as recorded in the next paragraphs.

#### 6. Irregular attendees, disruptive students, low level issues.

In the last ten years there has been an increasing number of students who find it difficult to fit into the present secondary education system because of behaviour problems. Such students attend school irregularly.

Teachers state that, while years 9 and 10 students are offered core subjects and a wide variety of optional subjects to broaden their horizons of learning, teaching time is spread thinly over the school year in order to cover the expectations of the curriculum statement. Many students, teachers confessed, lag behind, lose confidence and become disruptive in class. Likewise, not all topics are taught comprehensively, and poetry is one that is often omitted.



Teachers also report that the raising of the school leaving age to 16 has added to the negative effects of teaching students reluctant to be at school. In the fifties and sixties jobs were available for willing school leavers even without School Certificate examination passes. Now, a reluctant learner must stay at school and “inevitably disrupt the class and waste time – not only his time but mine”, Brian, a teacher at a boys’ school, observed. Yet another problem comes from lack of interest from home in a student’s progress. In many cases there is little or no support outside class time. Other disturbing factors involve the ready availability of drugs and liquor for teenagers, inappropriate night-time activities, poor dietary habits, computer and café or fish shop games and unsupervised activities outside school time. Other factors which limit homework as a follow up to class work include the demands parents or carers make on the students to work after school and in weekends. In some extreme cases there are also sports practices demanded by coaches who can be over-enthusiastic and unreasonable thinking only of the club, team or individual win.

Teachers often have to opt for superficial coverage of class material because of lack of time, an overfull curriculum, sports and cultural tours, and school interruptions of many kinds. A student absent from school through illness is rarely able to be taught the missed class as there is no time to revise or repeat lessons. A common – and often valid – excuse is “I was away when you taught us that!” With so much to cover in the curriculum and not enough time to cover it adequately, poetry is often the omitted topic. Ron remarks that “with a junior class, one can indulge oneself occasionally, but bureaucrats (who design syllabuses), parents and all those connected with the school make demands on

what a teacher teaches. Even my job can be on the line!” He explains, “I’m pragmatic! I teach a poem, not because it’s a good poem but because it is useful – being economical – for passing an exam, and because students have no patience for studying a novel! I wish it were otherwise”.

The place of poetry in the teaching of English, according to teachers, has changed considerably in the last 40 years because of a movement away from a formal critical literacy approach to the subject to a thematic, life-related language project. The Growth Model of English teaching encourages student-centred, teaching-learning strategies. But some teachers see the familiar critical literacy approach<sup>71</sup> as better in teaching poetry as it saves time and deals with facts. Several teachers, including Julie, comment that “getting to grips” with the “new” curriculum after years of being accustomed to teaching literature, and especially poetry, in a certain way, has meant concentrating on “new” material to teach topics described with “new” jargon. “Curriculum changes for some teachers have been too many too soon”, she writes.

Senior teachers spoke of the development of the curriculum for the teaching of English for years 9 to 11 (or forms 3 to 5 as it was called in the 50s) having undergone major changes since 1945. In the 50s and even the 60s, the curriculum was “behind a screen” somewhere. Teachers knew what had to be taught to reach examination preparation and success, but tended to teach not subjects but the students to achieve potential, step by step, rather than follow a rigid programme. Each teacher had his/her own scheme of work for each week, month and year, which gave particular details for

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<sup>71</sup> Theoretical approaches to reading in appendix B.1: 13.

each particular class. The overall pattern for the English programme for the department was the “master” plan. Much of what is now specified in the current syllabus – visual language, for example – may have been included under a different terminology.

Literature, with its three main genres of poetry, drama and prose, had an important role in underpinning all written and spoken language activities. Reading, writing, speaking and to some degree listening skills were interwoven.

In classes of thirty students or more, it is difficult, teachers say, to provide strategies to recognise the strengths, difficulties and weaknesses of all students. Peer, self and teacher assessments are recommended for each achievement objective at each level. According to Peter and Ron, students with learning difficulties or behavioural problems may approach peer and self assessment too subjectively or without discernment. Yet research evidence indicates that even the youngest children can successfully and accurately assess their own product, or their own group’s work.<sup>72</sup>

### **Positive poetry teaching**

Not all teachers, however, reduce poetry-teaching time. Bernadette has an underachieving year 9 class, most of whom will never attempt NCEA 1. She spoke of the enthusiasm her students show for poetry. She is able to improve the vocabulary, grammar and punctuation skills of her students through very simple poems read and spoken aloud by her students. The teacher is free to have “fun with poetry” and expose them to choices that match their interests and experiences. The poetry of Roger McGough, Edward Lear, Hilaire Belloc, Wes McGee, story poems to act, such as “The Highwayman”, “London

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<sup>72</sup> Brookhart, Susan. 2004. “Classroom Assessment Tensions and Intersections in Theory and Practice”.

Cries”, “Jesse James”, “The Listeners” and limericks, prove popular and become the means of introducing new words to incorporate in written language exercises. This teacher is a firm believer in the value of poetry as an integral part of the English class.<sup>73</sup>

Liz teaches a year 9 class. She is enthusiastic about her scheme of work, and the outcome for her year 9 class which is to produce an anthology. This class works on the project for about four weeks continuously during English periods. Later, as novels such as Mildred Taylor’s *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry* are studied, reference is made to the black African poets. In the poetry block, achievement objectives being assessed include: poetic writing, exploring language, transactional writing, thinking critically and processing information. Learning outcomes have been well planned to provide opportunities to fulfill these objectives.

Expressive writing is practised in Liz’s class as students write regularly in a range of styles. In poetic texts students shape, edit and rework their texts. They express their points of view through transactional writing. Independently, they also read a range of poetic texts, integrating reading processes and strategies for different purposes, and discuss meanings, language and ideas. Poetic devices, conventions and language features are explored, and their effects in the texts noted. Having gathered poems, recorded them, listened to those chosen by their peers and read them aloud to the class, students plan and design an anthology commenting upon and explaining the merits of each selection. Class and pair discussion centre on the issues arising from the poems, themes, moods and styles, and the crafting of these poems.

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<sup>73</sup> A former student in chapter 7 also salutes Bernadette for giving her a love for poetry.

To provide information and guide research methods, eight lessons are structured covering the material required for forming, refining and presenting the anthology. Each lesson builds up a knowledge and understanding of the basic ingredients of a poem. Some students, from having a hostile attitude at the beginning of the year, produce an anthology they are proud of. Others fly ahead with little guidance. Everybody produces an anthology and the teacher notices gains in writing expression, vocabulary and even discussion and speaking skills. Therefore, it seems, with an enthusiastic teacher such as this one, prepared to “sell” her topic, poetry can not only survive but also help to promote great improvements in all aspects of English.<sup>74</sup>

Unfortunately, Liz says, there may be less time for poetry (and possibly a different teacher with a less enthusiastic attitude) in year 10. Very little or no poetry may be taught in year 11 – except in relation to the Unfamiliar Text section of the externally assessed final paper. Yet the foundations have been laid, and a good number of students return to poetry at a deeper level in years 12 and 13, and choose to study English (and poetry) for Scholarship. These students, having had good experiences before they leave school, retain positive memories of poetry, a better working vocabulary, an appreciation of the history of poetry and their Poetry Anthology that they are proud of. Three of these students were very happy to have been asked to display their anthologies for me.

Monique also provided me with a copy of her poetry topic for her year 7/8 class for term 2, 2005. The topic is the exploring of poetry, written and oral, for the duration of seven weeks. Monique explains that at this private school poetry is part of the curriculum

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<sup>74</sup> A copy of Liz’s unit is in Appendix 2.

from year 3 onwards. However, she comments that she will be using this same topic in 2006 for her year 9 class at a different school, where the students have had less experience in studying poetry. She hopes to cover the same material in a six week unit of work.<sup>75</sup>

Others may be teaching similar poetry units to year 9 students, but in my interviews with them, teachers explained that some students find excuses for avoiding speaking or reciting in small groups or individually, before the class, because they have been able to opt out at years four to eight. Such children have neither the confidence nor the language skills to speak before their peers, and teachers are reluctant to force the issue. Monique insists that oral presentation, reading poems aloud and discussing the poems and quoting to support opinions, are essential aspects of the unit. She believes that, in the right atmosphere, where the teacher reads and recites poetry frequently, and uses group speaking, students will respond.

### **What the students say**

Charlotte, a year 13 student I spoke to, said she “had a tough, inspiring teacher who really stretched us at primary school”, and found her year 9 and 10 English classes repetitive of her primary classes. She saw NCEA 1 work, therefore, “as a breeze, didn’t work and failed to get ‘excellents’ in external exams!” She added, “If it hadn’t been for speech and drama lessons outside school time, I would have failed totally”. Lee, also now at level 13, came to secondary school without having studied any poetry. She found

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<sup>75</sup> A copy of Monique’s unit of work is in Appendix 2.

poetry difficult at first, but, being taught now by an enthusiastic teacher, she has come to appreciate poetry even more than prose.

An interview with two other students is recorded in Appendix 1.H.

Most of the year 9 and 10 students interviewed admitted that, when beginning secondary school, they found that having a new teacher for each individual subject was exciting but contributed to homework overload; large classes and lack of time prevented topics from being thoroughly taught; time lost through illness meant a topic was never revisited, and the “bogy, NCEA 1” was “dangled” before them from year 9 onwards. Hugh, Simon and Eddie spoke about being ignored in the crowd and “just wanting to leave school and get a job”.

## **Conclusion**

Poetry is mentioned in the curriculum for years 9 and 10 as it has been since 1945, but it is taught less frequently because of the nature of the curriculum. In a recent conversation with me, Stoop, now principal of the CCE, said that poetry “can be a valuable springboard for teaching English at all levels, but so many internal and external theoretical speculations militate against it”. Stoop explained that the English curriculum appears “to be progressive” but does, in fact “serve technicist interests ... [in supporting] the teaching of received knowledge rather than transforming it” by challenging or “de-routinising” established conventions. Stoop’s reference to “the teaching of received

knowledge” is described metaphorically by the poet, Elizabeth Bishop, in “At the Fishhouses”, an extract from which heads this chapter.

In an interview with Bill Manhire (*English in Aotearoa* 33 [September 1997]) Rod McGregor asked, “Of the entire literary genre in secondary school ... [why is] poetry ... the least taught?” Manhire’s reply reveals his concern that teachers are “scared of poetry ... because they were taught by teachers who were scared of poetry or by teachers who were vicars in disguise who were busy drawing morals out!” He explained that he believed teachers “ought to try teaching poems that they hadn’t read before” rather than “get [ting] out their lecture notes!” He believes in setting the students up as readers, allowing them to experience the poem first and then to talk about it. Manhire also suggests teachers need to let their security go and choose contemporary local poetry for their students. This is the approach taken in the CCE course currently taught by Ronnie Davey, which will be discussed in chapter eight.

Curriculum change is discussed also in chapter seven of Maxine Greene’s *Releasing the Imagination*. She refers to Bishop, Wallace Stevens, T. S. Eliot and Robert Frost among others, as examples of poets who disclose “alternative ways of being in and thinking about the world” through the language of imaginative literature. Greene says:

For most educators over the years, curriculum has had to do with cultural reproduction, the transmission of knowledge, and, at least to some degree, the life of the mind.... It has often opened the way to transformations and unexpected change.... The arts in particular can bring to curriculum inquiry



visions of perspectives and untapped possibilities.... To conceive the arts in relation to curriculum is to think of a deepening and expanding mode of tuning-in.... [We have to be] willing to feel and to imagine; to open the windows and go in search (89/90, 104).

Students completing levels 9 and 10 are still operating at different levels of learning and continuous, ongoing assessment procedures diagnose strengths and weaknesses. Self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher assessment through poetry activities were observed at the teacher education course<sup>76</sup> to be an effective means of dealing with language development. But unfortunately, teachers confess, as NCEA 1 becomes a focus for year 11 students, less time, if any, is now given to poetry as year 9 and 10 students look towards, and feel examination pressure from NCEA internal and external assessments.

In general, the place of poetry in the English programme for years 9 and 10 students seems to depend upon one or more of these factors:

- Attitudes to poetry assimilated before students come to secondary school.
- The policy dictated by the school.
- The enthusiasm – or apathy - of the teacher of English and the achievement objectives selected in planning the programme.
- The range of ability found among the students, and the decile of the school.
- The evidence of exam pressures, and the time factor that affects timetabling.

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<sup>76</sup> See chapter eight.

Years 9 and 10 are important formative years and, according to teachers, the students need more time for fewer achievement objectives in the English programme, and especially for poetry study, taught more thoroughly by enthusiastic well-qualified English teachers. Students might then approach year 11 with inventiveness and confidence. The format of NCEA 1 English, how the programme is managed and the responses of teachers to the effectiveness of the internal and external assessments required to pass, are the topic of my next chapter.

## Chapter Five

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore -  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over -  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

*Or does it explode?*  
Langston Hughes: "Harlem".

### Poetry and national assessments.

Students in year 11 (where schools follow the assessment-based programme, National Certificate of Educational Achievement, NCEA) face an achievement-based assessment with some standards assessed internally and approximately 50% externally. Students may choose from a range of Achievement and Unit Standards and receive credit at three grades – achieve, merit or excellence – or no credit at all. All the teachers I interviewed said that their students choose Achievement Standards.

Unit Standards follow a similar pattern to the Achievement Standards and have developed from a system of assessment trialled in New Zealand schools in the mid-nineties.

Unit Standards assess oral, visual and written language. Each credit is specific. For example:

- 12414, level I, Oral Language = Explore language and think critically about poetic oral text (3 credits).
- 8815, level 1, Oral Language = Perform interpretations of poetic text (3 credits).
- 12412, level 1, Written Language = Explore language and think critically about poetic written text (3 credits).
- 8813, level 1, Written Language = Produce poetic written text in simple forms (4 credits).

Unit Standards are accredited by qualified providers registered under the Accreditation and Moderation Action Plan (AMAP).

There are some schools (mainly in the North Island of New Zealand) whose students choose to take the Cambridge International Examinations instead of NCEA. The provider of these examinations is the University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) for students aged 14 to 19 years. CIE offers more than 60 subjects at IGCSE level.

Although some of the teachers I interviewed considered offering these exams to students, the initial cost of setting up the system appeared prohibitive.

There are also a few schools whose students who choose the International Baccalaureate Programme (IBM) designed as a two year course to year 12 students. Students are required to take six subjects at year 11, extending them with a broadly-based group of subjects. This course, according to the principal of one school which offers the

IBM, requires students to have “a strong work ethic, a commitment to full-time study, and the desire and ability to specialise in some areas, and be challenged to undertake less practised areas of expertise”.

### **What is NCEA?**

NCEA was phased in at New Zealand schools – level 1 in 2002, level 2 in 2003 and level 3 in 2004 – to replace School Certificate, Sixth Form Certificate and University Bursary. Scholarship was retained at level 4 and has undergone changes in format over the past two years. English is not and has never been a compulsory subject for Scholarship, although it is an option. Indeed, English is not compulsory at any level of the NCEA, except in relation to the literacy requirements needed for a National Certificate of Educational Achievement, and for students contemplating tertiary study. These literacy requirements are as follows:

Any English Achievement Standard from

- 90052 (Produce creative writing) to
- 90060 (Research, organise and present information).
- Unit Standards 1277 (Communicate information in a specified workplace);
  - 2977 (Read texts for practical purposes);
  - 2989 (Read and assess texts to gain knowledge);
  - 10792 (Write formal personal correspondence).
- Reo Maori Achievement Standards 90131 to 90134.

This chapter

- outlines the government's reasons for introducing this qualification for all year 11 students in 2002
- describes the format of the qualification to determine the place of poetry in the internal and external assessment processes for NCEA 1, and how poetry could be used in the achievement standards
- investigates the pedagogy used to prepare students to choose poetry as a short text in essay writing, and for the unfamiliar text achievement standard
- examines statistics as far as possible to gauge the popularity of using poetry as a short text for essay writing
- notes the pitfalls and advantages of the qualification as explained by teachers in interviews.

NCEA was introduced, as a government policy, to

provide a qualification that addresses the far broader needs for the many students who now stay on at school.... We need a qualification that recognises a broad range of achievement [with] greater flexibility in the way our students learn and provides a more useful profile of their achievements.... Challenge is provided for students at all levels of ability and in all subject areas in and beyond school. The excellence standards are tough and academically demanding. Less able students will probably achieve standards for some aspects of a subject.... NCEA is recognised by universities and other tertiary providers in New Zealand. This means that

NCEA will be recognised internationally (*An Introduction to NCEA 1*, 2002).

NCEA, thus, is an achievement-based assessment, structured according to set national learning standards by which students may gain achieve, merit or excellence credits, indicating the degree of level of learning students meet. To be awarded a National Certificate of Educational Achievement level 1, a student must achieve at least 80 credits, including the eight prescribed literacy standards and eight prescribed numeracy standards required to proceed to University Entrance level. Most full-year subject courses (of which there are many) offer about twenty possible credits. Consequently, students who choose to take six subjects will be entering for 120-144 credits at year 11.

### **NCEA level 1 English**

For English there are nine achievement standards earning two or three credits each and totalling a possible 24. Of the many texts offered for attaining credits in English study, I want to consider firstly, those that do not refer to the study of poetry.

- “Achievement Standard 1.2: produce formal writing; externally assessed: 3 credits.” (Examples from previous years’ papers invite expressive [personal, spontaneous] or transactional [informative, persuasive and argumentative] writing from a range of topics including current issues, letters to the editor and response to pictures).

- “Achievement Standard 1.3: read, study and show understanding of extended written text/s: externally assessed: 2 credits.” (Texts suggested for study are: novel, drama script, non-fiction and extended hyper-fiction).
- “Achievement Standard 1.5: view/listen to, study and show understanding of a visual or oral text: externally assessed: 2 credits.” (For this standard, the syllabus offers: film, television or radio programme, drama production or electronic text).
- “Achievement Standard 1.7: deliver a speech in a formal setting: internally assessed: 3 credits.” (Schools set the topics for these speeches as well as the method of adjudication. Teacher interviewee, Sean, said: “We have one week of five hours to hear and mark all the speeches of all the year 11 classes. It is easier to moderate the speeches if all students choose from three open topics such as: ‘Flying High’, ‘The School of the Future’ or ‘Exploration of Space’”).
- “Achievement Standard 1.8: produce a media or dramatic presentation: internally assessed: 3 credits.” (Suggestions for this standard include a media presentation, performance poetry or drama. Presentation for the media may be as a power point display, poster, static image or Web page. Much depends upon the resources available and units of work taught in the school. While performance poetry is a possibility, teacher interviewee, Helen, stated: “Time in our school does not permit classes to work upon several options. Four sessions in one week is set for each option. Although I like poetry, performance poetry is not an option as it is rarely covered satisfactorily even for short text study and static image is. We select static image”).



- “Achievement Standard 1.9: research, organise and present information: internally assessed; 3 credits.” (The school nominates the topic for research, but the skills assessed remain the same from school to school. The *NCEA Level 1* revision guide<sup>77</sup> suggests material gathered for this assessment “can be reworked for assessment against other standards such as 1.2, 1.7 and 1.8 ... [using] oral, visual and written sources” (63).

This makes a possible 16 credits. It is usual for students to prepare for these achievement standards using prose, non-fiction or a prose drama text selected by the school, although the use of other genres is possible, teachers admit. The following is also possible:

- A drama script could be used by the candidate in 1.3 (extended text) where blank verse (Shakespearean drama) or free verse (Fry’s *The Boy with a Cart*, Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*) could be discussed.
- An oral text of a poet reading/reciting his poems could be used in 1.5 (visual or oral text e.g. Seamus Heaney, Lauris Edmond).
- A poet and his/her works could be a logical choice for delivering a speech in 1.7.
- A dramatic monologue from Greek or Elizabethan drama could be presented in 1.8 (dramatic presentation).
- An informative speech could be on a period of poetry, for example, the war poets or New Zealand poets for 1.9 (present information).

Poetry is mentioned as one of the options in:

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<sup>77</sup> *NCEA Level 1 English: selected questions from previous assessments with suggested answers.*

- “Achievement Standard 1.1: produce creative/poetic writing; internally assessed: 3 credits.” (But creative writing **may** be descriptions, narratives, personal accounts, scripts and hyper-fiction in **prose** instead of poems, and frequently is.)
- “Achievement Standard 1.4: read, study and show understanding of a number of short written texts; externally assessed: 2 credits.” (Candidates **may** choose short story, short hyper-fiction or print media instead of poetry, and frequently do.)
- “Achievement Standard 1.6: read and show understanding of unfamiliar texts which include fiction, non-fiction and visual texts; externally assessed: 3 credits.” (There are options to respond to referring to several unfamiliar texts. Since 2002 a poem has been included. The candidates **may** treat the poem lightly, aiming only for an achieved pass, if they wish, and aim for higher grades in the other options. This standard could comprise almost half the eight literacy credits required for achieving a NCEA 1.)

Teachers, however, commented that preparing students to write essay-type answers for an external assessment on poetry can be time-consuming when compared with the study of the novel, short story and print media, genres generally studied in years 9 and 10. Teaching students to craft poems and to peer-assess poems for the internally assessed credit 1.1. are not disciplines that are familiar to all teachers (according to interview material), and subsequently, as some teachers observed, difficult for students to achieve well in. Poetry study, therefore, has a minor place in preparation for NCEA 1.

**“Too hard”**

Why poetry appears to be more difficult, more time-consuming and less appealing than other genres seems to stem from four factors:

- Poems as stories are favoured in the junior classes at primary schools. From levels 5 and 6 onwards in *ENZC*, less emphasis is placed upon poetry examples for oral, written and visual language. Informative, persuasive and instructional speaking; the language features of meeting procedure; of radio, television, film and print media; of advertising, campaigning and interviewing are studied to deal with current topics that teenagers like to discuss.
- The steps from a story poem to a lyrical or dramatic poem require a scaffolding process which some teachers are hesitant about making because the intermediate steps may not have been made at years 7 and 8. Even if year 9 students (as illustrated by Liz and Monique’s programmes cited in appendix B 2 and B3) have prepared a folder of shape and concrete poems, the phonological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic cueing systems needed for close reading of poems are more challenging than the more familiar approaches to close reading of prose.
- As explained in chapter five, teachers state that they are more comfortable assessing and moderating creative writing of prose than of poetry, and, therefore, poems are rarely studied as models for writing poetry.

- Because poetry study and the writing of poetry **can** be avoided, whereas prose cannot, a nod in the direction of poetic terms and verse structure is often all that is required for the unfamiliar text question (1.6) where a poem is set for analysis.

### **Examples from previous NCEA 1 papers**

Examples from 1.4, short texts, and 1.6, unfamiliar texts from the 2003/4/5 NCEA 1 external examination papers will clarify how short texts and unfamiliar texts are assessed by NCEA 1 examiners. Statistics are not available from NZQA to indicate the numbers of students choosing various options within questions 1.4 and 1.6. The figures illustrate a broad-based account of the percentage of results in each level of pass, and a concise report collated from the examiners' statements referring to all the texts.

#### A. Short Written Texts (AS90055) 1.4.

Read, study and show understanding of a number of short written texts; write a response showing understanding of ideas and techniques.

Choose from one of the following text types:

Print media; short story; poetry; short hyper-fiction.

**A. Using ONE of the topics below, write about TWO short written texts. Write at least 200 words for your answer. 25 minutes are allocated to the task.**

1. Describe an **important character or individual** in EACH text.  
Explain why EACH character is important.
2. Describe an **important idea** in EACH text.  
Explain why EACH idea is important to teenagers.
3. Describe an **unusual event** in EACH text.  
Explain why EACH event **interested** you.

4. Describe **TWO interesting language techniques** in EACH text.  
Explain how EACH technique helps you **understand** EACH text.
5. Describe a **challenge** faced by a character or individual in EACH text.  
Explain how the challenge helps you **understand** EACH TEXT.
6. Describe one **significant detail** in EACH text.  
Explain how EACH detail helps you **understand** EACH text.

The above questions were designed to suit any text. Their brief wording may have led students to “write what you know” about a short text, rather than “demonstrate analytical and interpretive ability”, according to Helen, a teacher of year 11 students. To develop one of those questions to give “convincing” or “perceptive” sustained understanding of two poetry texts may challenge students to choose short stories instead.

Examiners’ comments included the following:

**Not Achieved** = “Generalised, simplistic comments indicating a limited understanding. Shorter than 200 words. Plot summary unrelated to the question”.

**Achievement** = “References to specifics to support understanding of two texts, but without the convincing understanding needed for Merit. Question parts addressed unevenly”.

**Achievement with Merit and Excellence** = “Reference to clear, relevant details integrated into answer. Both parts of question answered convincingly (Merit) or perceptively (Excellence). Perceptive understanding of texts shown and sustained. Appreciation of significance of aspects described to the texts as a whole”.

The national statistics for this examination revealed:

Number of results = 41,444

Not Achieved	= 49.7%
Achieved	= 35.8%
Merit	= 11.7%
Excellence	= 2.8%

Similar comments to those in 2004 were made in 2003 and 2005. Statistics revealed:

2003:

Numbers of results	= 42,215
Not Achieved	= 49.2%
Achieved	= 32.8%
Merit	= 14.0%
Excellence	= 4.1%

2005:

Numbers of results	= 40,700
Not Achieved	= 41.3%
Achieved	= 31.3%
Merit	= 24.5%
Excellence	= 2.9%

#### B. Unfamiliar texts (AS90057) 1.6.

Read a range of short extracts not previously studied. Write responses to questions testing understanding of ideas, style and language use.

Assessment will be based on a selection of short texts with two from each.

#### **Read and show understanding of unfamiliar texts.**

This Achievement Standard, externally assessed, is compulsory for those wishing to advance to University level. It presents a variety of texts, including

- creative or formal written texts including prose, fiction or non-fiction and poetry
- visual texts, such as a static image, storyboard from a film, a cartoon or image from a magazine
- oral texts, such as the written transcript of a speech, or a script from a stage or radio play.

It is obvious that this question, which requires the study of at least ten different genres, may demand much teaching time to approach the standard at depth, covering every possible genre. The question is worth three credits, 60 minutes is allowed to answer it, and achievement criteria suggest how “achieve” or “merit” or “excellence” may be gained in answering the questions. The candidate is therefore, aware of the level of pass she/he is aiming at.

In 2004, there were 15 questions in this standard, 5 on each of the written, oral and visual strands.

3 questions (one on each strand) provided opportunities for students to show evidence of meeting the criterion for achievement; the other 12 offered opportunities for achievement with Merit and Excellence. Each question was weighted to gain 2 or 3 credits. Candidates could answer:

- eight questions at “achievement” level for achievement
- four at “achievement” and four at “merit” level for merit
- four at “achievement” level and four at “excellence” level for excellence.

*(In this example I shall deal only with poetry).*

Three examples of poems will illustrate the degree of difficulty confronting students in an external examination situation after what is usually 11 years at school.

2004. Read the poem and answer the questions that follow.

### **Grandpa’s Gift**

*For Turi.*

He could really handle money,  
my father-in-law, he threw most of it away –  
I'd never seen this before.

He fumbled in his pocket, it tumbled out,  
note after crumpled note, he'd fill your hand –  
what was his was yours;

and I saw to my delight,  
he made me understand, the scraps of coloured paper  
it truly merely was.

“Rich, eh?” I hear him say, and laugh,  
“Not anymore!” Rich all right, that man, in another  
currency, richest of all.

- 1) Explain how Grandpa's attitude to money tells you about the kind of person he is. Give evidence from the text to support your answer.
- 2) Explain the **link** between the title of the poem and the meaning of the words “another currency” (lines 11-12).

**Answers adapted from examiners' reports:**

1. Grandpa is an unconditional and unusual man because the author says: “I'd never seen this before”. *Or*  
Grandpa was a generous man because “what was his was yours”.
2. “The title is appropriate because Grandpa has given the author ‘gifts’. Firstly, Grandpa gives him money, yet the most important gift is in ‘another currency,’ – his wisdom and insights. Grandpa helps the author realise that money is merely ‘scraps of paper’”.

Examiners reported that there were “many blank sections in scripts and noted that failure to complete was the biggest barrier to achievement”. Candidates were aware that not only a comprehension of ideas, but also an identification of style and language features, as well as an evaluation of how *well* the features work, were required for an Achievement with Excellence. Examiners reported that many candidates did not understand what “constitutes a visual feature and what constitutes a verbal feature”. They also reported



that, as in 2003, “oral texts were not well done”, candidates being unable to recognise that the oral texts are spoken texts.

Number of results = 42, 373

Not Achieved	= 46.0%
Achieved	= 38.6%
Merit	= 15.0%
Excellence	= 0.4%

In 2003 the poem was:

**Poem: ‘Christmas in Windy Tree City’**

Every where is lit up  
 Kirkcaldies flags are flying  
 little bee people rush along the pavement  
 surge at the lights  
 into the stores  
 with gold and white and red  
 and green and music CDs  
 promising a white Christmas.

Christmas  
 and the Queen’s message  
 and the Virgin Mary  
 and even our own saint  
 bless us.

And car lights so bright  
 neon, and car indicators and pub lights  
 and headlights and  
 the glow of electric Christmas  
 candles.

And my heart is darker  
 than the reindeer  
 pretending to prance  
 on top of the building  
 shortly to be demolished  
 in front of my eyes  
 in daylight.

Think I’ll go rescue my car

from a WCC parking warden.

Remove myself to the beach  
 where Christmas is a vague concept  
 having much less influence  
 than the in and out  
 of tidal festivals in Windy Tree City.

It's the season.

**Note:** Kirkcaldies is a large multi-storey department store in Wellington.

WCC is the Wellington City Council.

[Source: 'Christmas in Windy Tree City', Roma Potiki, in *Shaking the Tree*, Steele Roberts, Ltd, 1998]

Read the article shown above and answer the questions that follow:

- (a) Explain the meaning of 'demolished' (line 23) (A)
- (b) Explain the metaphor in 'little bee people' (line 3) (A/M/E)
- (c) Explain **in your own words** why the poet does not like Christmas. Quote from the poem to support your answer. (A/M/E)

Teachers commented upon the length of the poem in relation to the substance of the explanations required. Three possible answers to meet the required standards are:

- (a) "Destroyed"; "knocked down" or "dismantled".
- (b) "Like bees people are attracted to the bright lights and colours".  
 "The people are rushing around because of Christmas, and doing their shopping".  
 "The movement of the people is frenzied in much the same way as bees as they move in and out of the hives to collect pollen".
- (c) "People are in a rush".  
 "The author seems very disenchanted with Christmas. She is mocking it, especially in regards to the lights that appear fake, and is even mocking it regarding the 'Virgin Mary and even our own Saint' (line 11-12)".  
 "Christmas has become a commercialized notion. The real meaning of Christmas has been lost in the marketing ploys of businesses – e.g. "Kirkcaldies flags are flying" (line 2)".

On the whole teachers felt this poem could be “handled well by the best students”.

Results indicated grades were “generally” as expected.

In 2003 national statistics showed:

Number of results = 42,856

Not Achieved = 23.4%

Achieved = 43.1%

Merit = 30.8%

Excellence = 2.6%

In 2005 the poem was:

### **John’s Dream House.**

On a familiar street  
 an architect’s living sketch:  
 a crate of air  
 the birds flit through,  
 a winter tree  
 that will twig and leaf  
 into rooms and views;

at the sight,  
 the mud fills with surprise  
 like a lung with sudden air  
 a gasp of blue

John’s building his own home,  
 if we squint,  
 it could be the start of a boat,  
 a craft its maker wants  
 to carry him from uncertainty to sure,

and we can see a house, though only a box,  
 has ribs and limbs,  
 it struts and beams,  
 strides out into our sightline  
 like a man fully at ease in his skin.

At five o’clock  
 the winds rise,  
 the cabbage tree sings  
 the sound of a creek,  
 over the unfinished weft\* of the roof

a tui throws a note;  
a bellbird juggles and drops it

And John knocks off,  
face dark and startled  
like a miner who's tunneled  
long and hard  
into the heart's hidden seams.

\* "weft" refers to the "woven" look of the crossed beams that frame the house.

Source: "John's Dream House", Emma Neale, found on *New Zealand Poetry Centre*, [www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz](http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz)

### Questions.

1. Identify ONE **verbal language feature** used in lines 17-28. Give ONE example of this feature. (A)
  2. Explain how the metaphor "a winter tree that will twig and leaf into rooms and views helps you imagine what John's house will be like when it is finished. (A/M/E.)
- 
1. Expected answers with examples: metaphor; personification; simile; alliteration.
  2. This metaphor compares John's house to a bare tree in winter. In spring the tree will grow leaves and be covered in foliage. John's house will also change from a bare frame to a home as it is built. The frame will be covered in walls in the same way a tree will be covered with leaves.

### Examiners' Reports.

Candidates assessed as **Not Achieved** lacked the following skills and/or knowledge:

- language terminology to identify features
- did not attempt the whole paper
- used pre-prepared examples instead of examples from the text
- ability to read questions carefully.

Those awarded **Merit** or **Excellence** indicated

- an ability to use the scaffolding correctly
- an ability to write longer answers
- an ability to explain the features well, showing an understanding of the effect of the technique
- vocabulary and clarity necessary to express complex ideas

- an ability to go wider than the text and make perceptive and generalized comments.

In 2005 national statistics showed:

Number of results = 34,907

Not Achieved = 30.5%

Achieved = 48.5%

Merit = 17.0%

Excellence = 4.0%

- In 2004, for example, 46.0% did not achieve and 38.6% achieved with the Unfamiliar texts question (1.6), one text being a poem; 0.4% gained excellence. In the same year 49.7% did not achieve and 35.8% achieved in answering the short texts questions (1.4), one option being a poem; 2.7% gained excellence.
- In 2003, with the unfamiliar texts, 23.4% did not achieve and 43.1% achieved, 2.6% gaining excellence.
- In 2005, 30.5% and 48.5% achieved, 4.0% gaining excellence. The percentages of those not achieved and achieved for 1.4, short texts, in 2003 and 2005 however, were reasonably constant; about 83% achieved and did not achieve.

2004 was a year when students seemed to find the questions in 1.6 more difficult than in 2003 – 84% achieving and not achieved, with only 0.4% gaining excellence.

Teachers observed that, in 2004, “few students could attempt the poem as the format had changed from the papers of 2002 and 2003”. They also said that “the wording of the questions in 1.4 (in 2004) could be applied more easily to short story texts than any other text”.

It is interesting to compare these questions which invite students to write about poetry texts (if they wish) in two achievement standards external papers with that mentioned below on the 1964 School Certificate paper optional poetry question.

### **School Certificate English 1964**

In 1964, according to my sample of papers for which I was one of the examiners, 27% failed to achieve 30%, the lowest mark needed for inclusion in the total mark of 200 over a candidate's highest marked three subjects in English, required for gaining School Certificate. After adjusting the median marks from all examiners, the pass mark for English was 50% - very little different from the 49.7% not achieved for 1.4 in 2004.

In the 1964 School Certificate English paper a high percentage of students preferred to answer the literature questions in section 2 as illustrated below.

A comparison with the questions relating to poetry at NCEA level 1, 1.4 (Short texts), and 1.6 (Unfamiliar texts), and the English paper for School Certificate 40 years ago shows major differences.

In 1964 the first section of the paper presented students with

1. Composition of about 300-350 words (20 marks).
2. Comprehension (from the *New Zealand Listener*) – 10 questions (20 marks)
3. Punctuation, Grammar and Usage (15 marks).
4. Vocabulary (15 marks).

Section 2. There were FIVE questions: 1. poetry; 2. summarizing; 3. novel; 4. drama; 5. general (terms relating to works of non-fiction).

Candidates were expected to answer two questions. Each question was worth 15 marks.

**The poem** given was by Basil Dowling. (A) 10 marks were given to comprehension questions. (B) For 5 marks the candidate was asked to name the poet and title of a similarly treated poem and describe the poem.

My statistics for **630 papers** that I marked that year were as follows;

47 was the median mark.  
183 candidates gained fewer than 30 marks  
86 candidates gained 70 marks or more.

In section 2:

Poetry was attempted by 98 candidates  
Summarising: 110  
Novel: 209  
Drama: 347  
General question: 105.

(Not all candidates answered 2 questions; some answered none in section 2; four answered all section 2 and none in section 1.) Even in 1964 students were advised **to read the directions**.

Apart from the externally assessed Understanding Unfamiliar text standard requiring basic knowledge of poetry techniques (usually taught at years 9 and 10, according to teachers) poetry plays a very small role in year 11 study of English and the NCEA 1 examinations today. In the 1964 School Certificate English, literature questions were popular – 654 of the 869 optional answers selected in section 2 were from literature – although a second comprehension question (poetry) was a difficult choice that year. This conclusion corresponds with the responses from interviews where teachers admit that poetry is, now, rarely taught at year 11, but was part of the programme for form 5 in the 60s.

Several other achievement standards in English, as I noted earlier, may include poetry in the internally assessed material. But for a variety of reasons, teachers do not encourage students to engage in poetry performance and presentation, yet they mention that the whole class (and possibly the teacher) would benefit from such opportunities.

Opportunities are there, as mentioned earlier, in Unit Standards, and some students could perform very well at that level.

Schools define the content of the curriculum for year 11 according to the consensus of the English teaching staff. At one school, where I interviewed the Head of Department (HOD) of English, the course covers 21 credits presented for assessment. Twelve credits are assessed by external examination and ten internally assessed. 1.9 (Research and Present Information) is taught but not presented for assessment purposes. The content of and resources for each achievement standard are planned by the HOD in consultation with the staff, but teachers do have some degree of flexibility in selecting texts. The HOD explained that, in a school of 800 students, the moderation process over several classes of year 11 students requires regular staff meeting and training days to implement the internal assessment process for creative writing, for example. This process adds greatly to the working hours and tasks of the teachers.

Most schools accept that NCEA 1 suits most year 11 students who, on leaving school at that level (having reached the age of 16) take with them “a piece of paper” showing some degree of having “achieved” something. A few teachers remarked that the brighter students are not challenged sufficiently by NCEA 1, although credits achieved over the required number can be transferred to NCEA 2. Debbie and Brian observed that sometimes “students slack off in year 12 as they carry credits forwards and so have fewer to study that year”.



Teachers offered the following comments in interviews.

**Positive Points:**

- The broad array of subjects offered help teachers tailor a course to suit and meet the needs of every student.
- New technology, resources and skills are available for teachers to instruct with confidence.
- The combination of internal and external assessment provide learning, skills, knowledge and understanding for students who work well under pressure, and those who do not.

**Negatives:**

- The logistics of moderation and timetabling are especially problematic for internally assessed standards.
- The restraints and irregularities in marking seem to cause problems for some schools.
- Teachers are burdened with extra work to administer the assessment tasks fairly.
- Teachers have difficulties in meeting the expectations of parents, boards of trustees, and the Education Review Officers (ERO) in achieving results.
- The mix of cultures, disruptive and transitory students, as well as the number of gifted students at year 11, cause difficulties in the classroom.

Teachers were honest in both their appraisal and their adverse criticism of NCEA for year 11 students. Opinions seemed to vary when teachers took into account the size of the

school roll, the attitude of the staff to the presiding principal or head of department, the decile grade given to the school, the socio-economic situation in the school and, perhaps, whether the school was single sex or co-educational.

### **Teachers' comments on teaching for the NCEA**

1. Sean had earlier taught at a school where the emphasis was on the process of educating the students from year 9 towards and through NCEA examinations. He believes that putting the emphasis upon assessment as an end to learning is a pitfall. His present school is a low decile school by city standards. A large number of students there have learning difficulties and achieve at a very low level by comparison with those at the same level in his previous school. This school also has the highest ratio of racial and ethnic groups in the city. Therefore, Sean says, these students make progress in small steps rather than in big leaps. Many, perhaps most of the year 11 students, will never reach what was School Certificate level, but might achieve certificates in certain subjects with NCEA. NCEA has opened up a means of achievement for these students. That is one advantage. However, there are restrictions in a small school for subject areas. These restrictions include timetabling, fewer teachers, the achievement ability of the students and the many credits offered in NCEA.

Sean believes that mathematics and the sciences, including technology and graphics, are essential for these students, so basic numeracy is given much emphasis. English, according to the curriculum, is divided into formal writing and creative writing. In a particular year, teachers focus on one or the other, not both. Sean remarks that, in 2003,

the attempt at creative writing was “an unmitigated disaster, filled with angst, totally subjective, cliché-ridden, neither poetry nor prose and impossible to assess”. Even though models are followed and the writing monitored, the students have insufficient vocabulary and language skills to produce worthwhile results.

For literature study, only the short story and the novel are studied in Sean’s class. The poetry of Hone Tuwhare, James K. Baxter and the War poets was attempted in 2002, he says, “with, again, disastrous results”. He adds, “Many of the students the College attracts are familiar with ‘X’ rated material and see poetry as ‘G’ rated. Poetry from a previous age is ‘defunct’ for these students”. If the poems refer to suicide, drugs, alcohol, or other similar teenage issues, “the teacher is seen to be opening up a whole can of fish and the parents flock to the school with objections and questions”, Sean observed.

The study of other genres, such as the assessment of the students’ understanding of a short story (1.4) including narration, description, theme, character development and context is able to be managed quite competently with Sean’s class. Owen Marshall’s stories and a general collection of New Zealand short stories seem suitable choices for these students. The approach to the novel as an extended text (1.3) is manageable if the right novel for the class is chosen. The speech (1.7), and the research project (1.9) are internally assessed, and “that is the ‘guts’ of year 11 English”, Sean concludes.

Sean has rewritten the junior school programme with NCEA in mind. Poetry is an option, but it is up to the teacher to choose to teach it. The general attitude to poetry at

this particular school is that it lacks narrative, is less concrete and becomes a language game. Poetry, for these students, is a mystery. When asked to “identify sound effects” the students are unable to hear the effects of the sounds in words. The question, “What is the poem about?” is answered by simply rewriting the poem “in full”. There are, of course, Sean says, the few who are able to appreciate poetry. But the composition of most of the classes dictates that a study of short story is a better choice than poetry study. He is not frustrated, he says, although he himself is “passionate about poetry”.

By redesigning the junior syllabus and concentrating upon basic English, Sean believes that students will be better prepared for NCEA 1 and 2 and “for life beyond school”. The department, therefore, concentrates on practical English for three periods and academic English for the fourth. In this way most, if not all, the students might pass many credits at level 1, and some at level 2. This means that the school retains students longer because they see positive progress in small steps. The students will be better prepared for the work force when they leave school.

2. I visited a large school where the staff of English teachers has a positive attitude and a passion for literature and for poetry in particular. The science co-coordinator also attended the meeting to add her opinion to the discussion on the process of co-ordination in a very large school. All classes teach the poetry segment and teachers are free to choose texts according to the composition of the class. The actual curriculum causes little problem. Teachers feel time permits teaching at some depth, but moderation across year 11 classes is of concern.

Internal assessment of the speech, of the presentation and creative writing are handled more successfully without the time limits dictated by an external examination, they feel. However, the actual logistics of organising internally assessed achievement standards such as a “speech day”, a creative writing block, media, dramatic or performance poetry days in a school of that size are “horrendous!” as there are 21 year 11 classes at the school. One teacher, Marilyn, remarked that the school is vulnerable to parental criticism. One parent will complain that her child was penalised for not having as much time to prepare as another child. Another child was sick at the time and the parent wanted her child to “do the speech”, “have another topic” or “give her presentation” at a time when the child requested. Children and parents sometimes hold the school to ransom so the student can attain a higher pass. Staff also expressed the hope that the assessment will be part of the work done in class rather than having to “do a task” because the timetable said so. The timetable is drawn up at the beginning of the year, Sue explained, setting the internally assessed blocks at a certain date. “It concerns me”, she said, “that we do not run the assessment when we, and the classes, are ready, rather than because we set it for a certain date”. Topics cannot be assessed at different times because they are the same for all students in all classes. The staff questioned the inconsistency in variation of standards from school to school. George said there could never be absolute consistency “because it is too expensive”. From this school, for example, for the creative/poetic writing achievement standard the numbers filter down to sending approximately eight scripts out of eighty – two each of not achieve, achieve, merit and excellent – for final moderation. “

There is a consensus of opinion about the place of poetry in the curriculum. Staff meetings, training days, individual and team sharing among teachers, and a ready supply of resource material for poetry study, ensures poetry is not squeezed out of the programme. This was borne out by my interview with the year 9 teacher, Liz, and the two year 13 students, Charlotte and Lee, from the extension<sup>78</sup> English class.

All the English teachers agreed that students find ideas in poetry interesting, pertaining to life and its issues and life affirming. Marilyn concluded that, on external examination day, however, it is up to the student to choose the best option for answering the short text question, “according to the wording of the question”. (It is interesting to note that the students in my tutorial who confessed to loving poetry, came from this school).

3. Ron, the HOD English of a large all boys’ school, observed that “Too much ‘stuff’ is put into the curriculum and not enough taken out”. He admits he wishes he had more time to encourage close reading of texts. He would love to extend his teaching into “touching this base, touching that: move off into interesting tangents – but must teach what is circumscribed”. The main approach in English in this school with these students is literacy. “Literature, reluctantly, is lower down on the scale”, he adds.

Ron believes creative writing is a fairly assessed now, as a student has time to prepare his best piece of work, and then hone it after some general advice from the teacher. He observes, “Any boy with a smidgeon of motivation will come away with something

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worthwhile, although it is possibly a piece of prose. Some of the more creative boys endeavour to craft a poem”. Preparation for answering externally assessed papers is “in the hands of outsiders, too” as a teacher tends to read moderators’ reports, and that gives a guide to weaknesses and flaws in the examination papers. “It is important to me”, adds Ron, “that I look at my clientele and ask if a selection is too subtle or too deep or even too trite for my students”. He regrets there is never time to bring in a visiting poet as students must be drawn from other classes for the occasion and might miss important work that will not be repeated, or an important assessment in the class they left.

Ron says that “poetry is still there, but not in the way it was”. Students may be “captured” by a narrative, such as “The Highwayman” and “have a go” at writing a poem. But these students have no knowledge of crafting. He believes that concentrating on techniques, how to use them and with what effect, is about all that most of his students can manage realistically.

4. The interviews with these teachers revealed that it is beneficial that there are many options to suit the wide variety of students entering for examinations and staying on at secondary school. Helen, a head of English at an all girls’ school says that poetry “takes time” because today’s year 9, 10 and 11 students “lack a working up-to-date vocabulary and the knowledge of the allusions and common sayings that we grew up with”. She adds that students find it difficult to “unpack” the poems as they are unfamiliar with biblical allusions, references to classical poems, foreign phrases and proverbs. She quotes several examples from her own teaching of year 11 students who are vague about or totally

unfamiliar with “religious” terms such as heaven and hell, Greek gods and goddesses, Hades, purgatory, and even nursery rhymes, plays and stories – a Midas, a Shylock, Twelfth night, a Daniel – even a ‘soufflé’, which surprised me and which we take for granted”.

Helen states that the students understand examples of devices such as metaphor, but find it hard to apply them in making links from examples to poems and other writing. She believes poetry teaching is all about confidence – hearing the rhymes, rhythms, patterns, the poetic language. Reading poems aloud, Helen says, is vital. A teacher must gain the confidence of her class so there is no fear of reprisal when questions are invited. The teacher, also, must be curious too, and accept responses from the students even if their attitude is different from hers. “If the idea can be justified”, Helen concludes, “if the teacher has joy teaching poetry, it will fly. If not, it will flop”. She adds that students want things “cut and dried” and an answer presented “in facts”. When invited to analyse a poem some students like to be “cryptic” and hope the answer will “stick”.

In this all-girls’ city school, year 9 and 10 students work with their teachers in integrated studies. Four periods of English and four periods of Social Studies are timetabled each week, and Helen maintains the writing skills have been enhanced because of this programme. Units such as taha Maori with poetry, stories, legends and history, and the ballad with its historical and literary development have been successful. When the year 11 poetry programme is presented, therefore, the students are more prepared to explore contextual material side by side with the textual. Their understanding



of poetry is greater. Students learn to unlock the sub-text and ambiguity and develop close reading habits. They realise that poets have peeled away the layers before publishing and so much more lies below the surface.

Where many schools now rely upon photocopied notes and English Online for their poetry resources, Helen's school has built up plenty of up-to-date class sets of poetry, and some of these include profiles of the poets, as well as helpful guiding notes. Students, therefore, are encouraged to handle the books, and receive copies of selected poems which they can annotate and file. Helen explains that the members of staff, also, are good readers, so purchasing suitable texts means that books are "well chosen and well read".

Successful poetry teaching, Helen states, depends upon the teacher who has a passion for literature and a passion for language. She regrets that poetry teaching is less popular today, but puts some blame upon the dearth of memorising it, as well as the "dying out" of the parental influence which, in times past, would have checked on homework regularly. Students no longer enjoy jingles and rhymes, such as skipping games, as former generations did. They no longer see poetry as a creative language form that can flow over and into drama, music, art and writing in general. Helen concludes: "In both formal and informal kinds of way, I think, a great deal of poetry is going on in school without students realising it. The effects can be 'touched into' when the need arises".

5. The main ingredient for an effective English teacher according to a principal, Josie says, is a great love of literature. She adds that she believes "students quickly imbibe

antipathetic feelings towards literature, and especially about poetry. They will not, therefore, choose to take poetry papers at University. When in their turn they become teachers of literature, their hostility to poetry will self-perpetuate”.

Her school, Josie says, welcomes student teachers, especially for year 9 and 10 students. These students taught by student teachers on section from the CCE have a distinct advantage as the policy of the school is to encourage poetry teaching and allow the student to “take over the class”. English teachers say they learn much from these students. Poetry is encouraged from year 9 onwards in this school. Unfortunately, as the school has intakes from several intermediate and primary state schools, not all incoming students had pleasant prior experiences, or had even explored the poetic writing section of the curriculum. And, Josie agrees, poetry sometimes “gets choked” by the other options as far as year 11 is concerned. Some return willingly to choosing poetry after that.

### **Drawing conclusions**

Distilling information and opinions from these teachers, I recognise similar attitudes to the teaching of poetry emerging from the current standard-based curriculum, the importance placed upon high standards of success, the wide range of abilities and aptitudes at year 9 students, and the expectations parents and students have of their teachers. With NCEA examinations and assessments in sight, the whole school system is geared at year 9 to pass rates at year 11.

One aspect of the English programme described as poetic writing from years 1 – 13 and creative writing for the NCEA complements the study of poetry in that the teaching and learning of both processes develops more competent skills in oral, written and visual language. Poetic and creative writing require critical thinking, a facility with language and the ability to shape, refine and craft a piece of work which lead to the achievement objectives of close reading, exploring language and interpretative skills required for the study of poetry.

Chapter six deals with these processes.

## Chapter six

... known and strange things pass  
 As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways  
 And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.  
 Seamus Heaney. "Post script". (Last 2/3 lines)

### Creative and poetic writing

In this chapter I am investigating the teaching of poetic writing and creative writing of poetry for year 9, 10 and 11 students in order to consider

- how NCEA restricts the possibilities for teaching poetry
- how creative writing of poetry complements the study of poetry
- the value of teaching these disciplines to develop written and oral skills
- the literature that demonstrates approaches to poetic writing.

Poetic writing is prescribed in the *ENZC* for years 9 and 10, and internally assessed in NCEA 1, as Produce Creative Writing (1.1). Worth three credits, this unit is attempted by most students in year 11.

### Interpreting the curriculum

Creative poetic writing, as opposed to formal writing or transactional writing, is defined in the curriculum as

Writing which has been crafted or shaped to convey ideas, thoughts, feelings, and sensory qualities to evoke a response from the reader. It is characteristic of fiction, biography, travel and other personal narrative, as well as of poetry (*ENZC*, 141).

It is also described as "writing ... shaped to convey sensory and artistic qualities, and includes fiction in its many forms. The term 'poetic' highlights the crafted quality of such

writing” (*ENZC*, 33), seeming to imply that transactional writing is not crafted.

Transactional writing, also defined in the curriculum, refers to “the language of science, technology, trade, reporting, persuasion, legal argument and debate” (*ENZC*, 142).

Writing poems is mentioned first at levels 3 and 4 in *ENZC* as an example for poetic writing. The charts displaying writing functions for poetic writing list “a number of genres” and “a range (or “wide range”) of genres” (*ENZC*, 35). But as I explained in chapters four and five, few examples for writing poetry are included in the achievement objectives.

Achievement standard 1.1 is derived from *ENZC* up to and including: Writing level 6 (100). Achievement objectives are: expressive writing, poetic writing, exploring language, thinking critically. There are links to Reading: personal and close reading; Listening to texts and Viewing in reading and viewing dramatic texts.

Produce creative writing (1.1) is an internally assessed achievement standard that most schools prepare students for. The workbooks and study guides published to help students preparing for NCEA 1 give guidance on the creative writing of prose rather than of poetry. Poems are included among the forms of creative writing with descriptions, narratives, personal accounts, scripts and hyper-fiction. A list of possible topics/starters is given in *NCEA Level 1 English (5-8)*, and produced from previous NCEA 1 papers, such as:

The kids at school are ...

At last I had my licence.

Dude. Got the message?

I couldn't help thinking 'Awesome'.

Burnt sausages and tomato sauce.

My heart was so full of aroha.

Clearly, these starters lend themselves more to narratives, personal accounts or descriptions in prose and limit students from writing poetry.

Another option for creative writing is to use one of the possible photographic starters such as pictures of

People outside a city theatre

A tug of war for children

Maori warrior in haka mode

Clouds over a sea/sky scene

Perhaps the fourth choice might inspire creative poetry writing if the student has practised writing poetry, but the other examples again seem more suited to prose.

When students prepare for NCEA 1 achievement standard 1.1, they are asked to produce a piece of creative writing and focus on four main skill areas:

- Ability to develop ideas
- Original creative writing
- Effective structuring
- Proofreading for accuracy.

A piece of creative writing needs to “fit” national assessment requirements for NCEA 1, which apply more specifically to prose writing than to the writing of poetry. This internally assessed standard is marked by the school. As the “assessed skills remain the

same across all schools and all topics” (NCEA level 1), the teacher sets the topic and guidelines to indicate the level of pass.

For achievement standard English Written Language 1.1 the following criteria are quoted from the NZQA website: [www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/assessment](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/assessment). (The bold print is mine).

To reach *Achieved*, the candidate needs to:

1. **Express idea/s** with detail in a piece of creative writing.
2. Use a **writing style appropriate** to audience, purpose and text type.
3. **Structure** material in a way that is appropriate to audience, purpose and text type.
4. Use **writing conventions** without intrusive errors.

To reach *Merit* the candidate needs to:

1. **Develop idea/s** with detail in a piece of creative writing.
2. Use a **controlled** writing style appropriate to audience, purpose and text type.
3. Structure material **clearly** in a way that is appropriate to audience, purpose and text type.
4. Use writing conventions **accurately**.

To attain *Excellence* the candidate needs to:

1. **Develop idea/s convincingly** with detail in a piece of creative writing.
2. Use a controlled writing appropriate to audience, purpose and text type, and **which commands attention**;

3. Structure material **clearly and effectively** in a way that is appropriate to audience, purpose and text type.
4. Use writing conventions **accurately**.

While every teacher and moderator receives this information, the terms “controlled”, “clearly”, “convincingly” and “commands attention” are essentially subjective. It may be difficult for markers to agree on the fine lines between Merit and Excellence in category number 4, for example. Most of the New Zealand teachers whom I interviewed described the assessment process as difficult. The assessing of creative writing, it seems, as a national internal examination achievement standard causes problems not only in New Zealand but also in the UK. Dymoke, writing in the introduction to *Drafting and Assessing Poetry: a Guide for Teachers* (2003), regrets that many teachers in England “felt wary of taking over a student’s drafting and intervening to the extent that the student’s ownership of a poem might be in doubt. Other teachers felt they lacked guidance [to make a final assessment] or a supportive framework” (xi).

### **Complements – creating poetry and studying poetry**

In “On the Pedagogy of Poetics: Methods for Addressing Problems in Poetry by Beginners” (*English in Aotearoa* 55 April 2005) Claire Hero, teacher of creative writing at the University of Canterbury, writes that “One way students find to counterbalance [a] plethora of definitions is to claim that a poem is a poem if [they say] it is”. Hero continues:

Poets who make it into anthologies and classrooms, who survive trends in readership and scholarship, who are read years, even centuries, after their



deaths, are often those poets who significantly challenged the contemporary definition of poetry. Poetry should be in metre, and then along comes Walt Whitman and other free-verse poets. Poetry should be in lines, and then along comes Charles Baudelaire and other writers of prose poems. Because beginning poets have little sense of what makes a poem, or of why such changes in the definition of poetry came about and how they affect the tradition, they often latch on to what they perceive as the freedom and formlessness in such examples as a way of defending their “polite mongrels”. This defence leads to two major problems in poetry by beginners: actual formlessness and an excessive reliance on the personal “I” without a sense of audience (the poem as diary, the poem as rant). (3)

Hero stresses that “beginning” poets (in fact, all students in creative writing classes) must read widely to relive past experiences, their own and others’, and create new experiences. Students of writing, she says, need to remember that “a poem is an imaginative product”.

If the creative writing students attempt requires previous reading and writing experiences on their own part, then it behoves the teachers, in their turn, to acquire “a range of teaching strategies for developing students’ poetry writing skills and guidance about assessment approaches” (Dymoke, xi). The NEAB<sup>79</sup> syllabus, for example, requires students to respond to questions on poetry in English Paper Two and the Literature Paper from a prescribed list of anthologies. The NEAB anthology has the greatest market share as it is available free to each candidate and may be personally

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<sup>79</sup> Northern Examinations and Assessments Board UK. See appendices 2 D & E.

annotated. However, “within these syllabi there are no compulsory requirements to respond to poetry in written or oral course-work, to read poems other than those being studied for the final examinations, or to write poetry” (“The Dead Hand of the Exam”<sup>80</sup>). Poetry, Dymoke argues, has become “deadeningly linked” to final examination papers.

If the time students in our schools are given for creative writing is limited, and if students are not “reading widely” (Hero), teachers feel inadequate in assessing the product, and there is no cross-over between creative writing of poetry and poetry study. One wonders then, with Dymoke, if, in our schools, there is “a legitimate place for poetry writing within an assessment driven curriculum”.<sup>81</sup>

In an article in *English in Aotearoa*,<sup>82</sup> Alan Papprell, in reference to creative writing, suggests a resource for internal assessment of poems. After some helpful advice on writing, he gives examples of students’ work explaining how they receive judgements according to the set criteria. To reach the level demonstrated, especially with the examples of merit and excellence, Papprell says, requires pre-working of examples, guidance, practice, understanding of poetry terminology, a comprehensive working vocabulary and time. Papprell’s article is followed in the same journal by a “Poetry Testing Kit” by Marty Schofield who suggests readers (teachers?) might find the kit helpful in identifying whether a poem “works” for the reader. The tests include the involvement of eye, ear, imagination, craftwork, truth, magnetism, being worthy of a second reading, and the ability to inspire with its context as well as its text.

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<sup>80</sup> *Changing English*, 9:1 (2002): 85.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

<sup>82</sup> 55 (April 2005):33.

On the same topic, a leaflet (source unknown) given to student teachers at the CCE begins with many reasons why teachers “have children write poetry”.

Some of these reasons, adapted from the leaflet, are:

- Poetry writing demands precision and conciseness in the selection and an arrangement of words.
- The writer becomes aware of and begins to learn to work with the language of implication and evocation, with imagery and metaphor.
- Poetry writing develops sensitivity in the use of and response to the sounds and rhythms of words.
- The creative act forces pupils to make use of jumbled life experiences and to bring thoughts into focus, imposing form upon them, and so discovering more of the world and themselves.
- Students can learn to value not only their own work, but that of others, and so develop self-respect and respect for others.
- Creative writing is an activity involving fundamental disciplines and the power of discrimination.

The leaflet also provides examples of kinds of poems, such as haiku, tanka, cinquain, diamond and recipe poems for students to practise crafting poetry. Advice is given about evaluating poems, setting up clear criteria for the writing task and the value of peer writing response groups. Ideas for this resource are taken from the books of Michael Harlow, Rory Harris and Peter McFarlane. This handout would be of value to all year 9 and 10 teachers of English to encourage the development of writing skills in the English

programme. Students' transactional and expressive writing will benefit from practising the disciplines of poetic writing, and inversely.

### **Really Useful Resources<sup>83</sup>**

Of recent years several books on the teaching of poetry have been published for the use of teachers by teachers, educators and poets. One of these is *Poetry Works*, developed and written by Elody Rathgen. Directed to both teacher and student, it emphasises not only working with poems for enjoyment and confidence, but also discussing poems, reading them aloud, and writing poems. This blackline copymaster booklet covers a range of activities as a resource for teaching poetry according to *ENZC*.

Phil Coogan<sup>84</sup> addresses the popularity of writing poetry in his article, "World Wide Writers" (*English in Aotearoa*).<sup>85</sup> Coogan states that "Writers' Window, begun in 2000 as part of the English Online website [is] one of the most vibrant and loved writing communities on the world wide web". He quotes the publication of twenty-six thousand pieces (to date) with more than a hundred pieces of feedback from students. Coogan also lists many other useful web sites in this article.<sup>86</sup> It is opportune that this incentive is available for students outside school. However, on the web site there is both the time (outside school) and the opportunity to experiment, edit, write as many drafts as one

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<sup>83</sup> Longworth, Kaye and Gary Kennett, eds. *Really Useful Resources*. Publications for NCEA revision guides. Kennett permits me to use his title as the sub-heading.

<sup>84</sup> Phil Coogan is director of English Online developed by UnitecNZ as part of a contract with the Ministry of Education, 2000.

<sup>85</sup> 55 (April 2005): 60-62.

<sup>86</sup> Several of these are listed in Appendix C.1.

wants, and receive feedback with a view to re-shaping and seeing one's poem published. There is not time for this in school.

In *Say it with Words*, a text for Senior English Students (1991), Rathgen, Scanlan and Harlow devote chapter two to "Poetry, Making Meaning". The chapter begins with a poem by Bub Bridger called "Wild Daisies". With this poem, and several others, the editors invite the readers to define poetry. Then they are encouraged to extend their definition by reading more poems, especially those of their own choice. The editors discuss various aspects of poetry study, such as, the place of the poet in the poem; interpretation, how a poem is crafted, and most importantly, performing poetry aloud to bring it alive. One very important aspect in this chapter for New Zealand schools is the use of Maori poetry or choruses in Maori.

Another useful book is by Michael Harlow, *Take a Risk, Trust your Language, Make a Poem* (1985). It takes the reader through different styles of poems, figurative language, and finally, the drafts of one of his own poems to illustrate the craft of writing a poem and steps to refining, editing and clarifying the meaning. Harlow, like Rathgen, understands the steps to poetry study and the process for engaging students in becoming absorbed in poetry. Several teachers interviewed, and Helen in particular, told me Harlow's text "was used with the previous form five classes" but with the NCEA fuller programme, the book is now "For reference, in the library". Most teachers affirmed that English Online was sufficient resource for what is needed for poetry teaching now.

Several writers of articles in educational journals for teachers in New Zealand and in the UK offer recommendations about creative writing and especially the writing of poetry arising, as Harlow, Rathgen, Scanlan, Harris and McFarlane propose, from studying and reading aloud poems by established poets. In an article titled “An explanation of poetry to my father” (*English in Aotearoa* 50 [September 2003]), Glenn Colquhoun, a New Zealand poet, remarks, “Some of the sweetest moments of insight I have ever had have come after taking apart very carefully whatever it is that I have been looking at. It could be ... a poem.” He explains that “poems work because they have a gap in them. The art of the poem is to tease and tantalize and seduce the reader into completing it”. Colquhoun insists that people need not be “excluded” from poems. As a poet he wants others to understand and enjoy “something in the world that has moved me.... I don’t want poetry stuck in a place where it intimidates and threatens people like a society with a secret handshake”.

Likewise, Mary Houston, a teacher of English, in issue 55 of the same journal, writes positively about creating poetry: “On the one hand it can be simple, regular, graphic, emotional, rhythmic, funny verse; but on the other it can be ambivalent, paradoxical, even downright obscure in shape, form and content”. This is why, she believes, students “often find this genre off-putting, putting it in the ‘too hard basket’ for they have not the patience for delving”. Houston gives her favourite definition as “one of Robert Frost’s one-liners: ‘Poetry begins with a clutch of the throat’ ... and a clutch in the throat is exactly what one feels when emotionally and intuitively responding”. She adds, what Colquhoun also implies, namely that “in order to understand poetry one has to try writing

it as well". But, Houston explains, "the restrictions placed by demands of curriculum and internal/external assessments did not allow my students the time to indulge in poetry writing that I would have liked them to have enjoyed" (58).

Manhire also, instructing students about creative writing which arises from extensive reading, says: "Read hard, find the work and the authors that matter to [you] and learn from them".<sup>87</sup> In school, Manhire says, students write for a hypothetical audience, namely, the teacher. The student, therefore, tends to write what he/she thinks the teacher would like or to pass an assessment. This puts restraints upon creative writing. Manhire questions if creative writing is assessable when teachers admit to having few skills for assessing it. Manhire, like other creative writing tutors (Apirana Taylor, another New Zealand poet, and Michael Harlow) link frequent reading of poetry and saying it aloud as essential preparations for writing one's own poetry. As Margaret and Michelle (teachers) suggest in chapter seven, students are impatient with repetition, and reading aloud is rarely part of the English unit.

Reading poetry, as well as writing poetry, is also recommended by John Gordon, a teacher in the UK. In "Verbal energy: attending to poetry", (*English in Education*, 38.1: 2004, 92-103), Gordon, quoting Gunther Kress, stresses the need for a revised National Curriculum wherein students are offered an education in which, using Kress's words, "creativity in different domains and at different levels of representation is well understood". Gordon extends the argument to modes of poetry, saying: "Meaning is different in different modes; different modes offer up different forms of knowledge".

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<sup>87</sup> Rod McGregor, "Interview with Bill Manhire", *English in Aotearoa* 33 (September 1997).

Some poems, therefore, work best with the resources of print; others make greater use of sound. Referring to the National Curriculum, Gordon states:

No overt reference to poetry is made in the Programme of Study concerning communication in the mode of sound, Speaking and Listening (En 1). This hierarchy is consolidated by assessment practices which represent poetry in print and demand response in writing.

Gordon believes that ignoring such misrepresentation of the potential of poetry, questions whether students actually do have access to, or an engagement with poetry.

In support of his case, Gordon refers to Dymoke's article, "The Dead Hand of the Exam", and that of Asher and Martin Hoyles' "Moving Black Performance Poetry" (issued with a disc). Here are opposite sides of the coin – on the one hand, poetry as a monomodal medium, read from the printed page by an individual, prepared for examination purposes; on the other, poetry, created by the performer/s, presented solo or in a group with rhythm, movement and gesture, varied intonation patterns, and sometimes song. Dymoke believes the pedagogy implied in responding to a poem by writing for an examination, discourages recognition of "the potential to make meaning in a variety of modes", while Gordon expresses his concern at a curriculum that

posits a skewed, inadequate and misleading design of poetry, a misapprehension of it exacerbated by assessment arrangements that present poetry encounters as silent, individual acts in realms of print.



Gordon concludes that “We the teachers [must] move from a curriculum in thrall to print and writing to “wrighting”<sup>88</sup>, making and crafting poetry, not only with words, but also with sounds”. In this way, Gordon suggests, the teaching of poetry will make a return to the Greek meaning for poetry – “to make” or “to fashion – or in the words of Seamus Heaney, “experiencing the aural and oral pleasures of poetry” (*Bags of Enlightenment*, 2003).

As curriculum tutor for English in the Secondary Post-Graduate College of English (PGCE) course, University of Leeds, Gordon uses current research in arguing for multimodal practices in the teaching of poetry. Material from recent UK teachers’ journals supports his contention that what is needed today is developmental research on the potential for incorporating oral literature into the English National Curriculum.

Other articles in *English in Education*, such as Andrew Staples’ “Poetic Experience: Found or Made” (2002), and William H. Peters’ *Effective English Teaching: Concept, Research and Practice* (2004), and Cheryl L. Rosaen’s article<sup>89</sup> endorse Gordon’s argument, and discuss the teaching of poetry in the classroom and its significance for presenting poetry as a visual, literate, oral and aural event, from studying established works and creating original work.

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<sup>88</sup> Ivanic, Ross. *The Teaching of “Wrighting”: Literacy Education in a Multimodal World* (2003).

<sup>89</sup> “Preparing Teachers for Diverse Classrooms: Creating Public and Private Spaces to Explore Culture Through Poetry Writing”, *Teachers College Record* 105. 8 (October 2003).

Rosaen's article is particularly relevant here for the study she undertook to consider poetry writing "as a site for teacher candidates to explore aspects of their own culture and share their knowledge with one another. I also wanted them to consider ways in which poetry can be explored by making connections with their personal lives and other texts they have read or have written to support meaningful learning. I describe teacher candidates' perceptions of the poetry writing activity and their learning in the four areas of curriculum, pedagogy, multicultural competence and social justice". Rosaen uses poetry writing for four reasons:

- To encourage teacher candidates to "reflect on and share information about their language, history and culture".
- To use poetry as "an interesting and productive site for engaging teacher candidates in learning about themselves as cultural beings".
- To enable novice teachers "to reframe their ideas of difference to understand it as the natural variation that occurs in classrooms ... and to learn about curriculum materials and pedagogical and assessment strategies that enable them to be supportive of and responsive to variation".
- To use "the experiences offered in the course [to] model culturally responsive teaching".

Rosaen concludes: "From the range of responses given across these 12 teacher candidates, we can see that some of them reframed their thinking about whether and how poetry can be used as a pedagogical tool to develop knowledge of self, knowledge of others, and understanding and appreciation of literature. Interestingly, when they began

the course, the majority of the teacher candidates did not view themselves as readers or writers of poetry as their preferred modes of learning to teach”.

### **Outcomes**

In general collating the responses to surveys of teachers and students, and interviews with teachers, as recorded in chapters 3, 4 and 5, I find that, while teachers of year 9 students, such as Liz and Monique, do plan and execute a vital and effective course in poetry for their students, many first year University students recall very little creative writing of poetry at school. Those who did recall some experience in class recorded that their poems were not constructively assessed. All teachers interviewed, except one, admitted that their students were not prepared for the short text poetry question and therefore, a unit in studying poetry was not included in the English course. If students are given inadequate preparation for writing an essay on poetry, as in short written texts 1.4, they are less likely to write creative poetry.

Most teachers prepare their year 11 students for the creative writing standard 1.1, but approach the writing project from the genre of prose. No teacher expressed any confidence in assessing the creative writing of poetry. The NCEA syllabus clearly restricts opportunities for writing poetry.

Twelve students, aged between 13 and 17, currently at the schools where I interviewed teachers, in an informal discussion with me, spoke of attending and loving creative poetry writing courses in their weekends, where they learned how to write, receive feedback and

get published in their magazine, “Young People Writing”. Two of these, Emily\* and Thomas\*<sup>90</sup>, spoke of their delight in being able to perform original poetry in the Christchurch Competitions Society annual festival and receive extra feedback. But in schools, teachers feel that the many options offered for writing functions indicate that the writing of poetry may be avoided altogether.

No teacher mentioned learning poems or studying poetry at depth. No one spoke of performance poetry or choral speaking of poetry. Not one of those practising teachers or University students surveyed or interviewed spoke of interrelating poetry with drama, music, dance or visual language.

It seems, therefore, that according to the data that I collected and analysed in 2004/5, the teaching of poetry and creative writing of poetry, as well as group or solo speaking of poetry for years 9, 10 and 11 students, are, on the whole, non-events. Much of this arises from the way of life of teenagers in today’s society, and the changes in education to meet these needs. I am certain, however, that negative attitudes towards studying and learning poetry can be reversed.

This chapter concludes my investigation of the place of poetry in the English curriculum according to material obtained from today’s teachers and students, and a study of the current curriculum.

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<sup>90</sup> \* Pseudonyms for privacy reasons.

In the next two chapters I shall show that both in the past in schools and also in the present at the Christchurch College of Education, poetry has been and can be a key element in the teaching of English. Though effective pedagogy, strategies can be put in place to break down the barriers to the teaching of poetry described by teachers in chapter three, and can change the attitudes of students so that they become open to listening to and hearing poetry.

## Chapter seven

... And dost thou touch me afresh?  
Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.  
Gerard Manley Hopkins. "The Wreck of the Deutschland". (7-8)

### Remembering the past

The principal aim of my thesis is to demonstrate the value of teaching poetry positively and dynamically. Poetry as an imaginative experience can promote the personal, social and intellectual development of students at all levels, and with lasting outcomes. When I taught English in the 50s, 60s and 70s, poetry was a key element in the programme alongside drama and prose.

In this chapter I shall consider responses to a survey sent to former students of mine. I will investigate why studying and learning poetry worked so well for these men and women to whom I taught English, and poetry in particular, in schools and in classes for individual or group tuition in speech and drama. These former students needed no persuasion to reply. The impact that effective poetry teaching made upon their lives and careers was evident from their responses. They stated, without hesitation, that poetry contributed to their confidence and competency in written and oral English, led to fulfilling careers, encouraged development in personal and interpersonal relations, and provided social, spiritual and cultural experiences. Since 1949 I have taught 7000 to 8000 students. Many of these I still see regularly or unexpectedly, receive communication from and support on occasions. Poetry is always a point of contact between us.

Observations made by these former students will provide a contrast between the attitudes of students and teachers to poetry teaching in schools in the 1950s, 60s and 70s with the situation in today's schools as revealed by the surveys recorded in chapter three of this thesis. These observations have implications for the revival of the teaching of poetry at all levels.

### **Making contact**

In March 2005, therefore, I set out to test my assumption about the long lasting effects of my own pedagogy. Using "off-the-top-of-my-head" addresses, initially, I sent papers to twelve former students whom I taught at post-primary schools between 1954 and 1965, asking two questions:

1. Describe your memory of poetry teaching and learning while at school?
2. Has poetry helped you in your life skills after school? How?

Twelve replies were returned promptly, all respondents acknowledging positively and in detail their appreciation of poetry. This convinced me that a wider survey of more of my former students would contribute greatly to the progression of my thesis. I sent out a further 48 papers<sup>91</sup> to students to whom I taught English in school between the years 1954 and 1973, and students to whom I taught speech and drama from 1973 to 2000. I selected these students from those of whose current addresses, and married, single or religious names I was sure. I pragmatically covered the age groups, selecting every third or fourth entry. The selection did not depend upon occupation/profession or scholarship. I had not been in touch with 25 of these students since I had taught them. Responses

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<sup>91</sup> Copy in Appendix A.3.

indicated all, except four, replied. (These four former students apologised later in 2006 for being unable to reply). As some respondents distributed copies of the survey to husbands/wives and friends who had not been sent copies, I received 72 responses.

From reading these responses I recaptured fifty years of mutually pleasurable learning and teaching of poetry with my former students.

The ages and occupations of these respondents are printed in the appendix to demonstrate the wide range of employment which these students of mine have undertaken. Poetry found a useful niche as a contribution to language features in each of these occupations. Respondents are indicated in the thesis by their first names.

- Fifty respondents returned the survey by mail and fifteen e-mailed their replies (twenty-two following the initial response with further communication). Seven requested an informal interview.
- Replies came from Auckland to Invercargill in New Zealand; there were also two replies came from England, three from Australia and three from USA/Canada.

A first analysis of the responses revealed that:

- All 72 respondents stated that poetry played a major role in their use of written and spoken language during, and since leaving school.
- 44 referred to their involvement with speech and drama classes as contributing to their continued love of poetry, and remembered poetry in school as satisfying.



- 43 recalled positive experiences with the teaching of poetry either as group speaking or/and studying in class with the English teacher.
- 14 recalled uninspiring experiences with poetry in school, but recalled with pleasure solo experiences with poetry and drama. Only one respondent (who left school in 2002) mentioned she disliked intensely the classroom experience, but enjoyed her speech and drama classes.
- 14 made no reference to poetry in the class room, or indicated they did not recall being taught poetry in secondary school. Their enthusiasm for poetry came solely from speech and drama classes.

Poetry, however it was encountered, was spoken of as a powerful agency for verbal and written expression, meditation, personal growth and understanding of others, and loving poetry for its own sake. The enduring nature of being taught poetry by me, they said, stemmed from our choice of poems, how I presented them, my intuitive recognition of the readiness and needs of the individual or class, and my ability to transmit my love of poetry to them. I will argue in this thesis that these factors expressed by my former students are the key components that make the teaching and learning of poetry successful, as urged by curriculum developers whether in the 1954<sup>92</sup> or 2004. They are:

- An appropriate curriculum (or syllabus) content that engages the students.
- Pedagogical structures that implement the objectives of the curriculum.
- Integrating new learning with prior learning, and time to absorb and transfer the new learning.

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<sup>92</sup> In the 50s, 60s and 70s I taught from the whole school syllabus (usually prepared by the principal), English syllabus (prepared by the senior teacher of English) and personally written class workbook, as well as the School Certificate and University Entrance syllabuses. These programmes were assiduously studied by Inspectors of Schools at each visit. To check the aims and objectives were implemented, the Inspectors also scanned examples of written work from the students' exercise books.

- Opportunities to share learning with others through discussion, through public speaking, performance poetry and connecting with other disciplines.
- The ability of the teacher to build a positive class room environment where relationships between teacher and students, and students and students, can flourish.

While the language of these key components is in today's terms, my approach to teaching was the same.

To relate the responses to my thesis proposal and give it impetus, I needed to identify broad, recurring themes from which to develop certain concepts. Scanning the responses, I found two comprehensive areas of consideration which I shall expand upon in turn in this chapter, namely:

- An abiding love and a deepening knowledge of literature, especially of poetry – a personal benefit.
- The development of spoken and written language, word skills, improved social interaction and communicative ability in their occupations because of a facility with language – interpersonal or public benefits.

### **Theme one: a personal love of poetry**

The replies pertaining to the first area mentioned emerged from several areas of appraisal. From studying the data supplied by my former students, I was impressed to read of their appreciation of poetry, whether they were at school in 1954 or in 2000. The following concepts about poetry were identified from the statement above:

- personal statements about learning poetry as an art, including insights into the influence of poetry upon
  - one's understanding of self and others
  - one's sensitivity towards humanity through poetry
- the power of poetry when spoken
- personal reasons for writing poetry and developing creative writing skills
- opportunities to enter into other worlds and ways of thinking
- the importance of studying poetry from the canon as well as modern poetry, and especially poetry from New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the United States.

As a teacher, I endeavour to animate my students to experience the physical, intellectual and emotional power of poetry. As a contrast to the logic and linear skills exercised in other subjects, I use poetry to promote the imaginative, colour, rhythmic and spatial awareness of language. This pedagogy gives room for fun and freedom in vocal expression, as well as offering a challenge to explore what is not specifically written on the page. I see poetry also as a safe but discerning means of opening the minds of teenagers to teenage problems and issues. This approach is mirrored in my former students' approbation of poetry.

### **Understanding of self and others**

Statements about a love for poetry incorporated perceptions of the influence of poetry in their lives. Each respondent indicated a connection between what poetry meant personally, and the value of poetry as a tool in relating to other people. Hilary, for

example, speaks of the challenge poetry made to her intellect “to mine all the nuances and layers of meaning”. Within poetry, she observes, is “distilled wisdom” which gives insights into an understanding of herself and the actions and motivations of others. Several former pupils, about the same age as Hilary, refer to the way in which, for them, poetry expressed feelings more powerfully than did prose, especially when the poetry was spoken aloud.

In the 50s and 60s teenagers were not so outspoken, perhaps, as they are today, and, through poems they were able to voice feelings of anger about cruelty to human beings<sup>93</sup> or to animals,<sup>94</sup> the disillusion and horror found in war poems<sup>95</sup>, despair in poems like the “terrible sonnets” of Gerard Manley Hopkins,<sup>96</sup> false expectations giving place to acceptance of reality in Stephen Vincent Benét’s poem, “Western Star”;<sup>97</sup> love in the Romantic and Victorian periods in the poetry of Wordsworth<sup>98</sup>, Keats<sup>99</sup> and Browning<sup>100</sup>; fun and humour in T. S Eliot’s cat poems<sup>101</sup> and moments of madness from Ogden Nash<sup>102</sup> and Edward Lear.<sup>103</sup> These selections gave opportunities to release these emotions safely. Hilary and others referred to the “soothingly therapeutic” or “politically subversive” nature of reading and speaking poetry. As teachers and social workers, some were later able to encourage their students and clients to look below the

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<sup>93</sup> W. H. Auden. “Refugee Blues.”

<sup>94</sup> Ruth V. Manning Sanders. “The Cage.”

<sup>95</sup> M.K. Joseph. “Drunken Gunners.”

<sup>96</sup> “Not, I’ll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee; / Not untwist – slack they may be – these last strands of man / In me or, most weary, cry *I can no more*. I can ...”

<sup>97</sup> “Whirring and turning, the wheels of the clock of time, / That rules men’s lives and spins them and weaves them out, / Not to their expectations but to its will.”

<sup>98</sup> The “Lucy” poems.

<sup>99</sup> “Endymion”. “A thing of beauty is a joy forever.”

<sup>100</sup> “My Last Duchess.”

<sup>101</sup> “Skimbleshanks: The Railway Cat.”

<sup>102</sup> “Golly, How Truth Will Out.”

<sup>103</sup> “The Pobble Who Has No Toes.”

surface meaning in poems to discover expressions of feelings like their own. One, Mary, a retired bank clerk, notes that she recommended poetry to her own children and grandchildren when they were stressed or worried to take time to reflect, like Wordsworth, on thoughts “That flash upon that inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude” as she did when her work became repetitive or she was hassled by demanding customers.

### **Understanding through language**

Other respondents spoke of the power of studying poetry to develop their confidence in their use of words, both oral and written. These former students had not heard of or read Ludwig Wittgenstein, the philosopher, who wrote: “A poet’s words can pierce us. And that is of course *causally* connected with the use that they have in our life”,<sup>104</sup> but many of them, like Clayton, attests to examples from their own experience when they were able to convey, forcefully, opinions and ideas to an audience, to persuade, inform and debate, and select the most appropriate word for a particular occasion. They believed that having studied poetry in depth and having memorised poems, words from the poems moved and took hold of them and became part of their vocabulary.

The themes and images of poems are said by my former pupils to be powerful aids to understanding their own thoughts on personal issues, their emotions, attitudes and beliefs. The words of the poets, according to Jessica (who became a psychoanalyst and consultant psychiatrist) enriched her own life as an adolescent as she explored alone and with her teachers the thoughts expressed through “the intensity of Hamlet, the passion of Othello,

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<sup>104</sup> Zettel, 29.

the power of Mark Anthony and the terrible tragedy of Lear”. Another respondent, Ella, felt her social conscience was stirred as she encountered the opposing forces in Blake’s “Tiger” and “Lamb”. As a teacher, I trod warily in exposing these people in their adolescent years to human emotions and the contending forces of nature through powerfully written poetry. Not all adolescents were at the same level of understanding and emotional development so, while trying to incorporate their experiences into our choice of poems, I needed to be aware of their personal backgrounds.<sup>105</sup> Many students like Pat, on reflection, report that, initially, “the full force and implication of the text escaped us sometimes. But the words and feelings sank into our minds and hearts with the learning, to surface and become pregnant with meaning as we matured”. Words became the “tools and weapons” as Clayton says, of his life as a citizen, public relations officer and politician.

### **Choral/group speaking**

The power of poetry when spoken aloud.

Speaking words aloud, sometimes at first sight unknown and unusual words such as those of Gerard Manley Hopkins’ sonnets<sup>106</sup> and Robert Browning’s dramatic monologues,<sup>107</sup> was indeed a challenge for adolescents. So many of these former students, writing with hindsight, referred to the “music of words created by using the speaking voice as an instrument which led to a connection between the self and

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<sup>105</sup> I discovered a reference to this pedagogy in Rosaen’s article in the *Teachers College Record*, 1467.

<sup>106</sup> “How to keep – is there any any, is there none such, nowhere / known some, bow or brooch or braid or brace, lace, latch / or catch or key to keep / Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty,.... From vanish-ing away? “The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo.”

<sup>107</sup> “Sleep, crop and herd! Sleep, darkling thorpe and croft / Safe from the weather.” “A Grammarian’s Funeral.”

language” or “painting pictures with our voices which enriched our imaginations” or “harmonising or counter-balancing each other in saying poems we came to understanding in our hearts, if not always in our heads”. They spoke about opportunities to enter different emotional worlds outside their immediate experience at that age: the tiger trapped in “The Cage”; the old lady dying alone in an upstairs room in Leamington;<sup>108</sup> betrayal in “The Highwayman”; broken promises in “The Listeners”; the mark of Cain in “The Ancient Mariner”; the struggle for survival in “The Magpies” and the depression days in “On the Swag”. Another comment on this topic, made by Sara, project manager with Walt Disney International, referred to poetry expanding the mind to be open to “the stored wisdom of people who have had other experiences”.<sup>109</sup> Poetry, both heard and approached with close reading, “became part of the skills used in thinking, feeling and encountering the cultures and enlightenment of others.”<sup>110</sup>

Group speaking, singing hymns and other songs, and storytelling in verse also expanded the working vocabularies as “Strings of words lead to ideas; and beyond ideas to the expression of ideas either written or spoken”, to quote Gary. Comments like these from people of differing ages and occupations illustrate how studying poetry encourages the development of oral language and the enrichment of vocabulary. Several spoke of finding in poetry succinctness that produced results when speaking up at meetings or serving on various committees or public speaking occasions, such as Hilary’s example of presenting evidence “with clarity and confidence before the Waitangi tribunal”.

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<sup>108</sup> John Betjeman. “Death in Leamington.”

<sup>109</sup> Wole Soyinka. “Telephone Conversation.”

<sup>110</sup> Haare Williams. “Patches.” Patricia Beer. “The Fifth Sense.”

### Developing personal skills

Another outcome of having read, spoken and listened to poetry was the development of certain personal skills. In choral speaking, prepared for performance, for example, memorisation had to be accurate. The performers needed to think about the poem, interpret its meaning, discuss its use of language and metaphorical techniques and agree on a method together. Reasoning and dialogue developed. They had to listen to each other while speaking together, breathing together, articulating together, modulating together, cueing together and harmonising together.<sup>111</sup> This process invited improved listening skills, concentration, reflective skills and a retentive memory. Performance led also to confidence from having an active role in the recital. But speaking poetry aloud has other spin-offs as recalled by Jane, Joan and Barb. They speak of learning how to “pronounce words clearly, modulate their voices to suit the genre, and project to an audience” which led them in later life to knowing how to address an audience for a presentation or in social speaking engagements, or when dealing with people for whom English is a second language.

Maureen is one of those who remember preparing for a choral speaking exam: “We were rather a naughty class. But this made us work together, cooperate with our teacher, understand what it is to be accountable and reach the proud goal of a 98% pass at grade 6 level. We also had to learn to make the appropriate Maori actions to the rhythm of the poem.<sup>112</sup> We were famous!” Nora’s memories include her pride in being part of the group to receive certificates for success in choral speaking examinations, and she stresses

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<sup>111</sup> O’Neill, *All in Together*, 1999, 5.

<sup>112</sup> Thomas Bracken. “The March of Te Rauparaha.”



the importance of poetry as a vital way to get a captive teen to think about new ideas, to stretch the imagination, to provoke lateral thinking and come to a realisation of the power of words. She refers to iPods, computer games and cell phones, “all quick and easy ways of communicating which interfere with time to stop and think – rare and precious times, vital for mental health”.

In the 50s, 60s and 70s, it was taken for granted that poetry was an essential part of English in the school where I taught, and teaching poems through group speaking was a means of involving everyone in the class to become familiar with the structure, text, language, sound and meaning of poems (and it kept the whole class busy). That this was also the practice in other schools was evident from the Sisters of Mercy secondary school annual exams in Canterbury and the West Coast, called the Mercy Exams, referred to in the prologue.

There are still teachers who include choral speaking in their spoken language programme in the primary schools at levels 3 and 4 in *ENZC*. Like Veronica, they believe this experience melds a class as a group, is a “gentle disciplining exercise”, emphasises clarity of speech, removes the fear of performing in public, and helps children enjoy the rhythm and fun of language they wouldn’t meet otherwise.

Having experienced an improvement in literacy, oracy and social skills through group speaking and literature study with me in the 50s, Judy endorses the value of choral speaking in the 80s because her daughter, at age five, six and seven, was having difficulty

with spelling and reading. She says, “Poetry speaking with others in class, learning how to phrase and find the rhythm in the words, made a tremendous difference”. Her daughter had to practise reading the words aloud and in this way she saw and heard the sounds and her reading skills improved.

### **Building confidence**

Other respondents affirmed the confidence that grew not only from speaking up in a group, but also from taking solo parts and performing before an audience or in an examination room. Performing to an audience as an individual develops confidence in expressing one’s ideas and opinions. According to Grant B, a boilermaker, speech and drama classes, exams and competitions, made him face fear and beat it. “I had to stand up in front of crowds, recite and talk. My confidence grew. I approached job interviews with assurance. In my work now I know and love the feeling of quiet authority”.

Daniel is another example of one of my students whom poetry helped. He says, “Because of my opportunities to perform in plays, ballets, concerts, festivals, and through passing speech examinations, I use both written and spoken language better in every day life. Without this background, I would not have had the confidence to overcome my “unanticipated disability” against all medical predictions. My language skills saved me”.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> At 18, Daniel had begun University work successfully, aiming to be a politician perhaps. A fall from his bicycle caused a serious brain injury. Patterns of speech were disordered. He lost his sense of balance. He could no longer concentrate, read or communicate with ease, or remember previously learned songs or poems, or simple directions. Very little progress was made over twelve months. Daniel was determined to improve but specialists were negative. Daniel took time off and planned his own programme. He worked with application and many tears, but the staff, reluctantly at first, followed his lead. On his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, with some apprehension, he organised, and chose to personally compère a party, inviting those who

This example of the potency of poetry is one of many I have witnessed over the years when asked to help people with a low self image, reading difficulties, deaf students who are frustrated, post-stroke patients or those who have to change employment because of severe occupational overuse syndrome. Poems are a good choice because of the short lines and short stanzas. Poetry always finds a way in to restoring confidence by touching the imagination and the unconscious. Sometimes, too, finding a skill the person had that I had no knowledge of, I became the student and she became the teacher. Dianne, a former adult student, recalls that she had lost her job, and her confidence through occupational overuse syndrome. She had a ventriloquist doll called Eric. Ventriloquism was outside my capabilities. Through Eric, with Dianne in charge, we shared songs, poems and conversation. Dianne declares she would never have had the confidence that led her, after several weeks, to perform for a hall full of disabled students and their carers, with Eric, leading them in songs, stories and poems, if I had not motivated her.

Another former student, also named Grant, made use of his facility with poetry in two ways, to train in an occupation, and to reach out to the disadvantaged in society. He became a qualified chef, using his speaking skills to conduct cookery classes. Lately, he has been working with the members of the St Vincent de Paul Society who care for young people who have run away from home, sniff solvents and abuse alcohol and drugs. He uses both remembered appropriate poems and also his own verses at every

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supported him through his illness. During the speeches, I made a tribute in verse, making comic reference to many of his theatrical performances. Daniel replied, spontaneously, by reciting faultlessly and with appropriate expression, a previously loved poem which he had not said for about seven years. We knew from this that his brain was healing, thanks, in part, to the memorisation of poetry. Daniel, at 24, has returned to University to study health science and paramedicine, and is succeeding superbly, beyond the specialists' predictions.

opportunity. When making presentations to publicise the work his group does, he composes ballads to “grab the audience and punch home my points. Without the legacy of speech and drama, I would never have been able to enlighten my peers and others to the plight of these young people”.

### **Creative and poetic writing**

Many of my former students spoke of their deep love of poetry, and loving poetry often leads to writing poetry. Creative poetry writing, as we think of it today, was usually, in the 50s and 60s, writing in metrical and rhyming patterns, parodying popular styles of the late 1800s and early 1900s. In the 70s teachers began to examine more closely free verse poetry, such as D. H. Lawrence’s “Snake” and Francis Brett Young’s “The Quails”, to demonstrate crafting a poem according to thought patterns which unify meaning, rhythm and shape. Poetry deals with powerful language and several respondents mentioned the mutual benefits of studying other people’s poetry before creating one’s own. When studying poetry with Bill Manhire, for example, Anne P valued her previous University study of the pre-twentieth century poets “like Chaucer, Virgil, the Romantics and Browning” which followed on from poets read, loved and learned at school and through speech and drama. She realised that she had a great advantage, as “younger students, unfamiliar with the great writers, may not achieve their potential as poets because they lack the discipline of the art”.

Men and women from all decades spoke of the value of learning poetry as a springboard to writing creatively for therapeutic and communicative reasons, and to

enable themselves and others to cross various backgrounds. Using poetry as a safe way of expressing emotions in “those turbulent teenage years”, Mark and Ben observe, gives release “to a whole gamut of personal feelings”.<sup>114</sup> While personal poetry is often kept private, creative poetry writing in a class conducted by a poet or enthusiastic teacher, is evaluated and assessed. Several respondents stated that writing poetry helps to clarify their own thoughts and feelings just as Hopkins,<sup>115</sup> T. S. Eliot<sup>116</sup> and the Mersey poets<sup>117</sup> said such writing did for them. Ben, for example, finds poetry “a great emotional support and a way of finding his own place in the world”. This happened, he believes, because investigating the poems of other people led him to “by-ways he would never have thought possible and the eternal nature of themes”. Reading his poems with him was an insight into his world and a privilege for me.<sup>118</sup>

Constructive feedback for creative writing, said Michelle, leads to healthy self-criticism. On the other hand, remembering adverse criticism, Tonia spoke of a special moment, when, at nine years of age, she was asked by a teacher to make a change in part of her poem, “telling me that I could do much better if I tried. I refused. I liked it the way it was. Later, the poem won a prize”! She concludes: “Sometimes, even the confident student-author, the self-critic, knows best”. Unfortunately, in today’s busy classroom, as the teachers I interviewed observed, the formula for assessing creative writing allows little time for constructive criticism for everyone.

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<sup>114</sup> John Clare. “I am, yet what I am none cares or knows ...”

<sup>115</sup> From “The Wreck of the Deutschland.” “Over again I feel thy finger and find thee”

<sup>116</sup> From “Ash Wednesday”. “Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood / ... Teach us to sit still / even among these rocks...”

<sup>117</sup> Roger McGough. “A Square Dance”. ““Old soldiers never die ....’ ... Only young ones”. “Snipers.” “Over the next five years they picked off / three of his brothers; one of whom was my father.”

<sup>118</sup> On one occasion Ben wrote about the time his father came home to report he had been made redundant.

Former students observed that writing, crafting and speaking aloud their own poetry teaches conciseness as the writer must express thoughts within the confines of the poetical structure. Poetry demands what Michelle calls “a hunt for the perfect word” and thereby vocabulary is extended. While writing poetry is a discipline requiring ruthlessness in its creating, it is also a freedom allowing a much greater creativity in language than is used in prose. Michelle, in particular, believes “writing poetry encourages the expression of what sometimes feels unexplainable”. Expressing this outcome in different ways these creative writers observe that what appeared to be difficult, with effort, energy and creative flair can result in successful and self-satisfying writing experiences. Without studying the poetry of the established poets, Michelle and others declare that they would not have reached the above conclusions. Those who write poetry, like Michelle, Ben and Shelley, state that there are certain rules to observe around the creation of poetry. Its inherent value, they believe, lies in its challenge. Writing poetry demands time and effort to rewrite, edit and refine. They recognise the value of a mentor to offer constructive criticism. Such people are more readily available outside school time, they said. The comments made by my former students are analogous to those made by teachers and writers whom I quoted in chapter six – Hero, Houston and Colquhoun,

Poetry, written for an occasion, can also be used to communicate a message in an inoffensive way, engender cooperation and encourage better business and social skills in a corporate setting according to Rebecca and Fran who are both employed in business management. Poetry can cross bridges and allow people of different backgrounds and

cultures to find common grounds and universal themes. Several of my former students became private, registered and psychiatric nurses, midwives, worked with disturbed teenagers and adults, and were counsellors. The nurses spoke of incidents when the poetry they learned gave them insights into the “often violent, painful, superficial and competitive world” (Jules); the challenging and “bewildering world of the second language speaker” (Jane); the elderly, the depressed and the disabled (Maryanne). The caring side of nursing, Sarah P believes, “comes from understanding emotions, and seeing other sides of life graphically depicted in poems like Fleur Adcock’s “Soho Hospital for Women” and Denise Levertov’s “O God of Mysteries.”. Maryanne speaks also about the skills she learned searching for deeper meaning to the words and developing “a greater sensitivity to language” which helped her in her studies towards her qualifications for her profession in counselling.

Poetry makes the reader confront one’s self, according to Kathy who works with failing/suicidal children. Jenny adds from her experience as a teacher: “I believe young people fear silence and fear poetry because poetry exposes their emotions when they think quietly or read, reflecting on the meaning, and are touched”. Margaret Louise considers that “Poetry demands that we listen intently to the voice of the poet, and learn to be good listeners”. Others add that listening skills are important for those in clerical work, receptionists, secretaries, or waiters and tour guides.

It is remarkable that all these respondents, once inspired by a considerable number of poems on diverse topics taught with diverse approaches, can apply the experience to

whatever occupation or need is theirs. Their statements expose the belief I have in the power of poetry, implicit in a view held by one of my favourite poets, Seamus Heaney: “Poetry as divination; poetry as revelation of the self to the self, as restoration of the culture to itself ... poetry as a dig, a dig for finds that end up being plants”.<sup>119</sup>

Studying poetry is much more, therefore, than an academic exercise. This is evident from the comments of many of my former students who connected the content, ideas and language of poems they examined to life’s problems and issues. In their work, they use the wisdom of the poets in working with their clients. Gary views the value of poetry as a way of reaching out to others, commenting: “Excluding poetry cuts us off from our past, our history, our developing culture, our relationship with ourselves and with God. We are dehumanised when cut off from our shared humanness”.

### **Theme two: poetry, employment and professional careers**

Poetry has touched and moulded the lives of these former students of mine in so many ways in preparing them for life skills and various professions because of a facility with language.

Having competent speech skills, those engaged in caring roles credited our sessions for giving them the courage, as well as the oral and written skills, to retrain in their special areas. For example, Margaret L. progressed from being a quiet, reserved dental nurse to a dental therapist who now visits schools and talks to audiences of staff and parents. Voice management skills helped others with interviews and presentations, and

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<sup>119</sup> *Preoccupations: Selected Prose* 1968-1978, 41.



because of apparent confidence, Liz says she “gets roped in to make videos for teaching purposes and can demonstrate role play for the others”. Ella declares: “Poetry and success and enjoyment ... helped me to move from being a very reserved country girl to a person of assurance. Finding my voice ... I discovered I could read and speak before assembled groups. I have been a competent speaker ever since”.

Many of these former students, therefore, affirm the values of studying, learning and performing poetry and drama as a fillip to their confidence. As their teacher, I observed their progress and now, at weddings, funerals and other social occasions, when they are called on to deliver eulogies and readings, and propose toasts, they look to me for the well deserved compliments!

For those with talent and flair who became entertainers, actors and singers, the foundation for their future vocations came partly from their study of speech and drama which led them, early in life, to study, learn and love poetry and manage their vocal skills. Louise C. married choral work in poetry with singing as her career. Today, her main enjoyment is singing in choirs for the delight of residents in rest homes and hospitals, as well as in community concerts at festivals and Christmas. Those who are professional actors, like Jean, Sarah, Ali, Louise G and Eilish, speak of the importance of poetry in developing a sense of rhythm of the spoken word, an awareness of vocal patterns, an ear for differences in tone and accent, and the application of inflection, pause and emphasis to convey subtleties of meaning. They all declare that, studying drama alone without a background of poetry, would have limited their dramatic range. Without

these basics, these roots, there would have been no flowering. Poetry has been the ‘force that through the green fuse drives the flower’ according to Jean.

One of these actors, Eilish, after several years on stage, returned to University work, gained her LTCL in speech and drama, and trained as a registered teacher. All four experiences, she emphasises, complement and promote one another. It is her belief that poetry, in particular, “tells us how human we are and connects us to our creative inner being” through song, rhythm, humour, emotion and imagination. She incorporates all these elements in her teaching in the junior school. Nursery rhymes, she fears, which were the beginning of poetry, are becoming lost because “families are too busy spending Sunday shopping at the Mall, to read ‘Humpty Dumpty’ – no wonder he fell off the wall!”

Other women speak of their expertise in reciting poetry as a preparation for being an active member of a city choir. From poetry they learned the basic skills of analysing and refining texts and scores, the exploration of rhythm, the affinity with singing and dance, and the personal aptitudes of belief in self, persistence and self criticism. As a regular member in a city choir, Maree connects poetry with music, and likens the work her daughter does as a sculptor to that of the poet who “hones experience, observation, thought and philosophy to that fine point and then expresses it”. She explains, “Likewise, we had to work hard at our performance pieces in the choir for singing as we did at poetry when we plumbed the depths of the craft of the work”.

While not professional performers, there are those who entertain rural and community groups such as Marlene, Anne and Bidy. They explain that they enjoy “bringing words alive through facial expression in performance” and, while this didn’t happen for them at school as solo performers, it did when part of the group. They are now visible and active members of their local community, acting, speaking, demonstrating and performing at functions, reciting poems “with heaps of gesticulation and expression for the enjoyment of the audience. I feel so good, and they enjoy me” (Marlene). Bidy also helps with drama and poetry speaking in country schools. Achieving an ATCL qualification in her 40s, she gained self esteem, and was able to stand up and speak out at staff and parents’ meetings. She is now working towards further qualifications in social work.

Another spin-off from performance is mentioned by Marie, who stresses the importance of risk “like the ones that my teacher asked of me”. She praises group speaking of poetry as an encouragement to read and overcome shyness when she was given a small part in a verse play (*The Song of Hiawatha*) and a solo part in a group speaking experience for a parents’ concert. Group speaking demanded that she “had to be accountable – I couldn’t let the others down”. She continues, “Soon, I was volunteering for solo roles – still scared, but determined”. This developed in later life into becoming an active member of the Akaroa drama club, and eventually, “to giving a lecture to 270 people, most of whom were doctors”. Marie wonders if young people today are called upon to take risks which lead to such confidence in later life. Now manager of a large shopping centre, Annie also credits performing poetry with skills that gave her the confidence to be alert, decisive and creative in her managerial role.

With a facility for languages, Kate has become a Hotel manager and translator for guests, as well as a speech and drama teacher in an area where that opportunity was lacking for students. Without the foundation in speech and drama, however, Kate observes, she would not have succeeded as an entrepreneur, nor would she have been enthusiastic about handing on similar skills to those in her area who will work there.

These examples, and so many more I could mention, indicate how developing confidence, and success in using communication skills, lead people on to exploring further areas of personal and professional development.

Taking another route to explore the language of poetry to enter other ways of thinking, Margaret C. became a heritage storyteller after twenty years of teaching English and History. She has travelled through New Zealand, Canada and the USA telling stories. Her original stories are published in print and in CDs. Margaret now works with a group of storytellers training others. She remarks, "Poetry has journeyed with me like the texture of my skin. It did become an integral part of my personality sometime at school. It was part of my degree, part of my teaching, part of my storytelling, part of the shaping of my mind".

Margaret recalls our English classes when she was at secondary school in the 60s. She remembers being enabled, even empowered to use words in many, many ways:

Other teachers were to be observed, enjoyed, noted, their lessons learned and regurgitated. In English classes we did things with words. We spoke,

we chanted, we recited, we acted out, we wrote poetry, and told and wrote stories. We learned poems off by heart, but I don't remember learning notes. We gave back our thoughts, our interpretations of life and [our teacher] didn't try to fix it, didn't see it as a problem. It was accepted as the talent that was there.

The teachers, lawyers, solicitors, barristers, journalists, reporters, TV announcers, accountants, an army officer and a counsellor make special mention of this aspect. The connections they make between their experience of being taught poetry well at school and their subsequent areas of expertise and employment are noteworthy because of the impact of poetry upon their lives and their careers, enabling them to continually pursue their love of literature, deepen their proficiency in language and explore other areas of professional development throughout life, as they affirm in their comments.

Attaining high grades in external school examinations, many of these men and women graduated from University, some at MA and PhD level, and also gained LTCL or LSB diplomas in speech and drama from Trinity College London or Speech New Zealand. Studying poetry, drama and public speaking to this level, these men and women used their skills to rise to top positions in their professions. Whether they took a law, commerce, science or arts degree, most included literature papers in their courses.

The teachers from this group express varying opinions about their success in teaching poetry, according to whether they taught before 1980 or are still teaching. All speak

gratefully of the opportunities for one-on-one tuition in speech and drama and declared that studying and performing poetry helped them, not only to get good jobs but also to be good teachers of English, German, French and Latin, business studies and second language teachers. Learning poetry, they declare, contributed to a secure use of language and a continuous development of a working vocabulary. Studying poetry expanded their general knowledge, enhanced their writing skills, and performing poetry ensured competency in voice care in classroom or lecture hall. As a consequence of their training, these teachers were given responsibilities for their school's major productions, Sheilah Winn Shakespeare in school performances, debating, and public speaking events. They were often invited to plan and organise assemblies for special occasions, such as Anzac commemorations. Poetry was inserted into these cultural events whenever possible. These teachers often took charge of editing the school magazine. One of them, Diane, in preparation for her Licentiate in Classroom Teaching for her Speech New Zealand examination, practised her prepared talk for the staff of her school. As a consequence, she says, the topic, "The Value of Oral Communication in the Classroom", became a major talking point in the school and led to the introduction of Speech New Zealand's Oral Assessment in Schools' programme for years 3 to 8 students, and openings for her for positions on a higher scale.

Several wrote of the difficulties they now meet that impede the teaching of poetry. Some, like Tracey and Liz, maintain that their own love for poetry led them to attempt to teach poetry at all levels with enthusiasm, but only sometimes with success. "It may not work with all classes but it works with the young mothers who have missed out earlier",

says Tracey. At first, she observes, “Poetry is seen to be difficult by the students, but once a poem is heard and spoken it usually moves students more than any other genre does”. Liz says she wants to make a difference in teaching her reluctant learners. She struggled with teaching war poetry, such as “Exposure”, “Mental Cases”, “Confetti” and “Brown Paper Carrier Bag”. The students reply: “These poems are too old and have nothing to do with me and my life and won’t help me get a job”. She explains to them why she is a teacher and how such study led her to acting, then to University work and finally, to teaching English and History, to pass on to others what she believes in. Liz declares: “My words may fall on deaf ears now, but sometime in the future, who knows what may surface. Poetry touches the soul”.

Several other teachers spoke of their methods of introducing poetry into their units of work in creative ways. One novel and successful experience is reported by Susan, a business educator, who takes her class each year, on Australia Day, to the Bush Poets’ Breakfast to hear poems recited. She sees this as a good way for her students to listen to and accept the messages the poets proclaim. She says: “These poems provide another window through which we can look at the world, and see how others viewed the world centuries ago”.

John, a former teacher, a BBC announcer, and currently the reporter for *The Bay News*, speaks of using the five senses as a way in to poetry, and a means of developing the powers of observation, perception and analysis. The symbolic meanings by which poets and their readers express themselves, metaphorically, can lead students into

“sensing” poetry. He gives the following examples: “Through sight, for example, in Keats’ “Song about Myself”; through sound: Henry Reed’s “Naming of Parts”; through touch: Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale”; through taste and smell: Dylan Thomas’s “Fern Hill”. Poetry, John asserts, keeps these five senses alive.

I collated the following positive comments about the value of poetry from some of the other responses:

- Poetry encourages the challenge of exploring something that is less easy.
- Poetry does not have to be too easy or instantly understood; its mystery would vanish if it were always easy.
- Hard work fosters an attitude to cope with the hard things of life. If students find everything easy, the art of interpretation is lost. They don’t enjoy the accomplishment of having figured out what at first seemed undecipherable.
- Children miss out on encountering the great masters of the world if they miss out on poetry and this void brings a lack of self knowledge.
- Poetry gives young people the opportunity to stretch their minds and hearts ... [as] it is such a crucial way of transmitting our culture and values to a new generation.

Examples, such as the following, of practical outcomes from their poetry study and performance are cited by those in various professions.



As a lawyer and currently secretary to a cabinet minister, Shelley observes that, as with poetry, hearing a statement read, or said, in a certain tone of voice has more relevance than reading over a statement quietly. She adds: “Learning speech and drama taught me how to use different registers (occupational dialects) for different occasions, and different writing styles for formal and informal occasions”. Ben, a young criminal lawyer, recognises that drama in prison has been successful, through the work of Miranda Harcourt, Jim Moriarty and others. Knowing how much learning and writing poetry influenced him in his studies and in his personal life, he would like to see more poetry courses taught as a broader creative rehabilitation programme for prisoners. Many prisoners, he says, are not very articulate and basic literacy skills need to be included in the course. “Using rhythmic verse, like suitably selected Hip Hop and Rap, could be useful as a starting point in teaching language skills”, he suggests. He feels prison is not a poetry-rich environment as those in their 20s and 30s see poetry as “soft” and a sign of weakness and that is dangerous (older prisoners, he says, respect and write poetry). Prisoners will do courses to reduce sentences (like anger management and creative writing) and, he suggests, “The right course with the right teacher could be beneficial”.

A senior lecturer in Law, Tonia believes her experiences in close textual analysis of poetry help her in preparing and delivering lectures. She mentions that she did not realise how much those early performances of poetry contributed to her ability to lecture when she first stood before her audience “in that vast lecture theatre and delivered my material in the clear, firm, strong, audible voice I didn’t even know I possessed”. Working with Tonia, I realised that, even as a teenager, she had a deep knowledge of the poets, their

language and concerns, which informed her grasp of the social and historical development of society through the ages. She explains: “I think the themes from every piece of literature I have read have influenced my life and world views”.

Jessica is at the top of her field in psychiatry. She makes this valid point about the modern attitude to studying to pass exams, rather than studying to gain knowledge:

I find it increasingly a struggle to teach the poetry of psychiatry to my junior doctors, encouraging them to listen to the particular experience and humanity of their patients. They are so fixated on having to get through increasingly prescriptive exams that they are too anxious to allow time and space to entertain uncertainty; Keats’s negative capability, so essential for creative life.... I quote from Eliot and other poets in my lectures, but the awful realisation has dawned that few know whom I am talking about.... [When] people are not educated in the symbolic understanding of poetry [they are left] with a constricted and literal view of poetry.

Eileen, a solicitor, says: “It is amazing how few words can describe a scene so vividly – important in my job. I work with language on a daily basis, having to think on my feet, and poetry is one of many genres that complete the picture”. For her work she has studied French and Spanish, and the poetry of these languages, and knows she speaks each language more fluently than most second language speakers “because my ear is attuned to vowel sounds and accent”. In the USA she needs to be fluent in languages to relate immediately to her clients. Angela, an army officer, says “Memorising the poems

trained me to memorise anything. Poetry also filled in the dark moments, the waiting moments, the uneasy silences, and helped relieve the tension. It gave power to my voice [as a woman], developed my imagination and softened the harsher side of soldiering”.

Studying and learning poetry was mentioned as important in the training to be a journalist, a reporter or a TV presenter, as both Kelly and Miriama observe. These occupations make great demands upon one’s language skills, written, oral and visual. Kelly, currently a radio reporter, knows that poetry has broadened her general knowledge and given her the ability to write succinctly and expressively, so essential for a journalist. It has made her aware of life’s experiences and emotions and the ability to think creatively and to express herself in different genres. Through studying poetry, writing about poetry and hearing it spoken in her teens, Kelly learned the basics of writing, and she has developed an understanding of writing styles and is able to grasp other styles. But Kelly would also like to see “teachers and lecturers of business studies, of journalism, of commerce given a good grounding in poetry so that they can teach others the English language – poetic language, transactional language, specific language and descriptive language, enthusiastically and correctly”. Miriama (on TV) says poetry “taught me about a turn of phrase, about painting pictures and moods with words,<sup>120</sup> about being economic, detailed, playful,<sup>121</sup> introspective,<sup>122</sup> joyful – so invaluable in my work”.

The youngest respondent, and still a University student, Charlotte, represents the view of a student of speech and drama who has come recently from today’s NCEA classroom.

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<sup>120</sup> Janet Frame’s “The Tree”. Hone Tuwhare’s “Snowfall.”

<sup>121</sup> Janet Frame’s “Comment.”

<sup>122</sup> Fleur Adcock’s “After the Board-meeting.”

She feels it is hard to shift ideas and attitudes instilled in high school. Now she is majoring in English with some poetry papers because “my tutorial in English 102, which I loved, was a positive experience like my speech and drama lessons. These experiences made me tackle poetry at Uni; learning to get inside poetry and not stand back”. She reflects:

I hope to be a teacher, and although I feel I’ve been educated in a generation of New Zealand students who, in my limited experience, fear and dislike poetry, I want to change my attitudes and my prospective students’ attitudes because poetry touches on so many aspects of writing and speaking English.

All these former students of mine surprised and moved me when they wrote about the infinite variety of ways in which poetry played a significant role in their education and later careers and how they, in turn, are influencing others through their mastery of the spoken, written and visual elements of poetry. I was impressed by examples such as Jules valuing poetry for keeping our eyes “seeing softly”<sup>123</sup> and as a way of learning “things about myself”; as Anne’s belief that poetry evokes a greater understanding of the human condition, “teaching me who I am and what I believe in”<sup>124</sup>; and as Michael’s application of the influence of poetry in commerce, when he spoke of “having been pushed beyond my comfort zone to face up to an audience – alone on stage; a scary gamble, until I came to like it, and am now incorporating poetry successfully into my programmes”. Fran acknowledged that the arts of persuasion, negotiation and mediation stem from higher diploma work in her own speech and drama classes and for “securing the positions of

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<sup>123</sup> “Your dolls and teddy bears / huddled in tears on the shelf .... Mary, your dolls and bears /are dancing / we are all dancing ....” Alistair Campbell’s “Home from Hospital.”

<sup>124</sup> “Once you set out there is no turning back.” Alistair Campbell’s “The Climber.”

responsibility I wanted”; and Maree mentions another, and very important dimension to learning and reciting poetry, which is, dealing with stress, as she observes humorously, “When I feel the arteries might be getting clogged I rattle off some poetry, such as ‘The Highwayman’ or ‘Lochinvar’ or sing up and down a scale, to test if everything is in working order”. Hilary, in similar vein, mentions wryly: “I shall be grateful for all the poetry I have learned if I am stuck in a prison sometime”!<sup>125</sup>

### **On reflection**

In summary, I see several ways in which my teaching of poetry in school differed from today’s pedagogy. For example:

- In the 1950s and ‘60s the English curriculum was less comprehensive than it is today, and poetry was included equally with prose and drama in class work and examination questions. Today’s students remain longer at school and become “examination-oriented”, as Jessica observed.
- Group speaking of poetry was more popular as a means of teaching poetry until the 1980s, when the classes became larger and time was at a premium for teaching all the aspects of the English curriculum.
- Speech and drama classes were always available during class time, or lunch time, for those whose parents were enthusiastic or who had themselves learned elocution (as it was called), or were sent to speech to develop confidence, or had the financial means to include tuition outside school time. Today, most teachers of

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<sup>125</sup> “Stone walls do not a prison make / Nor Iron bars a cage.” Lovelace’s “To Althea, from Prison.”

speech and drama teach students in groups of four or more, and always outside class time. There are fewer qualified speech and drama teachers today.<sup>126</sup>

- Most teachers of years 9 and 10 students in the 50s and 60s had time to teach poetry at depth because there was less emphasis upon exams and assessments. If tests were set, it was usually only at the end of the year as an indication to parents of their sons/daughters' progress.
- Poetry was taken for granted as part of the English programme. In my surveys of and interviews with teachers (chapters 3 and 4) several teachers expressed their regret that poetry has become less important as they endeavour to implement the requirements of the current curriculum.
- While we, as teachers in the 50s, 60s and 70s, were anxious for our students to attain well in examinations, and were fully cognisant with the requirements of the examination syllabus, we taught our students matter beyond the Government syllabuses from schemes of work composed by the school and English teacher.

Reading their enthusiastic tributes to poetry, I am inspired to “make words break from me”, as Hopkins did, to encourage teachers to think “afresh” about finding ways to teach more poetry. The testimonies of these former students of mine, some now retired, others still in the work force, just 72 of many more I might have contacted, bear witness to the impact poetry has made upon their personal and public lives.

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<sup>126</sup> In 1985 our association was “Thinking a thousand” qualified members. Today there are 280 members, and only some of these teachers are also trained primary or post-primary teachers.

In chapters three, four and five evidence was provided as to the current flight from poetry by students either put off poetry or afraid of it. Yet focusing on poetry across all the language modes has been used successfully as a microcosm for teaching English for almost twenty years at the Christchurch College of Education (CCE). An holistic teacher-education programme with poetry as the force driving the English curriculum, as described in chapter eight, will make the teaching of poetry more than merely peripheral if perceived barriers are broken down by the teachers who go through the programme. Their evidence suggests this is already happening where they are employed.

In the next chapter, I shall report on my observations of the pre-service course for student teachers preparing to teach English to secondary school students through multimodal practices in the teaching of poetry. Having been somewhat disillusioned by the comments of practising teachers and the present day students, I was eager to know how these future teachers are trained to teach English, and particularly poetry, in today's schools. There are obviously dedicated teachers out there in the classrooms, but they are restricted by the barriers that prevent them from giving time to the teaching of poetry. I am certain that attitudes can be reversed if those teachers who say they want to teach poetry or are fearful of teaching poetry for whatever reasons, realise the positive and lasting outcomes of implementing the teacher education programme described in the following chapter.

## Chapter Eight

Poetry has not room for timidity of tread  
 tiptoeing in footprints already made  
 running afraid of the word-stranger glimpsed out of the corner of the eye  
 lurking in the wilderness.

Janet Frame: "Some of my Friends are Excellent Poets". (19-22)

### Pre-service education

Having heard of the teacher education course at the CCE, I asked Ronnie Davey, teacher educator, if I could observe her first term course on the teaching of English at the beginning of 2005. This course, EN311, introduced by Elody Rathgen in 1988, has been developed and taught by Davey and other teacher educators at the CCE since then.

EN311 is an example of an approach to teaching English holistically through poetry, which, if introduced into every year 9 class, and continued through to year 13, can lead to poetry being once again a preferred option in the English programme. As I argued in chapter two, poetry in *ENZC* is included as one of many genres, and as "a literary text among a wide range of texts" (16). The plan for teaching English in this course at the CCE highlights poetry as a means of affirming "the importance of literature for literacy development, for imaginative development and for developing personal, social, cultural, historical and national awareness and identity" (Course description). The course work aims to illustrate how poetry is a valid tool for teaching the written, oral and visual aspects of English at every level, dynamically, practically and in terms of sound pedagogy.



This chapter

- reports on the sessions for Block One at the CCE where I observed the process of training, the pedagogical approaches taught to the graduates and the application of theoretical approaches to using poetry as a significant model for teaching English
- recounts my interview with the teacher-educator about the development of the course, its history and probable success, and the relevance of Block One to the four term programme
- summarises facts and opinions from my interviews with the graduates about the course and their experiences after being on section with associate teachers
- reports on my survey of some of those graduates who are still teaching English, and who were trained at the CCE between 1996 and 2003
- evaluates the advantages of the course for the teaching of English in schools
- publicises the advantages of such a course.

From these points I want to draw conclusions from my impressions of this course about teacher education, relating them to the outcomes revealed by my surveys and interviews with current teachers and students in New Zealand schools.

### **Outline of the CCE course**

As an observer of the Block One sessions, Teaching English years 9-13 (EN 311), I spent three two-hour sessions a week for five weeks from 7 February 2005, with the student teachers of English, under the guidance of Ronnie Davey, principal teacher-

educator. Twenty graduates, with a pre-requisite of English 200 level (but studying other teaching courses as well) enrolled in this course. It was structured to focus on

knowledge and application of key philosophical and pedagogical approaches that inform current thinking in English [according to the New Zealand Curriculum] ... as student-centred and inclusive teaching and learning strategies across the three language strands (Course description).

Students were from various parts of New Zealand, as well as from Canada, the USA, and other countries where they had been teaching, such as Japan and Spain. Some had just graduated but others had already experienced classroom teaching and were ready to share their knowledge of teaching practice in and outside New Zealand schools. This input, therefore, was rich and heterogeneous.

My first reaction was to make a comparison between this course and the training as a primary school teacher that I had received from 1948 to 1950, and the course former students said they had experienced in the 60s and 70s. For many years the only requisite needed to teach in a secondary school was a degree from a University, or a primary teacher's training and six units of a degree. With a course such as I was privileged to observe at the CCE for those about to teach English in our schools, I wondered why some secondary school students now leave school with poor English skills, unqualified and often unemployable, and with a negative attitude to poetry. I learnt, however, that a course similar to this one is not taught in any other College of Education in New Zealand.

The course is a microcosm of the teaching of English according to *ENZC*. The programme, the activities and the ongoing requirements from the students, and the strategies and resources necessary for successful teaching and learning, mirror in five weeks the functions and processes, the achievement objectives and learning outcomes that, as teachers, the students would be expected to cover for levels 9 to 13 for the teaching of oral, written and visual language.

For the 311 EN course, ongoing requirements and activities include the reading of relevant professional material, the major curriculum document and support documents, texts, journal articles and resources containing materials that inform the current philosophies and practice of teaching English. Participants are expected also to read a wide range of adolescent fiction and non-fiction texts, to attend to journal writing, to use STUDENTNET,<sup>127</sup> as well as to set and achieve their own goals. Full attendance, punctuality and active participation in all class activities are essential to fulfill the course. Assessment requirements additional to these activities include

- a poetry lesson plan assignment
- formal and informal written reflections of class work
- discussion of issues in class (NCEA, for example)
- the referencing and critique of professional readings
- self, peer and teacher assessment
- language resource journal.

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<sup>127</sup> A web site for the students at the CCE with resources, messages from teachers, extra lecture notes and other relevant information.

Students are also given an overview of various theoretical approaches to teaching literature, and especially poetry, including

- the personal growth model
- reader response approaches
- the cultural heritage model
- critical literacy approaches.<sup>128</sup>

A summary of these approaches is given to the students with reference material for research and reading. These models that inform the current teaching of English are developed in Blocks 2 and 3. Over the year the course enables students to become aware of current critical debates and issues pertaining to the teaching and learning of English, such as notions of literacy, the place of media studies, sexuality, gender and bi-cultural issues in language and literacy. Mention is made of the relevance of certain poems which are cameos of such issues, for example, Apirana Taylor's poems, and Lydia Wever's edited volume, *Yellow Pencils: Contemporary Poetry by New Zealand Women*.

Each two-hour period that I attended, involved listening, writing, practical work solo and in small or full groups, with constant reference to the curriculum material. Such pedagogy modelled future lesson planning. The full course is organised as follows:

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<sup>128</sup> Appendix B.1: 13.

**Block One** focuses on *ENZC* and pedagogies in English and literacy, using poetry as a microcosm for oral, written and visual language, the writing process, and the uses of ICTs.<sup>129</sup>

**Block Two** develops the theory behind *ENZC* by focusing on reading and related theoretical and practical issues, such as reader response, critical literacy and gender and “low progress”<sup>130</sup> issues, assessment and NCEA examinations.

**Block Three** returns to practical teaching methods focusing on oracy, drama, and Shakespeare as literature and drama.

**Block Four** draws the threads together and advises on long term planning, transitions into teaching, completed assignments and on any individual needs or gaps.

Assessments are due approximately every two weeks and these include assignments, reflections, presentations to the class and ongoing journal work recording personal reading, language resources and responses to issues, articles and personal professional development.

The assessment process serves a developmental purpose for the students, with ample feedback, written comments and specific suggestions for the building-up of skills. Informal feedback on assignments in progress is available with a possibility of resubmission of work. There is also a place for self and peer assessment. Assignment criteria suit each task, giving students a range of possibilities which they may, in their turn, model in the future.

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<sup>129</sup> Information and Communication Technology.

<sup>130</sup> Students whose reading age is below their chronological age.

Over all, the course is a busy and full one, covering strategies which relate to the key strands, the achievement objectives and the specific learning outcomes as outlined in the curriculum and which the students will model when they become teachers.

Using poetry as a model for teaching in the first block places it as a dominating force to intersect with every other aspect of the course. During the first week (six hours of class work) it became obvious to me that these students are experiencing a variety of methods, activities, teaching points, assessment criteria, and the means of accessing resources. Ways of highlighting learning and foreshadowing the next lesson lead to well-structured lesson planning for the future. While actively engaged in “doing”, the students are learning how, why and when to use these strategies, and what material to use to teach the functions and processes of oral, written and visual strands as indicated by the curriculum. Davey presented her material in a seemingly uncontrived manner, but her skill in making connections between effective pedagogy, the students and *ENZC*, her expertise in facilitating learning and creating a supportive learning environment modelled in an exemplary way what a teacher of English is all about.

### **Content of five week programme**

Each week has a programme involving particular strategies for learning and teaching and foreshadows both the following week’s schedule and the whole programme. Davey uses activities to form the student teachers into a unified working group and to model the process for their future application to their own students. She uses these activities to observe the involvement of her students and their willingness and readiness to lead,

participate, initiate or exhibit signs of nervousness or reluctance to undertake risks. The programme also serves to elicit the skills and individual potentials of each member of her class, as well as to discover any limitations. The activities are verbal and physical, and require quick thinking, acute concentration and intellectual interpretation. They demonstrate examples of student-centred learning, modern pedagogy and collaborative experiences.

In week one, time is given to checking out the students' own previous experiences about teachers of English and the methods they used to motivate students. Davey pressed class members to avoid generalisations and be specific about "learning" and "teaching" demanding individual replies, small group and full class discussion and written records.

Students are asked to consider

- English teachers who "lit a spark"
- the skills and attitudes of "particularly good" teachers
- their approach to the subject of English and to their pupils
- how they engendered a sense of interest, enthusiasm and success.

Discussion also centres upon pinpointing methods and attitudes of former teachers who failed to inspire pupils. A further exploration reveals how much or how little poetry was taught during these student teachers' years at school. Enthusiasm about poetry was shown by a minority. This was elaborated upon in a later session.

The following material is introduced in the three sessions:

- "The Big Picture", which is the history and ideology of *ENZC*.

- An explanation of each individual's journal "to record the process of learning to be a teacher of English with all its exhilarations and frustrations" (Davey) by exploring, analysing and evaluating each activity, strategy and performance, and the lessons observed and presented. This ongoing professional journal would continue towards a final synthesis and evaluation to be presented in Block Four.
- Finally, a preliminary discussion on poetry teaching invites students to be honest about and more definitely pinpoint their previous experiences of being taught poetry, and the value of using poetry as a microcosm for teaching English. In this section Davey is beginning to break down barriers and change the students' attitudes to poetry.

I found the three sessions provided students with a wealth of material that would lead to further discussion and exploration, demanding of them a questioning of their own strengths and inhibitions, their conceptualisation of the term "English teaching" and a challenge to find their own metaphor to describe their ongoing personal, professional and academic journey. I was aware that these students are enrolled in other courses and there is little free time. The programme, so far, was full and varied, and many activities and theoretical input had necessarily to be covered summarily, although the educator would have liked to deal with the processes and topics in more detail.

Even at this stage, several students expressed to me a delight in the format and evolution of the course, comparing it more than favourably with other courses.



In the second week ongoing reading, goal-setting and journal writing continues along with an introduction to the teaching of poetry. Sessions are arranged to deal with personal barriers to poetry – the experiences, causes and results. Being more comfortable in the group and with the teacher educator, the students are honest in their responses which match those that surfaced in my own survey of teachers and students. They are directed to articles such as Diane Lochward’s “Poets on Teaching Poetry” (1994). The points made in this paper are pertinent to introducing the inexperienced teacher to a successful method for engaging students in poetry. Edited to their basic statements, they read:

- Do not explain the poem to students ...
- Do not give tests on poetry ...
- Do not be overly concerned with techniques ...
- Expose students to beautiful powerful language ...
- Allow time for multiple readings of a poem ...
- Lead discussions that encourage a personal relationship with the poem ...
- Provide activities that actively engage students with a poem ...
- Teach poems that you do not fully understand ...
- Teach contemporary poetry first; then go backwards in time.

Davey suggested small group discussion of this article, first to identify salient points, especially personal opinions arising from their own experiences. In this way Davey not only encourages close reading, but models effective discussion techniques.

Another interesting article given to the students for discussion is Bernard Gadd’s

“Poetry for Maori, Polynesian and Asian Students” (1997). This paper argues that poets, like teachers, have “a way with words” and use the “words that come to hand” for whatever the situation requires. Every child, Gadd argues, can “use words imaginatively”. Poems do not have only one meaning. Gadd offers examples of poems written by immigrants to New Zealand (Shirley Lim is one of them) and reminds readers that writers like Hone Tuwhare, David Eggleton, Albert Wendt, Hinewirangi and Ling-yen are bilingual, bicultural New Zealanders. Gadd includes poems for ESOL students, such as his own poem, “Birthday Wishes for Oi Ling”. He includes resources useful for teachers of years 8, 9, 10 and upwards and reminds readers that in our New Zealand classrooms there are multi-ethnic students who welcome literature that declares their ethnicity through language and ideas.

Gadd’s paper initiates valuable discussion among the students, opening up possibilities some of them may not have encountered in their own school experience: the changing face of classrooms in New Zealand from intakes of immigrant students, and those fee-paying students, whose first language is not English, seeking education in New Zealand. Davey provides sheets of poems to supplement the material suggested by Gadd in his article.

Davey’s next step is to initiate a positive approach to teaching through a comprehensive and critical scrutiny of the curriculum. Davey urges her class to be totally familiar with the document and to test every lesson for its relevance to the curriculum. She has devised a template to use with every lesson plan to determine how the unit to be

taught to a class measures its relevance to the curriculum: oral, written and visual strands; achievement objectives, functions, processes, links with other strands.

The close reading of a variety of genres, transactional writing, visual language and the presenting of seminars, television/newspaper/magazine study and advertising assignments are explored, and the study of the novel, short story, Shakespeare, public speaking and debating. All of this is programmed in the curriculum. The class is beginning to realise that poetry

- overlaps every aspect of the English programme and can also integrate with art, music, social studies and dance
- serves many pedagogical purposes, as it demonstrates the precision of language
- is a powerful tool for exploring textual and contextual meanings when students, working collaboratively, pool ideas.

Working with poetry, therefore, and applying the activities to learning and teaching aspects of the curriculum, Davey focuses the student teachers' attention upon strategies for using the curriculum to advantage. A three-pronged approach to poetry is proposed as (a) being valuable in the development of language; (b) exploring the visual nature of poetry; (c) using technology with poetry. Davey provides students with plenty of examples for all levels.

The students are encouraged to listen to the voices of poetry and extend poetry to literacy and oracy sections of the school syllabus. In Block Two, post-section experiences

lead to strategies for reading acquisition and critical literacy for teaching reading and viewing. In Block Three more attention is paid to oracy and strategies for integrating speaking and listening for learning. Activities using poetry at this stage underpin later concentration upon literacy and oracy in the three language strands.

I was able to be part of the activities and was impressed with the group dynamics when an activity was in progress. Although it was only the second week that these student teachers had been together, they already exhibited qualities of collaboration within the group, strategies for accomplishing tasks, and the confidence to question the differences between keeping the class busy and purposeful pedagogy. This week's activities demonstrated for the students the value and authenticity of the course.

The third week began with further activities covering all language modes. With those already dispensed, a valuable collection of resources to suit all age ranges is provided for the student teachers.

Some assignments are also due in the third week and others initiated, for example:

- A record of students' own professional reading is expected.
- A personal reading record and critical reviews of young adult fiction are to be completed. Students are urged to read as many books as possible for written reviews and personal presentation to the class.
- A language resource journal is begun.

- The Poetry Assignment is initiated, directing the students to thematic, dramatic and personal responses.

The possibility of thematic structure in teaching is also promoted, where poetry, novel/short story and short films can be integrated to explore an issue or topic. These will all prove valuable resources when the students have their own classes.

Students are advised about lesson planning, feed-back and feed-forward. They are also invited to visit schools around Christchurch and observe classes. This experience proves a valuable experience when students recall for each other the reality of classes in action. Being quiet observers of method and response, talking casually to students and gaining impressions of school policy and discipline, students acquire valuable clues to current educational trends. For some of them, the reality is a shock when faced with classes where behaviour patterns are a problem for the teacher. Strategies to deal with such problems are discussed in class.

The fourth week is the week when more assignments are due, NCEA is under discussion, the teaching of written expression through poetry is introduced and a preliminary reference is made to assessment processes.

The major assignment, the Poetry Lesson Plan, is expected to contain:

- a. A sequence of lessons centred on a theme of their choice.
- b. In pairs, a small anthology centred upon a different theme.
- c. A poem to read aloud to the whole group.

Students are required to consider:

key strands ... achievement objectives ... levels/years

specific learning outcomes ... methods ... variety of activities

actual resources ... transitions and links between activities ... conclusions

timing and sequence of lessons... methods of assessment and assessment tasks.

These considerations are to be written in a detailed manner and to identify functions and processes, pre-reading activities, how to promote involvement from the class, key instructions, explanations and organisation of lesson to promote learning.<sup>131</sup>

NCEA is discussed as the media reports of the 2004 examinations were published. All of these CCE student teachers had left school before NCEA was introduced, but two of them had prepared year 11 students for NCEA 1. This topic, therefore, evokes many questions for clarification as NCEA 1 is a completely new approach as an achievement-based assessment.

A beginning is made on the strategies and approaches to written expression, with possible barrier-breaking activities. Integrating spoken, written and visual language is introduced, using creative writing composed, spoken and “published” on posters. Many of these examples are poetry.

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<sup>131</sup> See Appendix B.1. for examples.

In the fifth week the classes are geared towards preparation for going to schools for their first session with an associate teacher.<sup>132</sup> An unexpected (and for me, horrifying) early morning session is a threatening example of a “different” kind of teacher, role-played realistically by Davey. We were treated to the display of an unfair, dismissive, inconsistent, satirical, humiliating teacher. A few of the students are familiar with a teacher like this. Discussion led to the effects this might have upon a class. (Later, in discussion during a case study with a 16 year old girl, I realised such behaviour certainly occurs in school today).

Finally, all assignments are due for assessment. Directions about the forthcoming teaching practice and the possible attitudes of associate teachers are discussed.

Much of the students’ time in this fifth week is dedicated to personal interviews with the teacher educator. The course has been a full one in practice, completing assignments, collating material, lesson planning, questioning methodology and clarifying pedagogy. Even so, the students generously find time to contribute to my research.

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<sup>132</sup> Each student teacher is teamed with a class teacher at the school whose responsibilities are:

- To assist and check the planning and design of the student teacher’s lessons.
- To supervise the student teacher’s implementation of lessons.
- To provide written and oral feedback to the student teacher.
- To identify strengths of the student teacher and to highlight areas that he/she still needs to develop proficiency in.
- To make transparent decisions about unit planning and grouping.
- To offer opportunities for the student teacher to be involved with a range of school activities and to be part of the school community, e.g. participating in the school production.
- To show procedural features connected to the running of the school, e.g. the correct way to take the attendance roll.

These interviews affirm for me the value of this particular period of the course. The place of poetry in the teaching of English can be central to the whole English programme, not peripheral, as the earlier surveys of teachers and students led me to believe.

Davey has been teaching the course since *ENZC* was gazetted in 1996, and has continually updated the pre-service training in line with current pedagogy. Intersecting poetry and the spoken word in performance poetry is used in teaching the oral language speaking section of the curriculum. A new term, *literocracy*, used by Maisha Fisher and other authors, describes the blurring “of the boundaries between the oral/aural and written while emphasising that language processes exist in partnership with action in order to guide young people to develop a passion for words and language”.<sup>133</sup> Davey gave examples of poems that could be used in class like the rap, such as Liz Lockhead’s “Girl talk/Boy talk” (which Davey and I performed). Such performance poems also serve as models for a creative writing programme.

I found the five weeks so valuable that I was tempted to accept the invitation to return for the rest of the course. I regretted so much that such a course had not been in vogue when I was trained. Not only did I feel privileged to observe the expertise, the energy and educational commitment of Davey, the teacher educator, but I was also impressed with the dedication of the student teachers. I learned so much about teaching and about teaching poetry.

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<sup>133</sup> *English Education* 37.2 (2005): 91.



### **Student teachers speak out**

As well as talking informally to the student teachers, and participating from time to time in activities, I conducted semi-formal discussions in small groups, and in-depth interviews with two individuals concerning their responses to the course, how it fulfilled their expectations, and their hopes in being able to implement the strategies for teaching successfully. As the course was still in progress these men and women preferred to remain anonymous.

In general, the student teachers were emphatic about the value of the course, the economical use of time in covering so much material, the valuable resource material given and the opportunity to practise lesson presentation and receive feedback. B admitted that, coming from a drama background, much of the content of what was taught was familiar, but the presentation and peer work, and the application of it to the curriculum added a different perspective to teaching. Some in the group spoke of their confusion between what was reported as “reality” in a classroom where boys and girls misbehaved, were reluctant to be at school, and reacted with antagonism or apathy towards teachers and subjects they did not like, and the possibility of enabling classes to be as enthusiastic as they were about poetry teaching in the English programme. They admitted that their own attitudes towards poetry had changed for the better in the past few weeks, but they wondered if the activities would work in the real classroom. From their observation of actual class work in schools in the previous week, they questioned their own ability to be assertive and carry out what they would like to do. Two students questioned their own experience of teenage development and behaviour, as slightly

removed from the attitudes, beliefs and hang-ups of today's thirteen and fourteen year olds as reported by teachers and other student teachers engaged in other courses at the CCE. Dealing with such problems, they agreed, would probably become clearer as the course proceeded.

R, who was not born in New Zealand, was excited by the New Zealand literature she had already read. P expressed regret that his secondary school had not introduced him to poetry and that consequently, he had a limited knowledge of poetry and a great deal of catching up to do. (In a later response to a survey paper, P expressed his enjoyment of teaching poetry). On the whole, the student teachers were anxious to get started and claim their own classroom.

I observed that these student teachers were fired by the enthusiasm and energy of Davey; they were being well prepared for practising teaching; they believed their confidence in their own abilities was growing and they would enjoy teaching, but they needed time to integrate the theoretical and the practical, and apply strategies appropriately. The students realised that this was just one semester, and much had yet to be covered. All observed that using poetry as a microcosm of learning and teaching English at all levels, especially at levels 9 and 10, is a holistic way of teaching according to the New Zealand curriculum, an idea they would not have preconceived. But they did wonder where it would fit into the syllabus at year 11 when there was urgency about not achieved, achieved, credit and distinction for NCEA 1.

Another more personal matter that I observed related to student teachers' vocal skills. In a large, noisy classroom, or one where students displayed inattention or behaviour problems, the students wondered if they would be heard and obeyed. Some did not know how to project. I did wonder if their voices would survive in a classroom. That problem might be addressed later in the year but it was very important that it was addressed. As a voice management specialist, I have known too many teachers who suffered from laryngitis in their first year teaching. I therefore gave the students copies of *Speak Up*, a book I wrote on voice work for teachers and students, as a resource.

The following are summaries of interviews or/and written reports of students' experiences on section in schools. To protect the name of the city/town (these schools were not necessarily in Canterbury), the school and the student teacher, I have used a letter, e.g. "M", to indicate the student teacher. Associate teachers are not named. Schools are referred to merely by roll size and gender, if relevant. The responses indicate a broad spectrum of the method of teaching English, mainly at levels 9 and 10, throughout the country.

M first observed English at year 9 at an all boys' school of more than 1000 students. Here she observed and taught short periods of recognising homonyms and antonyms and checking spelling. The year 9 class was a "slow stream" group, M says, who thought it was "not cool" to like poetry or do well in class, preferring not to know the answers. M noted that the boys "hated" the novel they were studying. Some creative writing was attempted, but with little seriousness. Most of the examples displayed were, according to

M, “dirty” and unacceptable. A few showed promise, but the students were reluctant to show them to the class for fear of ridicule. The sonnet “had a mention” yet the form was not understood by the boys. It was not a happy experience and M sensed the class, as a whole, were reluctant learners, and the teacher was at a loss to know how to keep them interested.

M’s second section was with a year 9 class who were keen students, and the school had excellent resources. Here the students created poems and shaped them. Figures of speech that “sound like ...” and “look like ...” were handled with originality and enthusiasm. Students prepared folios with two limericks, three haiku, and a free verse poem. While this was an introduction to form in poetry, there was no study or learning of poetry, M explains. A second teaching experience at the same school was with year 10 students who had to write ten lines of verse about any topic, with the only direction that the poem “had to rhyme”. This exercise, M believes, was obviously to keep the students busy. The resulting lines were something like “The fat cat/sat on the mat”. On the whole poetry was not of great importance in either school, M says, although, at the second school, the year 9 folios illustrated an understanding of the form of poetry and the students showed a better attitude to the work.

K also experienced a year 9 class at an all boys’ school. The initial responses from students were negative, but as the lesson progressed, K says, the students became interested as they used poetry to access language terminology, rather than study poetry. After four weeks the students were given a test structured to apply the language terms to

two poems. This class, K says, aimed at level 4 approximately of the 8 level band. She noticed that English teachers on the staff often saw poetry as hard to teach and did not enjoy teaching it. They generally (in K's words) "looked down on it" as a unit not worth spending time and effort on as it produced no noticeable reward or profitable outcome. K's evaluation of the lessons she took was that all the activities were successful when they allowed room within the lessons to connect directly with the students. Offering the writing of a poem as a reward at the end of the lesson was seen as a successful way of class management. The boys usually had a "hang-up" with making poems rhyme. They forced the rhyming words for that reason. A couple of brighter students learned to use free verse and so went deeper into the text. K was invited to give the introductory unit on poetry to two other year 9 classes, with successful outcomes.

P's general comment prefacing the report on her one opportunity to teach poetry is that the perceived notion of poetry is that it is inaccessible for some students and boring for others. P believes that a lack of varied and rich teaching styles causes this. Armed with ideas on teaching English through the microcosm of poetry, P hoped to explore texts interactively, deal with gender issues, and use language creatively. P observed the class teacher presenting *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to a year 9 class. Viewing the film was the dominant teaching medium and the students responded to this. Extracts from the play were reviewed in class, mainly in relation to the plot and characters. P attempted to engage the students with the couplet rhyme scheme to explore the language of Shakespeare, and guided students in creating their own poems using couplets. This was

presented as “rap”, which contextualised Shakespeare, making it relevant for the class culturally.

P observed that the class room walls were adorned with examples of poetry devices, a poster displaying onomatopoeia, one with metaphor and one with alliteration. The students, therefore, were immersed in poetic terms and could recognise them in a text. The associate teacher was liberal in allowing P to structure lessons and to introduce activities to keep the lessons interactive and interesting. P found the experience most enjoyable as the class responded well.

F’s first experience was the first lesson of an introductory poetry unit to a year 10 class whose average reading age was said to be about 9-10 years. Specific functions and strands were not discussed with the associate teacher but the focus was intended to be upon written language/spoken language/exploring language. As the focus with the class teacher was to manage the class with quiet individual work, worksheets and copying notes from the blackboard in order to have them pass tests, F attempted pair work, self and peer evaluation of poetry games. As the students were used to being “kept on a tight rein” they became disruptive and F felt her skills in class management in that particular class needed honing. On reflection, F remarks that in the hands of an experienced and effective teacher the class would have enjoyed and learned from many of the techniques she had learned from Davey’s sessions.

T's experiences were similar. Most of the students, she says, admitted they hated poetry. After a few periods, however, the students were less hostile and even seemed to enjoy it. T wondered if the attitude would remain when their class teacher resumed teaching. T noticed that year 12 students struggled with creative poetry writing, yet eventually "turned out some excellent poems". Year 13 students had great difficulty analysing poems, but when T showed them how to scaffold<sup>134</sup> the process, the students soon were able to work on their own. T remarks that, on the whole, poetry was not a popular unit until they were shown some ways in to the texts. Shakespeare's sonnets were "hated", she says.

L spoke of a most satisfying experience in an all girls' school. The class had seen the film, *Dead Poets' Society*, and L introduced a unit created from the poems referred to in the film. Some excellent in-depth poetry study resulted from this unit, L says. Her associate invited her to take over the class while she was on section and commended her on the quality of her teaching. At a much later date, I met a student from that class who spoke enthusiastically about the lessons and the student teacher, unaware that I was engaged in research into the teaching of poetry.

Collating the reports of the students, I saw similar threads emerging from the experiences of the students in several schools from different parts of the country. The student teacher's first impression was that a class had a general dislike for poetry, but showed a gradual acceptance of it as an interesting unit when working under the student

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<sup>134</sup> A scaffold breaks down a task into a series of manageable parts to show clearly how that task is to be achieved. By scaffolding learning, teachers make explicit the skills and processes that students need to master in order to complete the task independently.

teacher. When the associate teacher saw the class was responding to the pedagogy, the student teacher was invited to take over other English classes.

I noted that the word “hate” was used as an attitude to poetry in every report or interview. The references to successful teaching of poetry applied to classes where the associate teacher used varied and interesting approaches, or a teacher from a previous year had produced an anthology with (usually) a year 9 class. Most of the student teachers reported a change in the attitude of the students after one or two sessions with them, and three spoke of a developing enthusiasm as the unit of work progressed.

I concluded from these reports that the student teachers believe that the success of poetry teaching observed or taught depends upon the approach of the teacher in relation to the attitude and circumstances of the students. As M observed, “A new teacher coming in for a few well-prepared sessions gets a different response from the class than does the regular teacher who has to cover the curriculum prescription in a set time with unwelcome interruptions and varied behaviour patterns, day after day”.

#### **Teachers trained before 2004**

I was fortunate in being able to follow up teachers who had trained at the CCE prior to 2005. I wanted to discover if the course was still felt to be practicable four to five years after the student teachers were introduced to it. I wondered if the pedagogies of various schools, attitudes of Departments of English and the introduction of NCEA had impinged upon their desires and ability to teach English through poetry. I hoped that their resource kit of strategies



and methods for using poetry as a microcosm for teaching English holistically at all levels was still being used and was being continuously supplemented.

I was given contact names of those who had trained with Ronnie Davey from 1996 to 2005. Selection of students depended upon:

- the availability of addresses from Davey's personal file
- whether they were still engaged in teaching English
- the possibility of selecting several teachers from one particular year of training, and a few before and after that period.

Davey indicated five of the 25 teachers for whom she had addresses had probably resigned, and two or three might have transferred to other schools overseas as she had not been in contact with them recently, and they had indicated their intentions to resign or travel. I followed up three of these, but they were unable to be contacted.

Seventeen teachers were accessible and survey papers were sent to teachers who trained at the CCE from 2000 to 2003 (including one prior to 2000).

Fifteen papers were returned<sup>135</sup> as follows:

<b>Year trained:</b>	
<b>1996</b>	<b>= 1</b>
<b>2000</b>	<b>= 2</b>
<b>2001</b>	<b>= 2</b>
<b>2002</b>	<b>= 8</b>
<b>2003</b>	<b>= 2</b>

<sup>135</sup> Two teachers did not reply.

This was a useful percentage of return as teachers reported how poetry was taught both before and after NCEA was introduced. However, although there were slight variations in content taught and numbers of hours available for the teaching of poetry, all teachers were able to teach written and oral English through poetry as taught at the CCE. One student had transferred to England after teaching in New Zealand for three years, but was happy to contribute through e-mail. All but one of the rest were still at the schools to which they had been appointed after leaving the CCE, which indicated a general satisfaction with their appointments, although Davey regretted the fact that they were not exploring other types of school and class in their early years of teaching.

Questions were put to the teachers as follows:

*1-3. Name your qualifications in English and other subjects. What other subjects do you teach?*

*A wide array of subjects was revealed:*

<b>English</b>	<b>BA (Hons)</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>English &amp; Art Theory</b>	<b>BA (Double Major)</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>English &amp; Classics</b>	<b>BA (Double Major)</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>English</b>	<b>BA</b>	<b>10</b>

**Other papers included in BA degree:**

**Art history**

**Film Studies**

**Japanese**

**Media Studies**

**Spanish**

**Theatre Studies**

*Other subjects taught by these teachers:*

**Social Studies, Journalism, Religious Studies,  
Health, Drama, Creative writing.**

All these teachers are engaged in teaching English but are also used in other departments according to papers studied at University, or in allied subjects such as Drama and Creative writing. Two of these teachers teach several media studies classes. Therefore, the expertise of these teachers is recognised and their skills are used to capacity as demonstrated here:

In 2006

Six teachers are teaching years 9, 10, 11, 12, 13.

Five teachers teach years 9, 10, 11, 12.

Two teachers teach 9, 11, 12, 13.

One teacher teaches 10, 12, 13.

One teacher teaches 9, 10.

4. *How many hours per week/month/term do you spend teaching: (a) English? (b) Poetry?*

(a) On an average, each teacher spends four hours per week with each English class; two teachers mentioned five hours per week.

(b) Average time for poetry depends upon the level taught. In junior classes (years 9 and 10), poetry is usually taught over a five/four week block, as well as during the English programme throughout the year. In senior classes (11, 12 and 13) poetry is taught for one period a week over four/five weeks to complete a theme, as well as part of the English programme when applicable. Class time for English varies little from school to school. But it is clear that poetry is taught by these CCE-trained teachers

5-6. *What, in general, is the attitude of your students towards poetry?* (I used the same scale as I did with the 2004 surveys).

**15** teachers reported both **seniors and juniors** are **interested**.

**4** stated that **juniors** are **enthusiastic**.

**6** indicated classes were apprehensive at first, and then responsive

**0** indicated “uninterested”

**0** indicated “hostile”

.

By comparison with the similar survey concerning attitude of students<sup>136</sup> this result indicated more positive responses to poetry from students at the same level.

*7. Were you convinced that the course at the CCE was effective and helpful?*

Their responses to this question are as follows:

1. Personal value

- I found the course irresistible
- It was extremely helpful, effective and enjoyable
- The experiential learning which it memorable
- I am still using ideas/philosophies/approaches in class since 2001
- I realised that we don't have to have all the answers all the time
- It was very helpful for me; but school has specific poems they prefer I teach
- I have continued to use all resources and ideas in all classes since 2002
- I have gained a huge number of resources that really suited me and my teaching methods

2. Resources included

- A vast selection of poems
- A huge range of techniques and ideas
- An excellent activities for different ability groups
- Inspiration to keep searching for relevant pedagogical material

3. Methodology used

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<sup>136</sup> See the survey of teachers on page 71.

- ways of exploring poetry at every level
- lots of interesting ways to secure interest of students
- specific – not woolly – examples and strategies to teach poetry
- activities for teaching specific figurative language techniques and crafting writing
- the creative writing course which was helpful for pre-working and peer marking strategies
- ideas broken into bite-sized pieces, scaffolded to make it accessible; complex poems that can be accessed

#### 4. Methods for improving the attitude of any class included

- taking away the fear factor by using poetry as a puzzle exercise to introduce oral or written work
- having success in small ways deconstructs the myth that poetry is difficult
- integrating poetry strategically through mime into a lesson invites critical thinking, and develops a story-line

*8-10. How successfully have you been able to teach the English programme through poetry?*

*At which levels?*

Eight teachers reported that poetry classes in their schools progress very successfully, especially with level 9 classes, and other classes become more enthusiastic as the units develop.

Four teachers mentioned poetry is received moderately well with levels 10 and 11 students.

Two teachers reported they struggled initially as students at all levels were uninterested at first, but gradually came to enjoy working with poetry as an approach to written and oral work.

One teacher observed she is sometimes successful, depending upon the class and their previous experiences.

These responses indicate that poetry study appeals more to students at year 9, possibly because there is less emphasis upon assessment, and more time is available to spend on units of work.

The teachers concluded that success depends upon three main areas of pedagogy:

1. *Breaking down barriers* by finding an opening that relates to an interest or current teenage issue, to sound, music or art work.
2. *Catching the attention of the class* with a selected poem that is fresh and relevant. The teacher's own oral delivery of the poem needs to motivate.
3. *Working with the poems to challenge the class* to explore them orally, dramatically, in group or solo, in creative ways, or into creating their own verses.

11. *What difference (if any) has NCEA made to your teaching of poetry? How?*

Six teachers stated they have known NCEA assessments since beginning teaching and have oriented their teaching towards 1.4 (short written text) and 1.6 (unfamiliar texts) from the beginning. They prefer to delay putting emphasis upon year 11 work with years 9 and 10

classes until year 11, but employ strategies that will lead gradually into unfamiliar text work over the two years.

Eight teachers regretted having to focus upon short stories for 1.4 (short text study) in year 11, but stated that it is the general approach of the school. They are concerned that, in years 9 and 10, poetry is taught to foreshadow preparation for 1.6 (unfamiliar text) in year 11.

Five teachers said they did prepare students for poetry as a short text, but in the external examinations no students used that material because the questions suited prose rather than poetry.

One teacher said poetry at 11 and 12 levels is optional, left to the discretion of the teacher, his/her ability to make it accessible, relevant and meaningful, and the attitude of the class. At that particular school poetry is not taught at these levels.

Comments about this attitude to poetry and year 11 included interesting observations from these teachers:

- Assessment-driven courses can include opportunities for studying poetry to learn techniques and craft poetry writing, but not for teaching poetry for poetry's sake.
- NCEA has made poetry teaching more clinical because of the teaching > assessment > teaching > assessment rushed timetable.
- The scope of teaching material is narrowed because of time pressure and assessment schedules.



- The thought of analysing poetry intimidates students.
- Poetry, being personal and reflective, is not as conducive to the type of questions asked; film/novel/short story questions are more predictable; teaching poetry well reduces the time for film and prose work which has more appeal for students.
- NCEA frustrates me as “literature” of all kinds is missing out to films, speeches, dramatic presentations and research. These do not require literary analysis, sadly.
- NCEA puts more pressure upon purpose and effect.
- Unfortunately, there is less scope for creativity and originality.
- Prose is easier for everyone, so poetry misses out.
- There is scope to teach and engage students in meaningful poetry study through 1.1, 2.1, 1.4, 2.4, **if** the teacher and class are keen.

These comments, similar to those reported by teachers in the 2004 surveys, also indicate that, wherever possible, these teachers use poetry to improve written and oral skills in English in all classes. Where internal and external assessments are concerned, however, teachers need to conform to the policy of the school.

### *7. Any further comments?*

Neresa points out that, through the use of creative and interesting resources students seem to become more engaged and enthusiastic about poetry in general. She explains: “Ronnie’s course introduces a huge collection of ideas on how to motivate students and keep them involved”.

Most of the students make similar comments. Armed, therefore, with their personal anthologies and collections of resources, these teachers indicate they are prepared for stimulating and inspiring methodologies for teaching written, spoken and visual English through the medium of poetry.

Listing the achievement standards available in NCEA 1, Sarah notes that only 1.3 (extended text) and 1.4 (short text) require students to be assessed on literary analysis. These achievement standards are worth 2 credits each, and require students to write about 200-300 words. The novel, drama script and short story present predictable questions, so preparation for these credits can be planned in advance with reasonable success. Therefore, the study of literature at depth is avoided and may never surface for students again.

Amelia points out that the focus, explicitly, on the importance of poetry is left to the discretion of the teacher. Currently, she teaches at a co-ed school of approximately 900 students where her poetry units are generally received well by students.

Finally, Scott T (a poet, according to Davey) used the back page of his survey form to explain how year 9 and 10 students (boys) with poor literacy skills grow in their love and appreciation of poetry as he uses multiple ways in to poetry through his wealth of resources from College. His students enjoy poetry writing “as it is short, personal, reflective and creative”, Scott T says. These students have fewer cultural, life and general knowledge experiences than private school students, he says, yet can come to grips with language features and some understanding of the “right” poems. However, he adds, smaller texts give

these students “less to grab on to”, and a study of a film or novel can be approached with direct statements and factual resources.

From these surveys several important factors became evident about the teaching of poetry in schools according to these teachers. All fifteen teachers are enthusiastic about using poetry as a microcosm for teaching English at schools of many types and deciles, and said they made a difference with level 9 students. They report that they succeeded in breaking down barriers to poetry that students set up because of previous bad experiences or no experience at all, just as they (the teachers) did with Davey at the CCE. Through incorporating poetry into units of work about oral, written and visual English teaching, they were able to introduce poetry in resourceful and strategic ways and lead on to looking more directly at poems less threateningly. This methodology invariably led to creative writing of poetry and teaching students to edit, revise, refine, critically assess their own and others’ work and class publish the result. Two teachers, Gen and Bex, say that using poetry experientially in their own course inspired them to be better teachers.

Varied results were reported with year 10 students depending upon the time factor and whether they were able to follow on with their own class, or a class already briefed in understanding poetry. In general, year 10 students were reported to be reasonably interested in poetry work in class.

It is evident, however, that year 11 students offer a challenge to working with poetry. The teachers feel NCEA 1 has become an assessment-driven course and poetry is the less favoured

option in most schools. Teachers continued to teach some poetry, but mainly to prepare students for 1.6 where, among the set selection of a possible array of twelve texts, one could be a poem.

The responses of these teachers to the applicability and excellence of the course Davey directed at the CCE are unanimous. Comments about teaching poetry to NCEA 1 students vary according to whether graduates were at the CCE before or after 2002. It is clear from my observation in 2005 that Davey introduces methodology on to how to teach poetry to year 11 students without highlighting adverse comments about NCEA 1. Poetry can be taught holistically at every level. Obstacles, if there are any, are there to be overcome through strategies and methodology.

Many student teachers, and the teachers mentioned above, spoke of the impact that relevant poetry makes upon their classes when discussing teenage issues such as those mentioned in *The Framework* (28). In classes relating to health and well-being, the social sciences and especially literature, teachers find appropriate poems, being short, incisive, pertinent and dynamic, which point to problem issues in a way a talk, a novel or a short story cannot.

Excluding the term literature from the text of *The Framework* limits the impact of poetry upon students' understanding of the genre. In particular, poetry can play such a major role not only in communication skills but also in promoting healthy attitudes and values in teenagers. Teachers need reminding, sometimes, of genres not specifically

mentioned in the curriculum when the emphasis is upon “essential learning areas” and “essential skills”.

### **“Preparing teachers for diverse classrooms”**

A parallel to the philosophy behind the CCE course is to be found in an article in *Teachers College Record*, (105: 8 Oct. 2003) “Preparing Teachers for Diverse Classrooms: Creating Public and Private Spaces to Explore Culture through Poetry Writing”. In this article, Cheryl Rosaen relates her efforts “as a teacher educator to transform [her] own curriculum, teaching and assessment practices to better prepare beginning teachers”. Her research arose from “a demographic imperative to serve an increasingly diverse population of school-age children” using poetry writing as a site for “engaging teacher candidates in learning about themselves as cultural beings” (1456). Her idea came from a study of “one of the pedagogical approaches taken in a literacy methods course”.

Rosaen wants beginning teacher candidates to consider how poetry and poetry writing can be explored in learning about “curriculum, pedagogy, multicultural competence and social justice” (1437). Rosaen’s conclusions from her research quoted responses from 12 teacher candidates who “reframed their thinking about whether and how poetry can be used as a pedagogical tool to develop knowledge of self, knowledge of others and understanding and appreciation of literature” (1467).

This article corroborates Davey's use of poetry as a holistic way of teaching English. In an interview, Davey spoke also of her course as means of integrating past and present knowledge in order to reveal understanding of self, others, the English language and literature. The course invites deeper thinking about learning and learners, teaching and teachers, Davey says. It helps to refine and develop beliefs, attitudes and expectations in a constructive way through poetry speaking, reading and writing.

Learning, Davey insists, takes place through existing knowledge acting as a sieve filtering and sorting new knowledge. Learning is both unique to the individual and a socially shared undertaking. The learning environment set up at the CCE by the English team, therefore, helps students engage with learning both as individuals and through interaction with others. Course work is an inquiry-based student-centred approach in which students worked in an active collaborative way.

Davey is aware that the student teachers are sometimes disillusioned when they go into a classroom for the first time on section. She believes that some teachers are dispirited and cynical today because they have been "assaulted with so much change in the past fifteen years they find it hard to be creative in an integrated way." She explains that many teachers fail to teach poetry because students resist it, and "some teachers do not teach it very well". Teaching today, Davey states, appears increasingly to be about "control and managing behaviour rather than managing learning". "Some teachers," she adds, "depend upon material from their University essays, which, sound in its way, is no longer compatible with today's curriculum or in touch with the needs of today's

students”. Even so, Davey believes, the teachers trained at the CCE can make a difference in schools, as they have, by their positive approach, and quality teaching – “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (1 Corinthians: 5.6).

The CCE approach to teaching English through poetry at all levels changed the feelings of dismay I registered on receiving the 2003/2004 survey papers back from teachers and students, to feelings of optimism. To illustrate the pedagogy that underpins the course, I have included some of the activities and strategies to teaching poetry as a holistic approach to teaching English in the appendix.

That poetry can be taught holistically and dynamically at all levels is clearly possible. Much seems to depend upon the attitude, resourcefulness and determination of the teacher who can find ways of incorporating poetry into units of work even in small ways, in spite of obstacles, to keep it alive and sought after by the students. The obstacles set up by factors already explained in the previous chapters, will not, I hope, deter these effective teachers from implementing the pedagogical strategies they have assimilated.

### Conclusion

I thought, this is my time. I don't have it  
for long, and the way here was never easy;

sorrow sat often like a beggar under a bridge  
darkening its passages and corners, and some days  
it moves so fast, this time of mine, I can't catch it;

but whatever it does, while I'm here nobody else  
can have it. They wouldn't feel its kick,  
nor understand the gleam in its eyes - and I do.

Lauris Edmond. "Take One". (8-15)

### Looking forward

In investigating the place of poetry in the teaching of English under the current New Zealand curriculum, I began from the premise that poetry, once taken to be a key element in the English curriculum for secondary schools, has become marginalised, and worse still, has come to be seen as irrelevant by many teachers and students. My aim in this thesis has been to demonstrate the value of teaching poetry positively and dynamically, showing how poetry as an imaginative experience can promote the personal, social and intellectual development of students at all levels with lasting outcomes. Although I have not focused upon years one to eight levels in this investigation, it is imperative that poetry be taught during these years.

I have tried also to analyse the causes of the cycle of deprivation which results from the neglect of poetry in the English programme, whereby a pattern of disadvantage is set up for the education of the next generation of students. Yet there is potential for a



positive change if the place of poetry becomes more central and more productive in the English curriculum. Strategies to achieve this change are proposed in my thesis.

My assumptions concerning the gradual marginalisation of poetry arose firstly from a comparison of my personal experiences as a student in the forties, and as a teacher from the fifties onwards, when poetry was a prescribed part of the English programme in schools and universities, with the current situation, where interviews, conversation and discussions with colleagues make clear that many see poetry as one of the least desirable options. Many teachers regret having to disregard poetry, especially at year 11, because of the wide array of options for assessment purposes, and of pressures from having to cover so much material in the English programme. It is also clear from articles in newspapers and periodicals by educationalists such as C.K.Stead and Warwick Elley (chapter two), that there is dissatisfaction with the current all-encompassing curriculum, which they believe is promulgating an assessment-driven education with a totally inadequate emphasis upon literature. As I realised from attending conferences of teachers of English, oracy, literacy and information technology (important as they are) have become the current crucial topics and the teaching of poetry in secondary schools is being edged out as a poor relation.

And yet, paradoxically, there are many more poetry web sites, publicly advertised book launches, weekend poetry writing courses for people of all ages, poetry evenings and public evenings to “Meet the poet”, than there were in the 70s and 80s. These events are well attended, but not usually by those of school age. Unfortunately, such events no

longer happen during the school day in the school classroom. There are, on an average, 944 students aged about 13 to 17 who pass Trinity College London/Guildhall speech and drama examinations annually, and 2,645 of the same age who pass Speech New Zealand speech and drama examinations. These students work towards these goals to develop their interests in literature and in performance outside school time and at some cost. Drama, poetry and prose selections are diligently studied and memorised. In the UK the Trinity/Guildhall high grade examinations are recognised by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). In Australia, year 12 and 13 students in some schools are credited with grades 7 and 8 examinations in speech and drama towards their end-of-year English School Certificate. This does not happen in New Zealand.

### **Pulling the threads together**

In my thesis I have used surveys and interviews which took me to the teachers, present day secondary school students and first year university students. A wealth of data received from the respondents forms the basis of chapters three to five and concentrates upon mostly negative responses about the current teaching of poetry in schools. However, responses to surveys from teacher-educators, student teachers of English, and former students of mine from the past fifty years, provide examples of pedagogy that can produce positive and lasting outcomes for students. Discussions of the teaching of poetry at secondary level in recent issues of educational journals for teachers such as *English in Aotearoa*, *English in Education* and *English Journal*, and of the advantages of teaching the creative writing of poetry to complement the study of canonical and modern poetry, have also been of importance. Websites also offer increasingly rich and varied resources

for the teaching of poetry in schools at a time when the teaching of poetry in years 9, 10 and 11 is declining.

All these sources confirm both the significance of the inclusion of poetry in the English programme and the serious consequences of its omission. I argue that, by neglecting the teaching of poetry or merely begrudging the time in the English programme to “fit in a few sessions”, teachers are either denying students access to what is perhaps the richest of literary genres or, at best, briefly acknowledging its place as *mentioned* in the curriculum.

### **Poetry, the curriculum and NCEA 1**

My account of the development of the curriculum from the 1940s to the present day identifies where the emphasis has been placed upon the teaching of poetry in relation to other genres to be covered in the English programme. In each reform of the curriculum, poetry is *mentioned* along with the novel, short story and drama, but clearly it has always been over to teachers to plan the English programme and implement it according to the curriculum prescription, the resources available and the particular classes. Examples of external examination papers show, however, that until the 1980s, poetry had a significant place, and in Bursary, a compulsory place, in English. Students, therefore, needed to study poetry at all levels if they were proceeding to senior level English.

During the early 90s there was vigorous debate among teachers and educationalists as to the place of literature in the English curriculum. References in *ENZC* to literature, text

or genre substantiate my conclusion that poetry had ceased to have a prominent role in the curriculum because the teacher could choose the text that best suited the class.

With the introduction in 1996 of other texts such as hyperfiction, print media, film, television and radio scripts alongside the short story and poetry, however, poetry has become a least favoured option with teenagers. Even in creative writing, English 1.1 (worth three credits), students almost always write creative prose and are encouraged by their teachers to do so. Given this avoidance of poetry, it is hardly surprising that where analysis of a poem is included in the unfamiliar text (English 1.6) achievement standard, students find the external assessment difficult.

Although there are no government internal or external assessments for years 9 and 10 students, the teaching of poetry is of comparatively minor importance in the majority of schools at these levels. But the situation is worse still in year 11 where poetry is often disregarded since other options, the short story, for example, best suit the questions on the paper for external assessments.

By many students, poetry is seen as “irrelevant” because, they say, practical skills are needed to secure employment. An instrumental view of education is revealed also by teachers’ comments, which make clear that literacy skills now need more attention because students who might otherwise leave school at fifteen are remaining at school longer to develop technical skills. Former students of mine, however, indicated that poetry was for children a way in to develop literacy skills. As many more students from

other cultures are now enrolled in our schools, poetry can also to be a positive means of teaching second language speakers the rhythm and inflection of the English language. Poetry offers students of other cultures an opportunity to claim their experiences and histories, and to educate their peers in their culture for their mutual understanding. “Open mic” night, as described by Korina M. Jocson,<sup>137</sup> and practical examples from Asher and Michael Hoyles’ article on black performance poetry, show how such activities can have successful outcomes in teaching language skills through poetry and song. (Refer also to Rosaen’s article in chapter six).

Poetic writing,<sup>138</sup> according to the students I interviewed, is not necessarily writing poetry, although the making of poetry folders is included in the English programme in some schools for level 9 students.<sup>139</sup> Likewise, prose is encouraged rather than poetry for those preparing for the internal achievement standard (English 1.1) as early as level 10. A possible reason for teachers neglecting creative writing of poetry, and for omitting poetry and preferring short stories in external achievement standard 1.4 (read, show and study a number of short texts), comes from my investigation into the content of the degrees of teachers of English. If, as is in fact so, a poetry paper is not compulsory for a BA English degree at New Zealand universities, graduates in English may choose to omit poetry from their English programme. To support this claim, statistics from the survey revealed that, of the 58 teachers who completed the survey, 35 had a BA in English, not

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<sup>137</sup> “Taking it to the Mic”, 132.

<sup>138</sup> ENZC, 141: “Writing crafted or shaped to convey ideas, thoughts, feelings, and sensory qualities ... characteristic of fiction, biography, travel ... as well as of poetry”

<sup>139</sup> See appendices B.2 and B.3 for Monique and Liz’s examples of poetry units.

all of these teachers had majored in literature, and few had included poetry papers in their degrees.

*ENZC* claims to be based upon research and curriculum development in education world-wide, but many of the teachers I interviewed commented not upon the philosophy and pedagogical initiatives of the curriculum but upon the lack of preparation and resources offered to teachers when the curriculum was gazetted. They felt new ideas and procedures need to be piloted first so that teachers can come to grips with them and feel more confident before they teach them to their students. Teachers also admitted to being bewildered by the multiplicity of choice in the oral, written and visual achievement objectives. This last attitude is expressed also by the New Zealand poet, Brian Turner in his article, “If I were an English Teacher (and thank god I’m not)”, when he asks:

[C]ould it be that, on the one hand, we have too much choice and that has made us dizzier, and on the other, there is, paradoxically, the cloistering drive towards specialisation? Is there, overall, too much of a preoccupation with technology? Does a lot of what is being taught – or attempted – really have a place in the English curriculum?<sup>140</sup>

Turner adds, “More time should be spent on fewer texts. More careful study of less may result in a better grasp and understanding overall. Can those responsible for NCEA English assert that literacy levels have improved in the, say, past decade”? Ron, a teacher at a boys’ school, made the same comment.

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<sup>140</sup> *English in Aotearoa* 55 (April 05): 49.

Teachers state that there are problems preparing students for creative poetry writing (1.1) for NCEA, for the short text essay using poetry (1.4) and for the poetry selection in the unfamiliar text question (1.6). They mentioned the following:

- The creative writing of prose best fits the possible topics or starters given in the suggested guidelines published from previous years' papers. Prose has a "safer assessment route" (Dymoke, 151). Internally assessed creative writing requires drafting and re-working. Teachers' main concerns relate to the assessing, evaluating and the moderating of submissions. Although many remarked that the creative writing of poetry is an opening to entice students into the study of poetry, and that there are plenty of resources for teachers to guide them in teaching creative poetry writing, these factors did not encourage them to introduce the study and writing of poetry into the busy classroom.
- Poetry is deemed an unsuitable choice for the short text study because print media and short stories are easier options to teach.
- There is insufficient time for revision of short, extended, visual, oral or unfamiliar text material, or formal writing preparation because internally assessed creative writing (1.1), the formal speech (1.7), the media or dramatic presentation (1.8) and the research project (1.9) all utilise extensive class time for preparation, practising and delivering. Teachers choose to teach credits that can be taught in a block of three to four weeks. Poetry, teachers believe, requires more quality teaching time than the short story.

- The irregular attendance of students – health problems and appointments, school/interschool interruptions and unexpected natural events, work experience – means that if a student is absent when a certain credit is taught, that lesson is not repeated and the student misses out. It is generally conceded in this regard that the short stories topic was easier to recover than the poetry would be.
- Moderation of internally assessed work is thought by some teachers to produce incomparability and inconsistency by the moderators from region to region and from year to year. Creative writing of poetry is problematic because teachers who lack confidence in teaching poetry will inevitably be uncertain about assessing it.
- Teachers appreciate the choice of credits which suit the varying talents of their students, but find the many options constitute timetabling problems to allow for the academic range of their students. Those students who are gifted in literary pursuits have to conform to the majority choice of credits.

Teachers also speak of the attitude of students towards NCEA examinations:

- With the leaving age of 16 in their sights, students will do just enough to achieve some credits and just pass enough to be able to get a job.
- As there are many choices, students consider which credits achieve the best marks with the least effort.



- Others ask if examination results have any value at all, since employers are uninterested in NCEA assessments and want employees with higher levels of qualification.
- Teachers and students ask if the system provides for the bright students. Science, mathematics and practical subjects that require answers to direct questions are easier to gain higher percentage passes in than those that require opinions and analysis. So, why do English, they ask.

It is clear that teachers find it difficult to motivate students who do not want to achieve highly, or even to stay at school. The constant struggle to timetable successfully in order to cover adequately every aspect of oral, written and visual language with their functions and processes in spite of interruptions and hindrances is an enormous task for departments of English and their staffs. In such circumstances poetry is seen as a dispensable option in the English programme.

My research attested to the veracity of the concerns of many – teachers, students, parents and educators – as reported by Virginia Larson in her article in *North and South* (October 2005: 43). In airing the opinions of educators and academics who contributed to the article, Larson quotes Professor Ivan Snook<sup>141</sup> who said: “[NCEA is] all about mastering the standard, ticking off that skill and moving to the next. None of this says anything about the quality of thought you bring to the subject, which is what an education in the sciences, humanities and arts should be all about.... Critical thinking is not only neglected, there’s a concerted effort to make sure it doesn’t happen” (51).

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<sup>141</sup> Emeritus Professor of Education at Massey University.

To make better use of creative writing, some teachers suggested that HODs engage specialist teachers to lift the standard of poetry teaching and attract those students who already had a love for poetry. Another suggestion was to ask a teacher, who loves, and maybe writes poetry, to cover that topic in all year 9/10 classes. As poetry, for some classes, is not an option as an achievement standard, one teacher suggested making it a special subject area, like drama, instead of “lumping it in”, as she said, with short texts. Teachers see difficulties in implementing these strategies, however, because of rigid timetabling and the organisation of staff schedules.

While some teachers are not averse to teaching poetry to prepare the ground for creative poetry writing or use creative writing to complement the study of poetry, my research shows that standard-based assessments and NCEA requirements complicate the organisation and flexible operation of the English programme in classes. Unit standards, as I stated in chapter five, do give opportunities for using poetry for NCEA 1. Where they choose to concentrate on poetry for achievement standards 1.1, 1.4 and 1.6, teachers are obliged to treat it superficially within a limited time and to encourage creative prose writing to meet the national assessment criteria requirements.

### **Accent on Poetry**

But poetry does not have to be the disregarded poor relation in the English syllabus. The pre-service teacher-education course at the CCE gave me an insight into a way forward for teacher-education which can lead to better teaching of poetry in schools.

Responses from surveys of teachers who were enrolled in the course before 2004 indicate that the English curriculum can be taught through the microcosm of poetry. Such a course could be introduced and deployed nationally to revitalise the teaching of poetry. One example of a block of eight lessons of successful poetry teaching currently taught by Liz, a former student of the CCE course, is included in Appendix B.3.

There is, ironically, given the current marginalisation of poetry, considerable support from educationalists for teaching it as an integral and valuable asset to the English programme. Much, though, depends upon the teacher, on how the topic is introduced and on effective timetabling. This was evident from the material provided and used on section by the student teachers and reported in responses to the survey. The responses from these prospective and practising teachers show how the CCE En 311 course confirms my own teaching experience with successful outcomes for poetry as testified by my former students.

Surveys of 72 former students of mine revealed enthusiastic attitudes to poetry. Although in the '50s and '60s, fewer students went on to tertiary study, the students' perceptions of poetry were more positive and lasting than those from later decades who had engaged in university studies. Poetry in the earlier decades was usually integrated into the whole English programme and the emphasis was on oral **and** written expression. Blending the oral, aural and written forms of language developed in students the love for words, poetry itself and the writing of poetry, spontaneously expressed in their responses to my survey. In a recent article from *English Education*, to which I referred in the introduction, such emphasis is defined as a "blending of oral and written traditions as a

fertile intersection for the teaching of literacy”.<sup>142</sup> In fact, in some schools where I taught, poetry was extended successfully as a correlation between music, singing, drama productions, religious studies, social studies, history, classical studies and art at every level. The so-called “new term [in] our lexicon, *literocracy*”<sup>143</sup>, was there in principle. There was time to study poetry at some depth throughout the year, not in a three week block with no opportunity for revision. Poetry, prose and drama studies were all recognised units of a BA university degree.

Responses to my inquiry clearly show that students not only still remember and appreciate poetry taught to them as far back as 1954, but also believe that performing poetry helped to contribute to their success in using language effectively in their employment, speaking out assertively and with conviction, and advancing in professional development training. Hearing oneself recite poetry and listening to others, prepare a person for studying poetry at depth. Poetry **and** drama **and** prose studies, my former students observed, interconnect and link with the arts and public speaking activities which are, in many cases, still actively practised in their lives. 72 men and women cannot be wrong.

### **Breaking the cycle of deprivation**

I have argued throughout this thesis that to achieve a balanced study of literature it is important that some fiction, some drama and some poetry, as well as a choice of other and different options, be offered at every level, and cumulatively from year 1. The CCE

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<sup>142</sup> Maisha Fisher, “*Literocracy*”, 91.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

course offers ways of teaching a balanced programme of written, oral and visual language across other disciplines, and in line with the principles of the New Zealand curriculum for the teaching of English.<sup>144</sup> These principles are based on “the premises that the individual student is at the centre of all teaching and learning, and that the curriculum for all students will be of the highest quality” (*ENZC*, 7). All programmes will be “gender-inclusive, non-racist and non-discriminatory”, planned to inter-relate with the curricula from other subject areas according to the eight essential skills.<sup>145</sup>

If poetry is excluded from the English programme, for example, students are deprived of access to the skills of critical analysis of the language of poetry, self-evaluation of original poetry writing, the rhythm, rhyme, form and figurative aspects of the poetic genre, and a whole body of work distinct from prose style. Students may not receive full exposure to literacy and imaginative development, and for developing “personal, social, cultural, historical, and national awareness and identity” contained in the information, self-management and social essential skills, and as stated in the principal aim of this thesis.

A generation of students will be disadvantaged in what is the most intense use of written and oral language if poetry is omitted from the English programme and, as a consequence, the aim of the curriculum to ensure students reach the “highest levels of literacy and understanding of language” will not be achieved. On the other hand, using a rich and multi-layered English programme, such as I experienced and taught, and the

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<sup>144</sup> See Appendix B.1. for examples.

<sup>145</sup> *The Framework*, 6-7

holistic approach currently taught at the CCE, students will leave school with the “highest levels of literacy”, personal satisfaction, and a lifetime love of learning. Such a programme, of course, requires quality teaching practice and knowledgeable, effective pedagogy, as well as a supportive learning environment wherein students integrate new learning with what is already known.

The cycle of disadvantage can be broken if strategies are put in place to enable the teaching of English holistically through poetry, if

- teachers who have a passion for and a knowledge of poetry are employed for creative writing programmes, and for the teaching of poetry at all levels
- teachers re-discover their confidence, and make use of the many resources available to them to break down barriers to poetry in the classroom, such as those suggested in Davey’s activities<sup>146</sup>
- poetry is given a more prominent place (as there is for drama) in the NCEA syllabus
- poetry papers are made essential for a BA English degree
- pre-service teacher-education courses introduce the current CCE course, or an equivalent, for using poetry as a microcosm for teaching English according to *ENZC*.

As mentioned earlier, Charlotte, a current University student, speaks of the possibilities for change because of positive experiences. Her words are worth repeating:

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<sup>146</sup> Appendix B.1.

I hope to be a teacher, and although I've been educated in a generation of New Zealand students who, in my limited experience, fear and dislike poetry, I want to change my attitudes and my prospective attitudes because poetry touches on so many aspects of writing and speaking English.<sup>147</sup>

Through my thesis, I urge teachers, educators and curriculum developers to reinstate poetry in its rightful place as an expression of the heritage, history and humanity of nations. Unless they study and learn poetry, today's students are less likely to understand, respect and use language successfully. Poetry has been and still is alive for me and for many of my generation. A poet's craft reveals depths of meaning that can, in Michael Harlow's words, "make the unconscious conscious"; with Seamus Heaney "dig" into the private and public history of a nation; and create an inscape of all the beauty, wonder, spirituality and suffering of humankind with Gerard Manley Hopkins.

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<sup>147</sup> Chapter seven, p. 203.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Copies of survey material**

- A.1. Survey: students enrolled in English 102, University of Canterbury,  
24 March 2004
- A.2. Survey: teachers of English, 24 March 2004
- A.3. Letter/survey: former students, 10 August 2005
- A.4. Ages and occupations of former students (at time of survey)
- A.5. Letter/survey: CCE student teachers, September 2005
- A.6. Letter/survey: teachers formerly trained at the CCE, Oct. 2005
- A.7. Teachers' teaching hours
- A.8. Case study: Cassie and Alice, March 2006

### **Appendix B: Material related to the teaching of poetry**

- B.1. Activities and material taken from the CCE course: Ronnie Davey's  
resources
- B.2. An adaptation of Monique's unit of poetry
- B.3. Liz's Poetry anthology
- B.4. Report from interview with Kate O'Hanlon: curriculum from  
UK with reference to GCSE
- B.5. Sue Dymoke and others re: GCSE

### **Appendix C: Websites**

- C.1. Websites for poetry (selections from Phil Coogan's page)

### **Appendix D: Occasions for poems**

- D.1. Anecdotes and incidents recalled by former students



**Appendix A.1.**

**Survey: students enrolled in English 102, University of Canterbury, 24 March 2004.**

For my PhD I am examining the place of poetry in the teaching of English in the New Zealand curriculum. I would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to complete this survey to contribute to my research. I would appreciate responses from **all students in 102**, whether you have just left school or otherwise.

*Please answer those questions which apply to you, or simply write N.A.*

1. In which **year** did you complete school? \_\_\_\_\_
2. At which **level** did you finish school? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Was the teaching of poetry a **regular** part of the English programme?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What kinds of poetry did you study? (E.g. Wordsworth; war poets; sonnets etc)  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. At which level/s (class/es) was poetry taught? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Did you enjoy studying poetry? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Why? \_\_\_\_\_
8. On a scale of 1-4 (1=hostile; 2=uninterested; 3=interested; 4=enthusiastic) what was the general attitude of your peers to poetry? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Did you choose to do poetry for internal and external assessments? Why?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
10. Did you write poetry in class? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Was the poetry that you wrote assessed? If so, how? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
12. Do you at present: a. read poetry? \_\_\_\_\_ b. write poetry? \_\_\_\_\_  
c. enjoy poetry? \_\_\_\_\_ d. study poetry? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Do you feel confident about studying poetry in English 102?  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. Any further comments? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Many thanks for helping me with my research. Please return the survey to your lecturer.

Best wishes for a successful University year.

**Helen J. O'Neill (Sister Leonie).**

**Appendix A.2.****Survey: teachers of English, 24 March 2004.**

*Please tick, or fill in the spaces appropriately:*

School: Private \_\_\_ State \_\_\_ Integrated \_\_\_ Co-educational \_\_\_ Single sex \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) (a)Teacher: HOD \_\_\_ Full time \_\_\_ Part time \_\_\_ Relieving \_\_\_  
 (b)Specialist in English only \_\_\_ Non-specialist in English \_\_\_\_\_  
 (c)English and other subject/s (please name) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Qualifications in English \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Other qualifications \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Years of experience teaching English to:
  - a) Year 9 students \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) Year 10 students \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) Year 11 students \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - e) Total \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Estimated proportion of time per term given to teaching poetry to:
  - a) Year 9 students \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) Year 10 students \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) Year 11 students \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Kinds of poetry taught at each level (e.g. Wordsworth; sonnets; war poets etc.)
  - a) Year 9 students \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) Year 10 students \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) Year 11 students \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) Degree of interest shown by students **in general** (please circle):  
 a. hostile;   b. uninterested;   c. interested;   d. enthusiastic.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

8. What are your reasons for teaching poetry as an integral part of the English programme? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What do you think are the barriers to teaching poetry as an integral part of the English programme? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. To what degree do you think the curriculum advocates the importance of teaching poetry as an integral part of the English programme? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. How positive do you feel your students are in approaching questions about poetry in NCEA 1? Why?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. How satisfactory have you found the results from NCEA 1 examinations with regard to poetry questions? Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. Any other comments, suggestions or clarifications? (You may continue over the page if you wish) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Many thanks for taking the time to respond to this survey. Sister Leonie O'Neill.**

### Appendix A.3.

#### Letter/survey: former students, 10 August 2005.

As you may have heard – those of you I see occasionally will have heard – I am in the final stages of completing a PhD at University of Canterbury in 2006.

My thesis title at the moment is:

“Once preferred, now peripheral; the place of poetry in the teaching of English in the New Zealand curriculum for years 9, 10 and 11 year students”  
(the previous forms 3, 4 and 5 classes).

As part of my research, I am including a personal account of my own experiences in teaching, adjudicating, examining and encouraging students in the speaking, reading, writing and study of poetry over the years.

I would, therefore, be very grateful if you would kindly complete the enclosed survey paper for me – *as far as you can*. I hope to use your ideas and opinions from these papers, as we shared much time with poetry as a matter of course in English classes or speech and drama sessions.

Many of today’s students are leaving school without much knowledge of poetry – traditional or modern.

Please fill in the gaps describing what **poetry** means and meant to you, how it still has a place in your life and work – in fact, *anything* that might support my thesis statement – or disagree with it – I would be most grateful. I value your opinions and thoughts on the teaching of poetry, including choral speaking, Shakespeare, pop songs, writing verse etc.

You may like to e-mail me with or without the survey form, including the essential facts and your opinions/thoughts/responses.

I enclose a reply envelope for a speedy return of the survey paper (by 20 September – or of course, earlier). I look forward so much to hearing from you, not only because of your contribution, but because it is a chance to get in touch with you again. We can always follow up the response with a phone call, or e-mail conversation.

Thank you so much, and may God continue to bless you and your families.

With my love, Sister Leonie.

**Survey. Please fill in as you wish.**

- 1) Name:
- 2) Address:
  - a. Phone/e-mail:
  - b. Name that I may use in thesis: (e.g. 1<sup>st</sup> name, pseudonym):
- 3) Present and/or previous Occupation/s:
- 4) Age: (e.g. 20+, 25, 33, 40+, 51, 66 etc.)
- 5) Experience with poetry & at what age:
  - a. speech and drama lessons;
  - b. literature in school;
- 6) Memories of poetry speaking, studying, reading, writing
- 7) Value of having been taught poetry: in your work/in the family/in general etc.
- 8) Your views on the teaching (or non-teaching) of poetry in schools today (you may have children or grandchildren).
- 9) Anything else you wish to contribute? (Please use back of page if you wish.)

Many thanks for answering this survey. I appreciate your comments.

Sister Leonie O'Neill  
56 Caledonian Road  
St Albans, Christchurch

**Appendix A.4.****Ages and occupations of former students (at time of survey)**

<b>Age groups of former students:</b>	
The ages ranged from 19 to 78	
(at the time of the survey)	
61 women and 11 men: <sup>148</sup>	
Age	Number
19-29	10
30-39	10
40-49	9
50-59	11
60-78	32

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<sup>148</sup> Apart from teaching in a co-ed school from 1970-1973, I taught secondary subjects in all girls' schools from 1954-1970.

**Professions: 40**

Member of Parliament  
 Lawyer  
 Solicitor  
 Barrister  
 Teacher  
 Lecturer  
 Speech & drama teacher  
 Pre-school  
 ESOL  
 Social worker  
 Counsellor  
 Nurse (registered)  
 Karitane nurse  
 Private nurse  
 Psychiatric nurse  
 Dental nurse  
 Dental therapist  
 Lieutenant colonel (army)  
 Reporter  
 Journalist  
 TV presenter  
 Librarian

**Arts: 9**

Actor  
 Director  
 Producer  
 Artist  
 Storyteller  
 Vocalist  
 Musician  
 Choreographer  
 Dancer  
 Craft-maker/painter  
 Window dresser

**Respondents' occupations since leaving school**

(Several people were employed in more than one occupation in their lives)

**Business: 15**

Bank clerk  
 Public relations  
 Accountant  
 Secretary  
 Receptionist  
 Trainer  
 Communications consultant

**Management: 12**

Marketing  
 Retail  
 Hairdressing  
 Restaurateur  
 Florist  
 Café

**Other: 10**

Air hostess  
 Chef  
 Farmer  
 Security guard  
 Boilermaker  
 Welder  
 Electrician  
 Signwriter  
 St John Ambulance

**Appendix A.5.****Letter/Survey: CCE Trainee Teachers, September 2005**

For my thesis, I would be grateful if you could supply information on your experiences on section.

Please reply to the questions below. I shall collate your responses, so feel free to write in note form if you wish.

Please return your response in the large stamped addressed envelope (on Ronnie's desk), and I am sure Ronnie will put it in the mail, as soon as possible.

I am grateful.

Leonie.



**Survey.** Please return to Sister Leonie, 56 Caledonian Road, Christchurch.

Your Name to use in my thesis: (pseudonym; initials etc.) \_\_\_\_\_  
 (No school name will be mentioned in my thesis)

Your e.mail?

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How did the first five weeks at the CCE help you to take a class, lesson or part of a lesson according to the English curriculum? At what level?
2. Did you *observe* poetry teaching in a class, either teaching a poem as **short text**, or in preparation for the **unfamiliar text** question, or **other**? What level?
3. Were you able to take a class, part of a lesson or lesson using poetry or poetic techniques? What level? Which strand? Which function?
4. In relation to 3, how successful or otherwise was your teaching? Class interest? Class response? If not, why not?
5. Did you see evidence of poetry being **important** in the English class? What? How? How much? At which level/s?
6. If you were not able to use one or some of the methods proposed in Davey's class, why not? Was it the class attitude or the teacher's approach?
7. If you were able to present a successful lesson, would that same lesson be successful in your other section? Why?
8. Anything to add? You do not need to keep to these questions. Feel free to respond in any way on the back of the survey paper, if you wish. (*Thank you so much*)

**Appendix A.6.****Letter/survey: teachers formerly trained at the CCE, October 2005**

I am engaged in working on a PhD thesis: “Once preferred, now peripheral: the place of poetry in the teaching of English in the New Zealand Curriculum for years 9, 10 and 11”.

In the first term of 2005, I observed Ronnie Davey’s course on using poetry as a microcosm for teaching English. I have used material from that course in my thesis. I also interviewed some of the students during the course and after their sections in schools.

My supervisors, Elody Rathgen and David Gunby, agree with me that it would be interesting to discover if those who attended Ronnie’s course in 2001 and 2002 (or years before and after those, depending upon replies) are still teaching English, and at what level/s. Ronnie kindly gave me your name as someone whom I should contact.

Would you be kind enough to complete the enclosed survey and return it to me in the stamped addressed envelope, or, if you prefer it, e-mail your answers.

I am a mature student, but my love and enthusiasm for poetry is compelling me to see this thesis through.

I would so appreciate your contribution. Whatever your responses, they will be invaluable.

Thank you very much. I do hope you can help me. Your response will complement my investigation of the only College of Education course in New Zealand which puts significant emphasis upon poetry teaching.

## Survey on Teaching of Poetry

Please reply with a brief answer or place a tick or cross on the appropriate line.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

a. Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E. mail: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Name or initial etc. to use in my thesis, if needed \_\_\_\_\_

c. What year were you at CCE? \_\_\_\_\_

d. Type of school (& decile) taught at: private \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ integrated \_\_\_\_\_ s. sex

b's \_\_\_\_\_ g's \_\_\_\_\_ co-ed. \_\_\_\_\_ Roll over 1000 \_\_\_\_\_ roll between 500/999 \_\_\_\_\_

roll under 500 \_\_\_\_\_

1. Level/s teaching: 9 \_\_\_\_\_ 10 \_\_\_\_\_ 11 \_\_\_\_\_ 12 \_\_\_\_\_ 13 \_\_\_\_\_

2. Qualifications/papers in English: \_\_\_\_\_ Others: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Other subjects taught by you: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Hours per week/month/term spent on teaching (approximate):

English \_\_\_\_\_ Poetry \_\_\_\_\_

5. Attitude of class/es to poetry (in general):

Enthusiastic: \_\_\_\_\_ Interested: \_\_\_\_\_ Uninterested \_\_\_\_\_ Hostile \_\_\_\_\_

6. Any comment: \_\_\_\_\_

7. How effective & helpful was the course Ronnie Davey presented in term one of the CCE course, in **your** opinion? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Have you been able to teach English through poetry? \_\_\_\_\_

9. How successfully? Very \_\_\_\_\_ Average \_\_\_\_\_ Not well \_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_\_\_ Never \_\_\_\_\_

10. At what level/s? \_\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

11. Has NCEA made a difference to the teaching of poetry? \_\_\_\_\_

How? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

12. Any further comments on any of the above?

\_\_\_\_\_

Please continue over the page if you wish. Many, many thanks. Leonie.

**Appendix A.7.****Teachers' teaching hours (teachers as above)**

Name:	Year:	Teaching time: (a) English	(b) Poetry
Rebecca	('03):	(a) 4 hrs wk x 5 classes	(b) 2-3 wks per year (yr 9)
Ben	('03):	(a) 5 hrs wk x 3 classes	(b) 4-5wks yr (yr 9)
Emma	('02):	(a) 8 hrs per wk x 3 classes	(b) 4 hrs poetry unit (yr 9)
Neressa	('02):	(a) 3 hrs wk x 5 classes	(b) 3 wks term (yr 9)
Scott T	('02):	(a) 4 hrs wk x 4 classes	(b) 6 hrs term with English
Scott	('02):	(a) 4 hrs wk x 5 classes	(b) 6-7 wks year (yrs 9/10)
Gen	('02):	(a) 4 hrs wk x 4 classes	(b) 8 hrs term per class
Donna	('02):	(a) 4 hrs wk x 4 classes	(b) 16/20/9/0 hrs yr
Sarah	('02):	(a) 4 hrs wk x 2 classes	(b) 5-6wk block yr (yr 9)
Amelia	('01-'02)	(a) 5 hrs x 3 classes	(b) ½ hr per week all levels
Brett	('01):	(a) 2 ½ hrs wk x 5 classes	(b) 8 hrs per term (junior classes).
Bex	('01):	(a) 4 hrs wk x 4 classes	(b) 8 hrs term (9/10) 11: 2-3 hrs term
Sonia	('00):	(a) 8 hrs wk x 5 classes	(b) 2 hrs per month (over all classes)
Abi	('00):	(Not included)	
Michelle	('95):	(a) 8 hrs wk x 5 classes	(b) 1.0 hr term all levels

**Appendix A.8.****Case Study: Cassie and Alice, March 2006**

To follow up the success of teaching poetry in schools by teachers trained at the CCE, I carried out a case study with two students from one particular school who had previously informed me that they had not studied poetry before this year, 2006. (Both students study speech and drama extramurally).

The purpose of this case study is to present an example of a school situation where the teachers of English may or may not teach poetry as part of the English programme.

Cassie and Alice (names chosen to preserve their and their schools' anonymity) came together for a semi-formal interview.

**Cassie spoke of poetry study in years 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and now, in year 13, in 2006;**

**Alice, in years 8, 9, 10, and now, in year 11, in 2006.**

Two directed questions were set:

1. Tell me about your experiences of the poetry studied, selections taught, and how they were presented in school at each level.
2. What percentage of time was given to poetry in the English programme over each year? What else was covered?

**CASSIE**

**Year 8 (Teacher A):** Cassie came from an Intermediate school where the accent, she said, was on Science, Mathematics and Computer studies. She has no recollection of poetry during that year at school or indeed, of any literature selections, apart from library time in class.

**Year 9 (Teacher B) and year 10 (Teacher C):** Cassie has some recollection of learning terms of poetry, such as haiku and limerick poetry, but no emphasis was placed upon knowing these terms. They were not revised or included in the end of year's work. No actual poems were presented for study in class. Emphasis was upon film studies and the study of one novel. Cassie found it hard to remember which material was covered in which term. Although she received glowing reports for English in her end of year reports, especially from Teacher C, her memory of these years was of copying of notes and filling in worksheets. (Teacher C had trained at the CCE prior to 2001).

**Year 11 (Teacher D):** The English programme included short text work which involved watching films for film study; work sheets taken from the internet, and a novel. Preparation for 1.6 (unfamiliar text) was brief but helpful. The whole class found the set examination poem difficult and the other questions less difficult; in her class, students' results were "achieved", or "not achieved" for this standard. In the internally assessed work, Cassie, like several of her classmates, gained "excellent" in all standards. For the other externally assessed standards: 1.2 (formal writing, 1.3 (extended text) and 1.5 (response to text), Cassie gained "Merits". She enjoyed the year's work, however, and felt her written English work had improved.

**Year 12 (Teacher C again):** Cassie received “achieved” for unfamiliar texts, as, again she found the poem difficult, but “excellent” in internally assessed work and “merit” with her other standards. Cassie again had glowing reports for English from school, but felt she had made no progress since year 11 in exploring language, thinking critically or processing information. Apart from her work in speech and drama classes, very little literature had been discussed in class. Only one novel had been introduced, and worksheets were handed out for written work related to the novel. She remarked that she had an unhappy year and her class tended to be slightly disruptive as “we did not like our teacher who just handed out worksheets to keep us quiet”.

**Year 13 (Teacher E):** Cassie’s class began this year (2006) with four weeks of poetry study. Cassie, and most of her classmates, has found this both absorbing and challenging. This teacher trained at the CCE prior to 2001. Cassie reported that some of her friends at the same school, with Teacher E in year 12, did study and enjoy poetry, but those who worked with Teacher C did not.

In summing up her experiences of poetry in the English programme over those years, Cassie felt she made progress in English, one of her favourite subjects, in years 11 and this year, because there was a balance between transactional and poetic writing, literature and formal English, written work and oral discussion.

**ALICE.**

Alice is in year 11. (I am continuing the alphabetical identifications of teachers).

**Year 8 (Teacher F):** Alice attended an intermediate school. English consisted of writing an autobiographical project and some drama activities. Alice enjoyed the work. However, no poetry was introduced.

**Year 9 (Teacher G):** poetry was introduced over three forty minute periods. One poem was introduced in order to discover the evidence of terms such as simile, metaphor, rhyme and, very briefly, the content of the poem. Haiku was taught with some concrete poetry and the class attempted to write their own verses accordingly. These examples were published on the classroom walls, but not marked, or commented upon.

**Year 10 (Teacher C):** the study of films was popular for English. The class watched the films and filled in worksheets from the internet. According to Alice, watching films and the study of a novel using worksheets, and essay writing occupied year 10 of the English programme.

**Year 11 (Teacher H):** another teacher who trained at the CCE prior to 2001. The term began with a discussion of several poems; comparing their themes and how those themes were handled; response to the texts, and some consideration of the context. The students, on the whole, according to Alice, found the study difficult but were interested. Several were enthusiastic. This was the first time this class had studied poetry seriously. Alice is benefiting



from this study of poetry and understands how to respond to text, interrogate a text and apply poetic techniques to a text.

Cassie and Alice observed that much depended upon the method used by the teacher, and the literature preferences of the teacher. Some teachers preferred to keep the class busy with worksheets. Teachers D, E and H invited discussion, oral speaking of poems and various methods of relating to and exploring the poems.

Both Cassie and Alice and their peers are surprised to be studying poetry with such emphasis this year, and consider their classes, uninterested in poetry in previous years, are now interested, and according to both Cassie and Alice, almost enthusiastic.

I found that this study provided a practical example of the lack of the teaching of poetry in secondary schools. Although my sample is small, I discovered from this study, as well as from informal discussions with many students working at all levels, that

- most teachers trained at the CCE continue to teach English through poetry
- teaching poetry is an option left to the teacher
- some teachers prefer to teach English using worksheets obtained from the website, English Online
- some English teachers tend to concentrate more upon written language than upon oral and visual language units
- material required to pass assessments often drives the teaching from year 9 onwards.

## Appendix B.1.

Activities taken from CCE (EN 311) course (adapted from) **Ronnie Davey's Resources.**

1. Examples of material, 2005.

**Immersion and Barrier-breaking activities** (Script taken from designed page)

Across the modes... Writing & Reading & Speaking... Peer/small group/open group/individual

### **Pre-activities:**

#### Investigate past/present knowledge

- Predict: searching for symbols, metaphors in images
- Locate the direction of the poem from verbs
- Activate interest from previous experiences of similar subject
- Build a background from prior knowledge of place
- “Jump into” anger, envy, sloth etc.

#### Curiosity rousing

Puzzle poems: jig saw; separate lines

Crack the metaphor by

- Leaving off title;
- Leaving out gender
- Leaving blanks

#### Out-reaching strategies

- Poems that ask questions
- Poems that open up issues
- Poems that allow risks
- Collaborative discovery in pairs
- Challenge each other on meaning
- Have views heard/hear others/predict and re-confirm

Types of poems:

Begin with

Shape

“I used to ...

Recipes

“I'd love to ...

Found

“I never told anyone ...

Collage

“I remember being embarrassed when .

Haiku

“My worst experience was when ...

Class

“My greatest fear is...

## 2.

**Listening skills**

Bingo – teach poetic language

“Eagle” poems – put in order/compare/hear versions

Speak poem – recall words and phrases

**Reading skills**

Talking to a poem

Poem vs prose vs drama of same theme

Each voice in group read: rhyme/rhythm/punctuation/pronunciation/diction/mood

**Writing skills**

Bio poem

Starters

Posters

**Visual skills**

Represent poem in static image

Illustrate poem; font/shape/balance

Use symbolism to convey theme

**Presenting: oral skills**

Choral work of suitable poem

Mime using solo and tableau

Role play/acting/movement

**Assessing skills**

Interrogate a poem

Drafting/editing/peer response/publication

Respond to criteria/challenge each other

Why?

Fun learning

Enjoyment while working

Word skills

Fluency

A way into poems

## 3.

**BINGO!** (Written language – writing: levels 5 & 6) *Achievement Objective: poetic writing; exploring language.*

Context : Teaching poetic language. Prepared boards with names of types of poems:

Lyric; ballad; epic; limerick; haiku; allegory; elegy; sonnet; found; shape etc.

Teacher/student reads definitions from cards. Pupils match. Example:

<p><b>SONNET = poem of 14 lines; particular rhyme and rhythm</b></p>
--

This activity is a way of empowering students in reviewing forms of poetry. The activity can be applied to different topics such as new words discovered in recently read poems. Achievement objectives include identifying genres, exploring texts, developing language skills. This activity applies also to creative writing skills.

## 4.

**JIGSAW** (Levels 7 & 8)

Poetic structure. Two versions of a poem (such as “Eagle”) cut into lines and distributed.

Pupils fashion into possible order, compare poems and consult the original. Discuss structure of poetry.

Other activities include:

- (a) presenting a poem without a title, such as “Mushrooms” (Sylvia Plath); “cracking” the imagery and determining what/who “we” and “our” are; what is happening; and provide a title. Note the clues that helped solve the puzzle. List the lines that don’t fit. Discuss the solution with another, justify, compare and contrast.
- (b) presenting phrases that form a poem; arrange in lines. One phrase can be the title. Arrange and re-arrange until the poem has continuity and sense.
- (c) Presenting a poem where words are omitted and possible choices given.

These activities involve close reading, understanding of form and linking thoughts logically.

## 5. PROCESS OF POETRY WRITING (levels 9 and 10)

Using a starting phrase such as “I used to ...“ write a poem – shape it - edit it – read it out – add to those of other students – publish on a large sheet for display and method of assessment.

Other starting points include: **“The worst piece of advice my mother gave me ...”**

This activity involves poetic writing, refining writing skills, speaking aloud, listening attentively, assessing content and presenting the text visually. Achievement objectives such as exploring language, thinking critically and learning about the organization and function of language are all covered in this activity.

## 6. MIME (Levels 9 and 10)

Present a poem as a group in mime and movement. The poem needs a story line, such as:

“The Jabberwocky,” “The Magpies,” “The Highwayman,” “Skimbleshanks, the Railway Cat,” “The Loch Ness Monster.”

Criteria:

- a. Storyline shows clear sequence of events with climax, highpoints – beginning, middle and end.
- b. Characters recognizable with appropriate actions/reactions and relationships.
- c. Body language clear, exaggerated, in character with facial expression showing emotion and attitude.
- d. Movement and use of space indicate development.
- e. Audience may be invited to be involved; large, lively actions show awareness of audience.
- f. Overall, the performance needs to show cohesion, a sense of ensemble, creativity, original interpretation and everything co-ordinating.

This exercise is a way of communication without words. Every action and movement needs to be precise and meaningful, demanding from the students understanding of text and intention. The mime communicates narrative and mood, and transfers words into body language. Mime also demands concentration and imagination from the audience. A “good” mime is a clearly portrayed mime. The practice of assessing develops critical thinking, understanding of drama (conflict and resolution) and sense of storyline.

An alternative is to produce the poem with mime and words, or mime and sounds – either voiced or musical instruments or mechanical sounds.

## 7. INTERROGATING THE TEXT (Levels 9-13)

This exercise opens up texts through multiple readings, comparative readings or parodies.

Students begin to understand ideologies behind texts and contexts.

Two poems are presented: “I wandered lonely as a cloud,” William Wordsworth; “Why

Dorothy Wordsworth is not as Famous as her Brother,” Lynn Peters.

- a. Both poems are read aloud.
- b. Convert W.W's poem to third person prose, using your own words.
- c. Read L.P's poem with a partner in differing moods e.g. bitter, frustrated, patient – becoming more and more muddled.
- d. Decide which reading as a “feminine” text best fits the poem:
  - i. Dorothy Wordsworth's work was stolen by her brother;
  - ii. she sacrificed her own ambitions for her brother's fame;
  - iii. society expected that from her;
  - iv. all women should do likewise;
  - v. D.W. was an equally good poet as her brother;
  - vi. women are as good as men in many fields but not recognized.

This activity asks questions such as: what levels such work would be presented; the purposes of such an activity; how much historical or period location would be required; processes, functions, achievement objectives and the strands involved.

Similar work can be presented with “On First Looking into Chapman's Homer,” John Keats and “On Looking in on Blodgett's ‘First Looking in on Chapman's Homer’” by George Starbuck; poems about Brueghel's painting “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus”, “Musée des Beaux Arts”, “To a Friend whose Work has come to Triumph” and “Waiting for Icarus”.

## 8. INSCAPE OF A POEM (Levels 9-11)

Select a poem from a number of poems. Plan in group how to present it to the class with voice/s, movement, acting, sounds, music, mime etc. to bring out meaning. Prearranged criteria in assessing. Group B assesses group A. Performing group reports on process.

The task was to produce the poem orally. Group had to come to an understanding of the content and purpose of the poem; discuss ways of presenting it; prepare and rehearse it to capture and re-create the poem's tone, feeling and intention. Criteria for assessing involved clarity, variety, interpretation, cohesion, mood and engagement of all. In this activity all aspects of listening and speaking were processed.

## 9. TALKING TO A POEM (Levels 10-13)

Teacher (or one student who reads well) read a chosen poem to class. Class responds by listening without question or discussion, jotting down any thoughts that arise/reminders/feelings/atmosphere/annotating in any way.

In small groups (3/4) the poem is read again. Words, lines, images are circled. References to sounds, rhythm, rhyme, linking ideas, words, images, punctuation, format, changes, repetition etc. are jotted down. Are there questions you need answered?

Read aloud again individually. Do different readings imply different emphases?

Find words that suggest mood.

Look for key words that indicate development of thought or an argument.

What is the poet's attitude to the topic?

Is the title relevant? Perceptive? A clue? Is there a message?

Compare with others ... are questions answered? ... one person (or more) from each group read again to the whole class.

Poems that can be used for this activity include teen issues, and poems from the canon, as well as New Zealand and Polynesian literature, such as

“Sacrifice,” Hinewirangi

“Patches Hide no Scars,” Haare Williams

“For Heidi with Blue Hair,” Fleur Adcock

“My Mistress’ Eyes are Nothing like the Sun,” Shakespeare

“Wild Bees,” James K. Baxter

“My Grandmother,” Elizabeth Jennings

“Granddaughter Polly Peaches,” Hone Tuwhare

“She’s Leaving Home,” Lennon & McCartney

“Digging,” Seamus Heaney

“Early Innocence,” James Berry

Poems from *Playing God*, Glenn Colquhoun: “Schizophrenia”, “Arthritis.”

Relationships: poems written by teenage students.

## 10. BIO POEM (Levels 8-10)

Present opening phrase of each line of a poem for students to complete about their life, opinions and feelings.

*I am ... (simile)*

*I had ... (name, and give age)*

*I had ... but ...*

*I thought ...*

*And now ... (age)*

*I have seen ...*

*I have heard ... (other senses)*

*I know that ...*

*I know ... but ...*

*I hate ...*

*I love ...*

*I'm looking for... etc.* Concluding with *My ...* (describing self metaphorically.)

The objective is spontaneous, personal writing presented expressively, using poetic language. If appropriate, the results may be posted on the board, and/or read to the class. In this way all three strands are incorporated. While a format is given, there is room for freedom of expression. Metaphorical language is explored.

This activity is usually for level 8, unless the class has had no previous experience.



## 11. Some Possible Approaches to Teaching Poetry - ©Ronnie Davey

### 1. Groups of poems

#### **A collection of poems around a theme**

Reading, comparing and contrasting, writing about and responding to.

You might highlight only one aspect of a poem. What is the key focus for your objectives?

Don't bludgeon them to death.

#### **Anthology making**

Students put together their own collections of other people's poems presented in an effective and original visual way, e.g. ones they like, giving reasons for their choice (consider the criteria).

#### **Students publish collections of their own writing**

Write in groups, as a class, as individuals, for real audiences.

#### **A selection of poems by the same author**

Choose someone to explore similarities and differences in style, themes etc.

### 2. Individual poems

**Pre-reading activities** for reading other texts – to stimulate ideas – activate prior experiences and memories and help make personal connections – introduce themes, situations, issues that will come up later.

**Pre-during-post activities** as part of a wider literature study.

**Starters for writing** in other styles, including transactional e.g. dialogue; film script; newspaper articles/reports.

**Stimuli** for expressive and poetic writing.

### 3. Individual poems for **different purposes**, exploring a wide range of language skills and activities to access them

- dramatization, dramatized readings or mime
- speaking to a poem, annotating, asking questions that require both response and close reading ... helping students grapple with meaning
- using static and moving images and sound tales to explore meaning ... mood ... slide shows
- looking at specific aspects ... titles to predict ... sound devices ... imagery and word pictures ... diction
- looking at structure (delineation, poems in pieces)
- changing medium – to a film script or storyboard ... to a letter or diary entry or article ... changing point of view/perspective
- role plays to open up gaps and silences in the poem
- poems as openers or closers.

### 4. Songs are poetry too ... music and lyrics together.

- By favourite singer/group
- Focus on themes or rhyme ... rhythm ... imagery ... colloquial language
- Writing own songs

**12. Strategies** – © Ronnie Davey

**In Teaching Poetry,  
ask yourself if you are:**

Using strategies that

- arouse curiosity and allow for prediction and revision of those predictions
- activate prior knowledge and previous experiences
- allow students to ask questions in a safe environment
- allow students to change their minds and add in new ideas and different ways of seeing from their own
- encourage the ideas of others to stimulate and spark critical and creative thinking
- give responsibility to students (within groups, pairs, threes)
- give a structure or framework for students to work within
- opening up meaning un-self-consciously during discussion and questioning
- encourage students to read and reread
- allow and validate personal responses
- allow for sharing views among groups
- ensure students focus upon word choice and meaning

**Exploring language and thinking critically as key processes.**

### 13. Overview of various theoretical approaches to literature.

**En 311 course. Adapted from handout for class.**

The following summarises concepts from significant theoretical approaches to reading explored in the writings of such educationalists as John Dixon, Harold Rosen and Andrew Wilkinson.

#### Personal Growth Model.

- Relationship between relevant language learning and the individual
- Wide reading and enjoyment of literature encouraging language used for real purposes and real audiences
- Empowerment of the individual through language
- Dehistorised, student-centred, personal response.

#### Cultural Heritage Model.

- Close reading of literary texts, especially the canon
- Literature that offers moral truths about what it means to be human
- Teacher as expert and role model meaning in texts
- Student as passive reader with emphasis upon Shakespeare and Standard English
- The civilising effect of great literature.

#### Critical Literacy Approach

- Questioning traditional canon and shift in concept of text and literature
- Readers construct texts according to cultural backgrounds; texts constructing readers
- The changing nature of texts according to time and place
- Dominant and resistant readings; gaps and silences; deconstruction; discourses; reading positions such as gendered readings, post-colonial reading; cultural materialism

#### Reader Response Approaches

- Recognise, value and encourage what the reader brings to the text
- Reader as an active participant making on-going interaction with the text
- Reader becomes aware of the processes by which they make meaning
- Readers see what they bring to the text; how the text is persuading them to feel, manipulating emotions and shaping thoughts
- Makes whole task of reading literary texts more accessible and enjoyable
- Focuses upon pre-, during-, post-reading processes.

## Appendix B.2.

### An adaptation of Monique's Unit for Poetry.

#### English – Poetry

**Topic:** Exploring Poetry **Strands:** Oral/Written **Class:** 7/8 (or 9/10) **Duration:** 4 weeks

- **Achievement Objectives:**
  - Using texts: recite, read aloud, present or perform,
  - arranging material and making meaning clear by
  - using appropriate speech and delivery.
  
  - Poetic writing: write on a variety of topics
  - shaping, editing, reworking texts in a
  - range of formats, expressing ideas and experiences
  - imaginatively and using appropriate vocabulary and conventions.
  
- **Processes:**
  - Thinking Critically.
  - Discuss and interpret spoken and written poems,
  - considering the meaning of the form,
  - personal experiences and other points of view.
  
  - Exploring Language.
  - Identify, discuss and use the language features specific to
  - given poetic forms.
  - Use these features in speaking, adapting them
  - to the topic, purpose and audience.
  
- **Learning Outcomes:**
  - Discuss language, meaning and ideas in a range of poetic texts,
  - relating their understanding
  - to experiences, purposes, audience and other texts.
  
  - Use poetic devices to structure three original poems based
  - around the forms studied in class.
  
  - Use appropriate performance techniques
  - to speak or read aloud a poem of their own selection for an audience.

**In her notes, Monique includes:**

- **Assessment procedures:** write a variety of poems; present a poem for performance; self-assessment.
- **Essential skills:** communication, numeracy, information, problem-solving, self-management, physical, cooperative.
- **Learning experiences:** meeting the needs of the students; displays of poem forms and poetry book corner.
- **Notes on “What is Poetry?”:** Hand-out; timeline; poster; rehearse and perform section of a poem.
- **Rap and rhythm:** copy of History of Rap; discussion; rhythm games; create own Rap.
- **Haiku/cinquain/diamonte poetry:** discuss format; write poems, edit, illustrate, buddy feedback; publish.
- **Sensory poems:** class poem: touch; feel; smell; create sounds; individual poems
- **Poetic devices:** worksheets for figurative and literal language; write poem.
- **Effective Poetry Speaking:** choose poem; discuss performance skills; hand out Poetry Speaking Assessment Sheet to each student.
- **Poetry Publication:** folio of three original poems. Teacher assesses according to pre-arranged criteria.
- **Follow-Up:** poetry on other topical themes studied in class;
  - further study of sonnet, limerick, etc.
  - class poetry competition arranged by class;
  - choral speaking of favourite poems.
- **Copies** of “The Highwayman”, Nursery Rhyme Rap, “The Death of Ben Hall”.

**Monique states in the learning experiences, the following topics:**

- What is poetry? Example: “The Death of Ben Hall”. Design a “Wanted” poster using verbal and visual features. Rehearse and present part of the poem, in groups, to the class.
- Rap and Rhythm. The history of Rap; handouts; discussion on issues communicated in Rap. Nursery Rhyme Rap (tape and lyrics supplied).
- Haiku/Cinquain/Diamonte poetry. Students read, write and publish.
- “The Highwayman”. Discussion; murals; freeze-frame scenes; unfreeze and act.
- Sensory poems. Find individual poems after experiencing tastes, smells and touches.
- Poetic devices. Discuss examples; analyse their use. Write a poem to illustrate their use.
- Effective Poetry Speaking. Each student presents a poem after discussion on how to deliver and how to evaluate the presentation.
- Poetry Publication. Submit three original poems. Criteria explained. One poem from each student bound in a class book of poems.

### Appendix B.3.

#### Liz's Poetry anthology – Levels 4/5. Year 9 students (2005)

Task: Students to make their own poetry anthology in book form. The anthology should consist of:

1. Title page
2. Contents page
3. Introduction
4. An acrostic poem
5. A Ballad
6. A metaphor/simile poem/colour poem
7. A Limerick
8. A Haiku
9. A Dylan Thomas Portrait/Ezra Pound Couplet
10. A poem about a season (in any form)
11. A poem written by another poet about a scene
12. A favourite poem by another poet
13. A second poem by the same poet
14. An explanation on why they selected their favourite poems

**NB Each poem should be contained within a border and illustrated.**

#### Lesson 1

- Teacher and class discuss and list language and structural features of poetry in general.
- Make up glossary writing out basic definitions of poetic devices and descriptive language (i.e. simile, metaphor, personification).
- Teacher models acrostic poem.
- Students write their own; discuss with peers on merits.
- Discuss and write on whiteboard poems that take on particular forms.
- Select and teach form/purpose of ballad.
- Identify ballad features of *Sir Patrick Spens*. (Each has own copy)
- Class to answer questions related to this ballad for homework.

#### Lesson 2

- (*The Highwayman*). Read aloud to class. Each student has copy.
- Discuss imagery/rhyme/word order/language features.
- Class to write own ballad. Supply newspapers. Teacher leads students through process of selecting topics: heroes/villains; sports people/musicians; explorers/adventures/terrorists; community workers/world leaders etc.
- Students work to Ballad Unit Criteria.

## Lesson 3

- Revisit/revise simile/metaphor.
- Show on OHP the *Ian Sharp Poem*.
- Students copy out poem: draw cartoon/stick images that spring to mind: teacher model stanza 1.
- Discuss meanings of words not understood. Discuss final stanza.
- Students write/craft own poem for anthology.

## Lesson 4

- Teach form of limerick.
- Write points on whiteboard. Students do close exercises.
- Students draft/craft own limerick for anthology.
- Discuss/share with peers.
- Teach Dylan Thomas portraits; give examples and model process.
- Write Dylan Thomas poem for homework.

## Lesson 5

- Teach and model Ezra Pound couplets.
- Class write own; peer share/class share.
- In pairs, choose best of three. These included in anthology.
- Think about and illustrate poems they have written.

## Lesson 6

- Revisit/revise rhythm and syllables – as basic as is necessary.
- Discuss Haiku; write on whiteboard; model process.
- Provide pictures from magazines/journals as stimulus for writing. Students write on coloured paper; attach to picture; publish on wall.

## Lesson 7

- Students select poetry from library.
- Teacher model a critique of favourite poem: language; structure; poetic devices; imagery; mood; context etc. (in classroom).
- Students to mirror with own choices.
- Remind students about criteria/check list.

## Lesson 8

- Refining/presenting anthology.
- Teacher demonstrates how to make a book.
- Students complete the task.

Achievement objectives being assessed:

Poetic writing; exploring language; transactional writing; thinking critically; processing information;

expressive writing; personal reading; close reading; listening to texts; impersonal speaking and listening.



#### **Appendix B.4.**

##### **Report from interview with Kate O’Hanlon: curriculum from UK with reference to GCSE**

Kate O’Hanlon, advisor for English Southern Education Library Board (SELB) Northern Ireland, whom I interviewed in Newry (Northern Ireland) in 2003, told me of the significance of teaching poetry in a School Improvement Programme for Northern Ireland (DENI, 1998) to raise the standards for all pupils in literacy through both fiction and poetry. O’Hanlon said: “Knowing how to learn, rather than acquiring content – area knowledge, is now becoming the primary aim of schooling”. The curriculum is aimed at examining the means by which students “acquire, process and use knowledge.” Teachers need to give students opportunities to “think out loud ... discuss, argue, debate; a book, article, poem, advertisement ‘makes us think’; composing a written text demands awareness, concentration, the ‘de-centring’ of the writer.” O’Hanlon models lessons first to the teachers. An example given was to ask the teachers to explore the poem, “Upon Westminster Bridge,” and ask as many questions about it as possible, especially questions to which one does not know the answers.

O’Hanlon also spoke of the programme the SELB has initiated to raise standards of literacy for years 7 to 11. O’Hanlon and her team preface the chapter on “Threads of Thinking and the Links with Language” in *Language Framework*, Key Stage Three, for SELB, with this quotation: “The goal of schooling is understanding, understanding that will lead to a lifetime of meaningful application” (Perkins ’92). To enable students to

“acquire a comprehensive range of language skills and become fully literate”, O’Hanlon encourages a wide range of reading texts and plenty of poetry. O’Hanlon believes that year 9 students, newly arrived at a “new” school, respond well to poetry as an introduction to the English programme.

So many of the oral strategies and the modelled, shared and guided teaching practices are connected to poetry, and are similar to those I encountered observing Davey educating the student teachers of English at the CCE. From year 8 to year 10, in the UK curriculum, teaching time is given **equally** to prose, poetry and drama.

O’Hanlon continued:

Poetry studies include an exploration of poetic forms and identification of the main features of the forms – how poets play with meanings – and investigation of the language features: spelling, vocabulary and grammar use, with limericks, haiku etc, at year 8; to a similar exploration with narrative (including epic poetry) and lyrical poetry and their styles at year 9; to sonnets, odes and modern poetry at year 10. These aspects of poetry work are not options, but essential areas of the *Language Framework*. How much better prepared students will be when at year 11 they are exposed to the GCSE.

At GCSE level, the English Literature paper (and a crossover to English paper) requirements are set out for paper 1, taking 2 hours 30 minutes, worth 70% of the marks; and internally assessed course (IAC) work, with three components worth 30% of the marks.

### **Paper 1**

Pre-1914 Poetry. Two set anthologies are provided for candidates:

Anthology A. includes fifteen poets from Shakespeare, Shirley and Bradstreet to Wordsworth, Keats, Hopkins and Tennyson.

Anthology B. includes fifteen poets from Blake, Campbell and Hood to Byron, Kipling, Patmore and Browning. The paper offers four questions of which candidates answer two questions – one poem is specified, the second is the candidate's choice.

Post-1914 Drama. Similar format.

Post-1914 Prose. Similar format.

Internally Assessed Component: Three assignments with a percentage weighting of 30%.

Assignment A. At least fifteen poems post-1914 to be studied. These should prepare students for:

AO1: respond to texts critically, sensitively and in detail, selecting appropriate ways to convey their response, using textual evidence as appropriate;

AO2: explore how language, structure and forms contribute to the meanings of texts, considering different approaches to texts and alternative interpretations.

AO3: explore relationships and comparisons between texts, selecting and evaluating material and indicating how context (social, cultural and historical backgrounds) impact on the texts.

The poets listed are: W. H. Auden; Carol Ann Duffy; Robert Frost; Seamus Heaney; Liz Lockhead; R. S. Thomas; Tatamkhulu Afrika; John Montague; Grace Nichols; Wilfred Owen; W. B. Yeats (post-1914).

Samples of questions for students to work on include:

1. Poets often write about people who have had an influence on them in some way. Compare two poems from the list below in which each poet wrote about a person. Show how the use of language, style and structure helped you to know each person too.
  - “An Old Man’s Winter Night” Robert Frost.
  - “Evans” R.S. Thomas.
  - “In Mrs Tischer’s Class” Carol Ann Duffy.
  - “The Hill Farmer Speaks” R. S. Thomas.
2. R.S. Thomas writes about “the people and landscape of the Welsh hill country”. By referring closely to at least 2 of his poems show how he makes the Welsh countryside and its inhabitants vivid to the reader.

Maximum of 2500 words for the assignment and approximately 100 hours of guided learning will be required to achieve a GCSE qualification in English Literature.

## **Appendix B.5.**

### **Sue Dymoke and others.**

#### **Comparison with GCSE (General Certificate in Standard English)**

In her article, “Taking Poetry off its Pedestal: The Place of Poetry Writing in an Assessment-Driven Curriculum”, (2001) Sue Dymoke, in research covering a two-year period investigating poetry repertoires, teachers’ attitudes to poetry and “how these inform classroom practices”, considers the fact that the teachers in the UK were having difficulty “coming to terms with the implementation of new GCSE English and English Literature syllabi”. The teachers were using the Northern Examinations and Assessment Board (NEAB) syllabi and the GCSE poetry anthology as the questions on poetry formed “a sizeable proportion of both the NEAB English Paper Two and the Literature Paper.” As a result of the NEAB chief examiner’s report for the 1998 examinations expressing surprise that candidates, in response to a question, were not directly penalised but “limited their own personal achievement” by writing poems, teachers felt the students should have been commended for their creativity. Dymoke declares that teachers, such as those who encourage poetry writing in the classroom, believe assessment of poetry was “notoriously hard” (Andrews, 19991) and “prose had greater status than poetry when developing children’s writing skills” (Carter, 1998). Dymoke found that teachers were loathe to assess poetry as “it seemed almost intrusive to be overcritical”, they declared.

Other comments from Dymoke's article.

Reaction to the NEAB anthology is both positive and negative. One criticism of the NEAB's anthology derives from the complaints that "an unnatural emphasis on pre-20<sup>th</sup> century poetry [forces] on pupils poems which are alien to them and consequently puts them off poetry" (Benton, 2000). One teacher expressed concern that "We find ourselves teaching against our will and better judgement to the exam". Another added: "When poetry is introduced it is with an exam in mind" (Benton). Another regrets the sense of pressure in planning and executing English studies, "While poetry is at the heart of English teaching ... the 'heart' has moved from something akin to the 'spiritual centre' to being a geographical location". While a prepackaged list of material saves time for the teacher and ensures the requirements of the curriculum are met, and "enshrines poetry as a vital component of GCSE English ... encourages multi-cultural study which was previously neglected ... and provides support material which is helpful to teachers and students". Another teacher sums up the value as "current – the poets are generally alive and students can meet them ... it demonstrates poetry can be relevant and enjoyable". Teachers believe poets are in touch with teacher opinion. Some teachers feel they lose their own control over what their classes need ... feel disempowered and restricted in choice. While all pupils are challenged, nationally whole generations read the same poems. The pressure of an ever-fuller syllabus has effectively limited poetry teaching to the Board's selection and there is fear that extension work to poems or poets would confuse pupils. While the 1995 curriculum requires students to "develop their ability to write poetry" time is at a premium and this element is reduced to make space for critical analysis needed in examinations. "Independent views" are not encouraged but the "best answer" must be reproduced. For teachers to demonstrate their own ability as teachers to achieve results there is a fear of repetitive coaching.

## Appendix C. Websites.

### C.1. Websites for poetry.

Phil Coogan, director of English Online, published some of his favourite websites “for poetry teaching ideas and resources and also for New Zealand poetry” in *English in Aotearoa* 55 April 2005: 60-61. I have chosen a sample from the twenty-seven given on his pages.

- **BBC Arts: Poetry** (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/books/>) “is an online celebration of poetry ...poets reading their poems ... tips on writing poetry”.
- **Poetry Class: Taking the fear out of teaching poetry** (<http://www.poetryclass.net.index.htm>) is designed “to enhance students’ appreciation, including: making the ordinary extraordinary, using songs ... photographs ... figurative language and sound”.
- **Teaching and Writing Poetry** (<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/poetry/index/html>) “has resources to encourage students to read and write poetry, including rules and tools for poetry writing”.
- **The Online Poetry Classroom** (<http://www.onlinepoetryclassroom.org/what/>) “is dedicated to the teaching and enjoyment of poetry ...How to Teach ... What to teach ...Find a Poem ... Find a Poet ... Teacher forums”.
- **PBS: Poetry** (<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/poetry>) “includes poetry lesson plans ... poetry links ... sections on poetic forms including rap and hip hop”.

For other sites, check Phil Coogan’s pages “Net Returns” in *English in Aotearoa* 56 July 2005: 58-60; 57 October 2005:25-27; 58 April 2006: 42-44.

## Appendix D. Occasions for poems

### D.1. Anecdotes and incidents recalled by former students

1. *John recalls “one small feat of memory into money during Capping week 1960/61”.*

“The Clarendon Hotel public bar was packed with dozens of under-age student drinkers after Proceh and it took ages to get served. Someone beside me said: “They also serve who only stand and wait”. I retorted with “John Milton – ‘On His Blindness’, last line”. This started a huge debate (actually it was a drunken shouting match – “debate” is a far too refined word). There were loud offers of Wordsworth, Kipling, Marc Anthony, Shakespeare, Hopkins/Felix Randall, Browning/Fra Lippo Lippi, Holmes, St Paul, Dante, Poe, Doris Day, John Wayne, David Niven, Lord Nelson, The Ancient Mariner, Lord Cobham, Horatio at the Bridge, and goodness knows who and what else.

Then someone decided to run a ‘book’ – it cost entrants ten bob each to back their choice. It ended up with about 50 people contributing to the pool; each entrant had to stand on a bar stool and recite what they could of their chosen author/piece. I recall launching into ‘When I consider how my light is spent / Ere half my days in this dark world and wide ...’ I’m not sure if I got to reel off all of it, given the raucous and ribald atmosphere of the occasion, but I sure gave the last line plenty of gusto. Once the ‘Book’ was closed someone reasonably sober was dispatched to the Varsity Library to undertake the necessary archival research. The night ended up with Muggins scooping the pool – no second prizes in this sort of sweepstake! Quite a lot of money in those days. Not that I got to take it all away with me – such a furore broke out that I was “obliged” to shout for all the entrants and about half the spectators. Most of the contributors that day were able to



spout off great screeds of the writings of their chosen author/poet/character. They might have been wrong, but they were certainly knowledgeable in quoting from their erroneous choices. Another intriguing thing was that most of the participants were not from English Lit. nor even Arts students – they were from Geography/Geology, Biological Science, Physical Science, Engineering, Maths, and only a smattering of Arts types”.

2.

*Another somewhat “scary” experience was recalled by John when he was down a very narrow mineshaft near Kumara with a 78-year old emphysemic gold miner.*

“The miner knew by heart the collected works of Robbie Burns, among others. I remember this miner reciting from memory wonderful lyrical stuff which certainly helped to take one’s mind off the danger of our venture – digging an unsupported 5-foot high tunnel, 35 metres into a clay bank about 20 metres underground, with only a sputtering candle for light and no piped air supply”.

3.

*John also recalls an incident concerning his wife, Hilary, when they were on holiday in Jordan visiting the fabulous ruins at Jerash.*

“In the huge amphitheatre with its marvellous acoustics my wife delivered Shelley’s ‘Ozymandias’ and was accorded the undivided quiet attention and genuine appreciation of our own tour party and guides, and other groups of tourists paused to listen. We could almost see the impromptu audience’s musings and ponderings as engendered by the poet’s words ... which captured the images, sentiments, emotions and spirit of the place far more than any technical account. She had learned this sonnet many years ago”.

4.

*John includes the art of poetry when speaking of the lack of vision of some people towards works of art in his town.*

“Only rarely is there a ray of light – support for the vision of the city officials, the wonderful creativity of the artist, the enhancement of the beauty of the city. It is through poetry and good lyrical prose that one can come to appreciate the lovely artistry which language (any language) is capable of, and the importance of allegorical expression for intellectual and moral development of our maturing youth. And I am encouraged. There is some superb music and lyrics being written and performed by young artists; some are making names for themselves before national and international audiences. And for those who take the time to decipher it, even the staccato of some hip-hop exponents can reveal some extremely clever creative poetry”.

5.

*Maree, a personal secretary/administrator, recalls a personal experience when she was attending a formal dinner and was seated with “three distinguished elderly men all well into their eighties.*

“Discussion came round to poetry ... and all agreed it was their love of poetry that carried them all through WW1 and the rigours of that time. One spoke of his *Palgrave* – a precious possession – which he carried with him all through the war”.

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