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Accessing Poetry in a Global Age: An Applied Pedagogical Assessment

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Teaching poetry is a challenge, yet historically, poetry is a foundation of our society and an oral tradition dating back to ancient Greece, with the first recorded poem, *The Odyssey*. This paper assesses a course on global poetry designed to teach the exploration of differing world views presented through poetry. A mixed methods approach includes both quantitative and qualitative data; a pre/post-test combined a personal experience survey about poetry with a cumulative review of content and various written assignments and reflections. The results of a paired t-test show that students had a statistically significant increase in appreciation and knowledge of poetry. This, along with the qualitative data, suggests that a correlation exists between course pedagogy and student growth. The results indicate that the pedagogy may be effectively used in secondary and college classrooms to engage students with poetry, which promotes a deep understanding of humanity and our global culture.

Keywords: Poetry, The Odyssey, Global Age

The broad idea of this paper is poetry education. This project began with a love of poetry and a desire to teach it in such a way that students would walk away with a heightened sense of and appreciation for poetry. This project shows the effects of a poetry curriculum, which combines noted poetic teaching strategies used in many different situations. The project also includes a global perspective. One question driving this research is: “How can presenting accessible, global poetry aid poetic appreciation and experience?” Instead of almost exclusively studying the ‘old dead white men’ of the literary world, which is the type of poetry that many students are exposed to in their secondary school years, this project presents almost exclusively contemporary, accessible poetry by global poets. The purpose of using such poetry is to increase student’s exposure to a global perspective while promoting a connection to universal human experiences that invite

students to find a place for poetry in their individual worlds.

This project increased poetic awareness and experience, through the teaching of a three-credit Honors Global Poetry Seminar that allowed students to analyze a variety of perspectives, which allowed the students to think both critically and creatively. These results may help provide an action plan for affecting positive change in the world of poetry.

Historically poetry is an oral tradition dating back to ancient Greece, with the first recorded poem, *The Odyssey*. Poetry is a very part of our history and was one of the first ways humans connected to one another. Although the study of poetry has changed, poetry is still important and recognized widely. A Google search for poetry + The New York Times produces page after page of articles on teaching poetry, reviews of poetry, pairing poems with others texts, and others. One article

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titled “Poetry Kept My Patient Alive” by Ruth Livingston (2015) addresses a patient affected by schizoaffective disorder. She concludes that poetry was extremely important in his personal and social life when she recounts that “he used his writing to keep himself alive, to soothe himself when spinning out of control, and even to fuel his psychosis when he drifted into madness. Most of all, however, poetry kept him connected to others.” Based on this article, one can assume that poetry is important because it is good for mental health and provides a place of consistency even when the rest of the world seems to be falling apart.

In addition to a plethora of articles, there are many poetry competitions held annually. Here are a few - Poetry Out Loud hosts a National Recitation Contest and BBC supports Authors Live, which is a poetry slam competition. There are competitions for individuals at any age, including College Unions Poetry Slam Invitational, better known as CUPSI, a collegiate poetry slam competition that holds tournaments at the regional, national, and international levels and National Poetry Slam Championship where teams compete in a series of solo and group performances. Since there are so many competitions, poetry is popular in today’s society.

Further our country’s government officially appoints a poet laureate each year. This person is often expected to create poetry for special occasions. Ralph Fletcher, author and poet, discusses the presence of those poems written for special occasions in his book *Poetry Matters: Writing a Poem From the Inside Out* (2002) when he writes “At funerals, graduations, fiftieth wedding anniversaries, birthday parties, at the inauguration of a president, people gather to read – what? Not stories. Not articles or plays. They read poems” (p. 7). He goes on to explain that he feels the

reason we use poems for special moments is because poetry is so intimate. Poems are short, intense, and use a few select words to emphasize emotions, thoughts, and feelings that may not have been expressed otherwise. Finally, our country recognizes the importance of poetry every April with National Poetry Month. Inspired by Black History Month in February and Women’s History Month in March, “National Poetry Month is the largest literary celebration in the world, with tens of millions of readers, students, K-12 teachers, librarians, booksellers, literary events curators, publishers, bloggers, and, of course, poets marking poetry’s important place in our culture and our lives” (“Academy of American Poets,” 2016). In a world where poetry is celebrated, loved, and acknowledged for its significance, there may be a disconnect between the teaching of poetry in many schools and the way the world seems to recognize it. There is a lack of concrete curriculums that incorporate poetry and even fewer articles that address the specific effectiveness of each curriculum tried. Given the way poetry is recognized, teaching poetry effectively seems to be the next logical step.

Literature Review

This review will describe some of the challenges teachers have faced with poetry, while also providing some solutions that have been implemented. An exploration of peer-facilitated learning in collegiate Honors Programs will also be included. University Honors programs have been utilizing the ability of senior undergraduate students to teach underclassman at their colleges for years. While those programs were more directed and often allowed students less freedom in their teaching, the model is similar to that of this study.

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Students may dislike poetry due to the way it is taught and presented. An English teacher published in *The Virginia English Bulletin*, Amanda Epperly (2009) writes about students' dislike of poetry in adolescence and discusses the many questions surrounding poetry. She addresses some of the controversial issues, like who is to blame for why students are not learning poetry well. Epperly also discusses solutions. The most popular answer to why students dislike poetry is because they do not like the way poetry is taught in high school (p. 71). With this in mind, Epperly explored methods of teaching poetry that students disliked the most (p. 72). By asking students their opinions, she found many do not get enough exposure to poetry during childhood and then they get too much in high school.

Epperly emphasizes that students should be exposed and reintroduced to poetry gradually and often throughout their careers as students (p. 73). She explains that the poems chosen for the beginning of a poetry class should be simpler, in order to evoke enthusiasm. Students also need to learn that multiple interpretations of a poem are possible, as long as each claim can be supported in the poem. She concludes that many dislike poetry because it is a mystery, which often remains unsolved, but the ambiguity of poetry is the very element she appreciates most.

Engaging in poetry has to be about the interactions one has with a text. English Professor, writer, and developer of a revolutionary approach to reading and teaching literature, Louise Rosenblatt (1956), believes that a story, poem, or play "is merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols" (p. 62). The interaction that a person has with a text is what makes meaning for the reader. Without the transformation, the words are meaningless.

She also believes that a "literary work is a particular and personal event" (p. 63). Similar to Amanda Epperly, Rosenblatt contests students should make their own connections to the text, making individualized meaning possible. If teachers help students make "personally satisfying and personally meaningful transactions with literature" then they will look to literature for "the pleasure and insights it offers" (p. 63). Rosenblatt insightfully details the transaction between readers and literature and the power of that interaction on students.

Teaching poetry regularly may prove effective in increasing student opinion of the subject. United States Poet Laureate and award-winning poet, Billy Collins, created his collection, *Poetry 180: A Turning Back to Poetry*, for students to hear a bit of poetry every day. The program suggested reading poetry as part of the daily announcements at high schools across the country. After hearing the poems there was "no discussion, no explication, no quiz, no midterm, no seven-page paper – just listen to a poem every morning and off you go to your first class" (Collins, 2003, p. XVI). This allowed students to think about the poetry, as they heard it, but they did not have to write a drawn-out explanation of their thoughts. This also decreased the intensity of the students' exposure to poetry content by listening to one poem a day.

Poetry can be incorporated in many aspects of life and education. Thomas Frank (2005), a teacher of religion and church administration, learned that poetry can be effectively implemented into any curriculum and with any audience. Frank taught the same religious concepts but used poetry to emphasize his points. Frank introduced the students to about twenty poems and gently helped them reveal personal meaning. Frank found poems that tied into his religious lessons, because there is a poem to

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fit any occasion (p. 47). Even though he received mixed reviews, he continues to use poetry because it aligns with his beliefs and goals for his students (p. 49). He hopes students will listen for the poetic song and have the courage to let it speak (p. 50). Frank's teaching is proof that poetry can be a part of anyone's life and education.

A fear of poetry by the students may lead to poor teaching by the educator. As with Epperly, noted above, high school English and journalism teacher, Bill Connolly, and teacher in the literacy education program at Rutgers University's Graduate School of Education, Michael Smith (2003), noticed comparable reluctance to poetry in the high school setting. They fear that the student's dislike of poetry leads teachers to focus on a single interpretation of each piece and that by presenting poetry this way they are torturing their students (Connolly & Smith, 2003, p. 235). Their main concern is the lack of research on how poetry is best taught in the classroom. Through their research, they concluded that teachers tend to teach poems they have mastered, which makes sense, because teachers want a deep understanding of the work before they teach it. They argue that instead teachers should teach poems they have not mastered in order to foster uncertainty and exploration, something that could strengthen student's interest in poetry. When this is done correctly, the teacher becomes part of the conversation instead of the leader (p. 236). Connolly and Smith concluded that students often fear poetry because they feel intimidated by teachers who know the poems so well they only express one interpretation of the piece. When teachers look at new poems the classroom dynamics change drastically (p. 239). Although this is just a start, implementing a few changes can show significant improvement in student learning and involvement with poetry.

Before attempting to teach poetry, an understanding of what has worked in the past and what has not will be necessary. Just like the teacher, Smith, observed in the previous article, the different methods that teacher, John Moore (2002), applied to his classroom increased his students' involvement with poetry. Although these strategies have been used in the high school classroom, many of these tools can transfer into the college classroom as either a reinforcement of ideas or a new look at an old topic. He discusses how many of the methods he used in his first years of teaching were overly "technical... textbookish, English-majorish, and mostly uninviting to [his] students" (Moore, 2002, p. 45). It took him years to come up with a method of teaching poetry that worked and even once he found something that did work, other methods he used later did not work. Coming out of college, he did not feel prepared to teach poetry, but was determined to develop a way to teach it effectively, because Moore recognized the value of poetry (p. 44). The method he found most effective was grouping students and having them talk about poems and then breaking up and doing a creative writing assignment connected to the poems (p. 45). Something else he found successful was using poetry throughout several lessons, rather than as a lump sum. As previously noted by Epperly and suggested by Connolly, teaching too much poetry at once increased the difficulty of learning and teaching poetry. By weaving together literature and poetry throughout many lessons, Moore avoided overdoing it, while presenting students with an array of poetry types (p. 47). He has also integrated other art forms including music into the lessons (p. 47-48). This article is a list of attempts at teaching poetry.

Although each of the studies was based on limited experience and each group

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of students is profoundly different, the methods can be tailored to fit the needs of any class and all students. This research incorporates many of the strategies listed in these articles and others. The study will also explore the dynamics of peer facilitated learning.

Peer facilitated programs are used in several collegiate Honors Programs in the United States. Ramapo College of New Jersey, University of Connecticut, Lane Community College, College of Charleston, and University of Maine are a few of the colleges and universities in the U.S. that actively use some variation of peer facilitation. Many of these are a part of the first-year student experience, where upperclassmen facilitate a one-credit class to first year Honors students. Like Ramapo College of New Jersey, which implements an application process, (Peer Facilitators 2015) most ensure their applicants are highly qualified and well trained. These programs are said to help foster “a sense of community among first-year students by connecting them with upper-class mentors,” (Peer Facilitators 2015) a goal of many Honors programs.

An Honors faculty member from the University of Maine presented his college’s peer-facilitated program at the 2014 National Collegiate Honors Conference. In this seminar, he explained how 4th year students teach one credit hour current events courses. The students worked with a group to compose key curriculum pieces before the semester began, and then were expected to plan lessons and grade assignments (with assistance), with weekly meetings to aid this process. These courses helped the new students build a sense of community, while the facilitators learned about responsibility, time management, and teaching with another individual (Haggerty 2014). While the seminar discussed in this paper is an expanded take on peer facilitation, this

review illuminates the idea that peers teaching other peers at the collegiate level is nothing new. This project hopes to show the results of an expanded model and how effective peer teaching can be, when coupled with an effective curriculum.

Historically, many teachers have struggled with the implementation of poetry and many students have struggled with the learning of poetry, as is evident in the research. Some articles do suggest ways to teach poetry effectively, for example, spreading poetry learning out over a lump sum approach or facilitating poetry learning over leading the learning from mastery. However, there is little scholarly work that provides concrete examples of effective poetry teaching being implemented in the classroom and little scholarship, which explores the effectiveness of specific poetry curriculums. There is even less data about poetry being taught at the collegiate level. This research does not boast itself as presenting the best or most effective poetry curriculum, but it does combine elements that have been cited as effective into a one-semester poetry curriculum taught at the collegiate level which according to the qualitative and quantitative data was effective in teaching poetry and increasing poetic appreciation.

Methods

Participants

The participants were fourteen college freshman and sophomore students in the Honors Program. The class consisted of ten sophomores and four freshman. There were eleven females and three males in the course. Each student received three academic credits towards his/her Honors Program requirements upon completion of the seminar. The course met twice a week

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for sixteen weeks and included one mandatory event outside of class time. The course was advertised in the Honors Program, but students self-selected the class. All participants received the same tests and assignments and were graded on the same rubrics.

Since this project is much like a case study, there is a vast amount of data to choose from. It would be impossible to include all aspects, but highlights will be included. Key quantitative data, including a pre/post-test and an evaluation at the quarter and halfway mark, and supporting qualitative data will be included in the study.

Design

The class was held in a room with access to technology. All copies were made in the Honors Program office. Each student was provided with one folder with a number written on it. All assignments submitted for a grade were collected in the folder. The folder acted as a log for continual growth and aided in growth grading. All assignments and reflections are stored in a locked filing cabinet.

Procedures

This study utilizes a mixed methods approach, which includes both qualitative and quantitative data. Honors 200: Seminar on Global Poetry for undergraduate students in the Honors Program at the University of Northern Colorado is a research-based one semester-long poetry curriculum created by the researcher.

The researcher instructed the course with the consultation from an instructor of record, a professor in the English Department. The first day of class, students completed the pre-test, which gave a baseline for student knowledge. The exam

began with a personal experience survey with both free response and Likert scale questions. The scale ranged from one to eight, from strongly disagree to strongly agree and asked participants to answer questions about their experience with poetry in the past. Topics included questions about ability to analyze, interest in, previous experience with, and ability to identify poem, poets, and poetry styles.

The remainder of the test consisted of content-based questions answerable in a variety of ways. The test included six multiple choice questions, four true or false questions, eight fill-in-the-blank questions, and eight short answer questions. Preceding each of the multiple choice and true/false questions was a question that asked about participants' confidence in their answers. This data will be used to show if an increase in the relative ability to answer the questions occurred after completion of the course.

The goal of the pre-test was to initially assess students' ability to answer questions about poetry concepts and to gauge their past experiences with poetry. In order to complete the data cycle, a post-test was administered on the last day of class. The post-test resembled the pre-test, but it was adapted to fit the needs of the students and the changes to the curriculum that occurred throughout the course.

The post-test included the same ten Likert scale questions, but the second set of personal questions changed to one question which asked students to provide the most valuable skill they will take away from the course. The multiple choice section still included six questions, with six confidence questions to follow, but one question was changed to reflect the content of the course. The true and false section of the test was expanded to six questions, each with a level of confidence question to follow. The questions were added to assess student learning throughout the course. Two

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questions were also added to the fill-in-the-blank section of the test to reflect the changed content of the course. One question was removed from the short answer section of the exam and moved to a new section of the exam because it became more useful for the students to identify examples in a poem than provide extraneous examples as the pre-test requested.

Some additional items were added to the end of the test to reflect the changed content of the course and the increased learning that occurred when students chose to explore more deeply the world of poetry. Students were asked to fill out a rhetorical triangle, a graphic organizer which acts as an aid to students when completing academic writing. They were also asked to read a poem by award winning poet W.S. Merwin and identify key ideas and poetic devices from the poem. To relieve stress, students were offered a brief extra-credit section, which is not reflected in test results but did aid in their final exam scores. The last three questions reflected their opinions on their preparation for the test. Although the pre/post-tests were not replicas, only questions consistent between both tests are included in a paired-data comparison. In place of a midterm, students were asked to complete the personal survey section of the pre/post-test again.

The tests will provide three forms of data: whether the participants' opinions of poetry has increased or decreased, whether personal experiences with poetry has changed for better or for worse, and whether overall knowledge of poetry has increased or decreased after completion of the course.

Qualitative data was also collected through the study. Students were required to read, write, and recite poetry weekly. All written items were stored in students' folders. Students were also asked to reflect on the process of the class several times. The reflections ranged from personal

connections with texts to how the content would apply to their future careers. Students were asked to take an additional survey at the four week mark to address any concerns they had about the course. This survey asked students to state what they wanted to learn but had not yet, what they liked about the course thus far, and what they would like to see changed. Using these suggestions, the researcher tailored the remainder of the semester to fit the specific needs of the students.

During the last week, students were asked to reflect on the following prompt – “Considering all you have learned through this seminar, reflect on your learning and how this might transfer to other courses and your future careers. Are there any skills you will take away from this course? Explain what about the course you did or did not enjoy.” This reflection provided a summative look at the skills students took from the course.

Each day of the course was structured similarly. The course started slowly, laying the groundwork for analyzing and composing complex poetry. We began with techniques for analyzing poetry by annotating effectively, learned the TPPCASTT¹, which is an analysis technique, studied literary terms, and gained a rough feel of the course. Lessons followed a rigid plan, aligned to the 12th grade Colorado State Standards, and included essential questions, real-world connections, and skills based instruction. Most Thursdays, we started with an author's spotlight, which highlighted a particular poet related to the topic of that week's lessons. Our first author's spotlight highlighted to great Billy Collins, a contemporary poet who was U.S. Poet Laureate in the early 2000's. His poem “Introduction to Poetry” embodied many of the ideals of the course,

¹ TPPCASTT - Title, Paraphrase, Poetic Devices, Connotation, Attitude, Shift, Theme, Title

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as it suggests that reading poetry is more about diving into what the piece has to offer and less about trying to squeeze out a certain meaning from a piece.

Each week the class processed different forms of poetry, learning about the history, studying the poets who made those forms famous and who became famous using those forms, and practiced writing along the way. Our main text was Mary Oliver's *The Poetry Handbook*, an accessible read that details the keys to success when reading and composing poetry. This text laid a strong foundation for our poetic endeavors. Throughout the course, students were required to read sections and then write reflections. Students were taught a few strategies for writing well-structured arguments, including using an adapted Toulmen model. During the course, we were treated to several guest speakers – poets and musicians – who shared about their history and poetic journeys. In one guest lecture, students were required to translate Chinese poetry, using a list of symbols and synonyms. The complexity of translation struck an interest in the students, expanding their knowledge of language function and use. During another guest visit, a history lesson on Chicano/Chicana literature shed light on Spanish poetry, read in both the original language and in translation. To conclude most classes, students were asked to reflect on their learning. Some days, they were required to write a reflection, others a verbal check was sufficient. One goal of the course was to make poetry applicable to their future lives as students. An expectation of reflection allowed students to consider unique connections between their world and the poetic world.

Results

Overall, the results of the project are promising. The post-test showed a

significant increase in the number of correct responses from the pre-test. There were twenty-four content questions in common between the two tests, and students showed some increase on twenty-two of the questions. The data presented in Figure 1 shows that an increase of at least 40% in correct responses from the pre to the post-test occurred on the majority of the questions. Further, the majority of the fill-in-the-blank and short answer questions showed an increase of up to 90%, with one question showing a 100% increase. A paired t-test was conducted on the averages of each question for the pre and post-tests. The post-test showed significant improvement as compared to the pre-test in mean score ($M=95.75$ Post and $M=40.04$ Pre) and standard deviation ($SD=5.74$ Post and $SD=31.24$ Pre). Furthermore, the p-value showed a statistically significant increase ($p<0.0001$).²

As mentioned previously, students were asked to answer an ability question after each multiple choice and true/false question. The purpose of this question was to better understand the data, as students might have been able to correctly answer questions from lucky guesses or their ability to deduce an answer. The data presented in Figure 2 does confirm that the average confidence of all fourteen participants was never below an 80% on any of the post-test questions. The average ability of participants increased on every multiple choice and true/false question. A paired t-test was conducted on the average abilities of each question for the pre and post-tests. The post-test showed significant improvement as compared to the pre-test in mean score ($M=92.56$ Post and $M=39.44$ Pre) and standard deviation ($SD=4.88$ Post and $SD=25.13$ Pre). Furthermore, the p-value showed a statistically significant increase ($p\approx 0.0004$).

² A p-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant

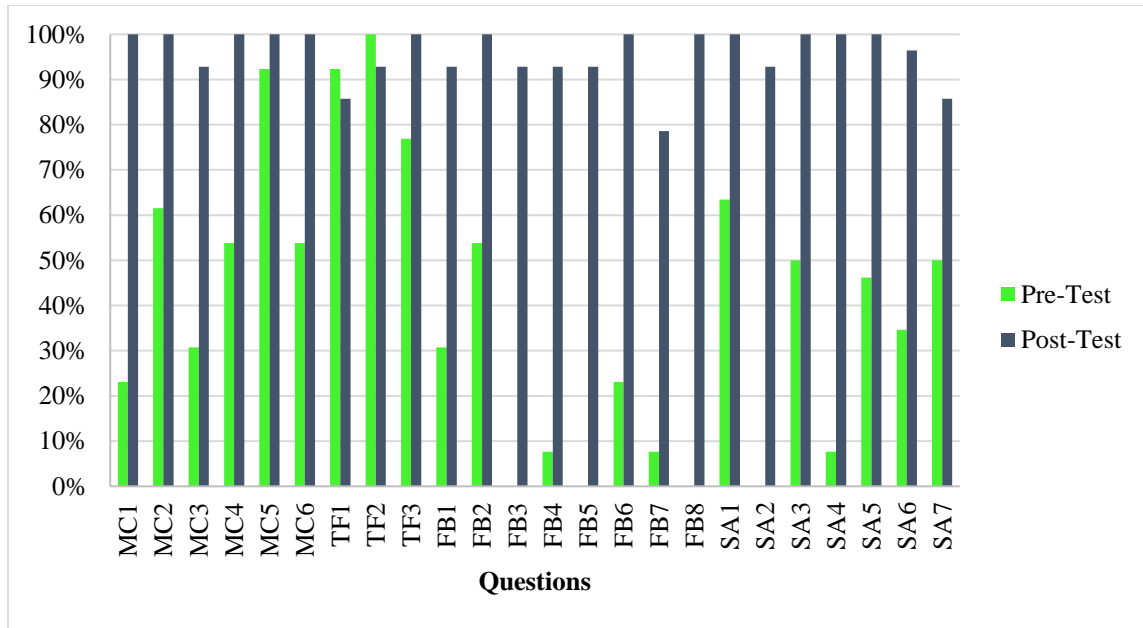


Figure 1 Percentage of Students with Correct Answers

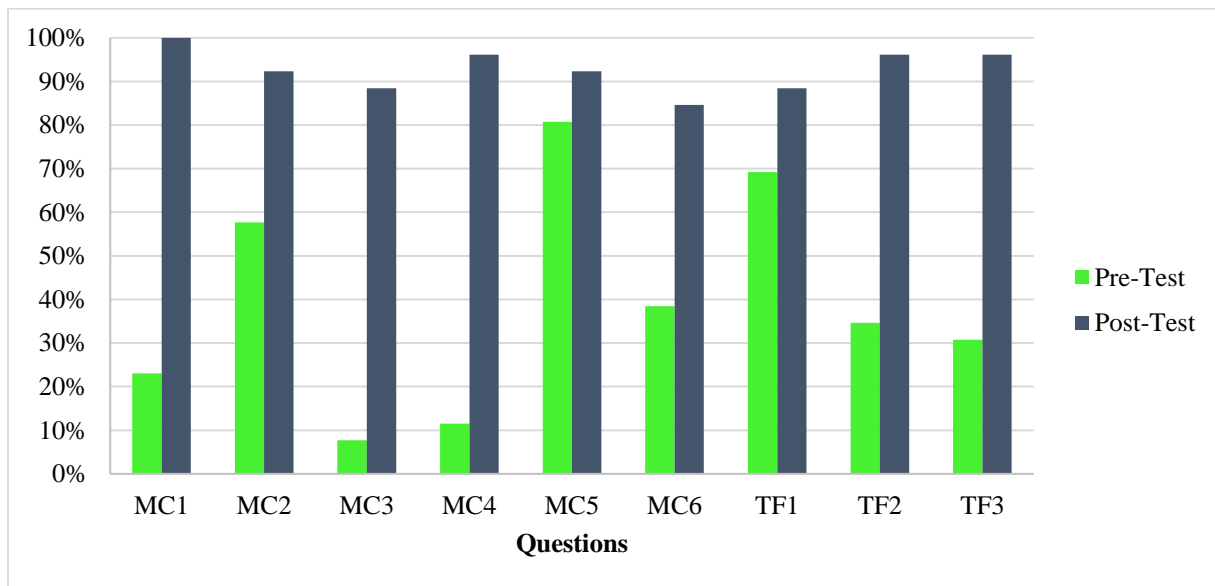


Figure 2 Average Ability of Students to Answer Questions

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While these numbers do show progress, they are not enough to prove that the students gained poetic appreciation, that their positive experiences with poetry increased, or that the poetic knowledge gained through the course will be transferred to the future endeavors of the participants. Another piece of test data taken from the pre/post-test was a personal survey. This survey was given to the participants three times during the course.

The ten questions were answerable on an 8 point Likert scale, where one was strongly disagree and eight was strongly agree. This type of scale did not allow a neutral selection, although answers four and five might be considered neutral. The data in Figure 3 represents these three surveys and shows a general upward trend. On all questions, the average rating increased from the pre to the post-test. A paired t-test was

conducted on the averages of each Likert question for the pre and post-tests, and the post-test showed improvement as compared to the pre-test in mean score (M=6.23 Post and M=4.40 Pre) and standard deviation (SD=0.538 Post and SD=1.191 Pre). Furthermore, the p-value showed a statistically significant increase ($p \approx 0.0005$). Lastly, on the post-test students were asked to answer the following question, “What is the most valuable skill you will take away from this course?” Five categories were deduced from the student responses and were tallied. Figure 4 shows the five most transferable skill categories include editing, reading enjoyment, writing (both technically and for personal expression), and analysis. In addition to this reflection, paragraph responses were written during the last week of the course.

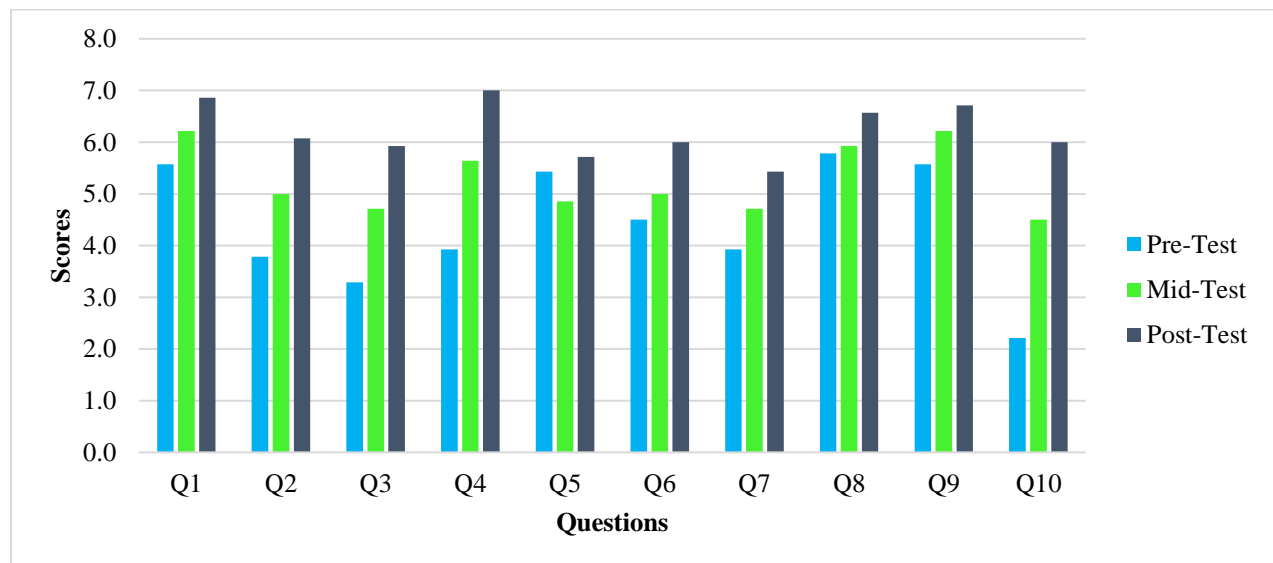


Figure 3 Personal Experience Survey

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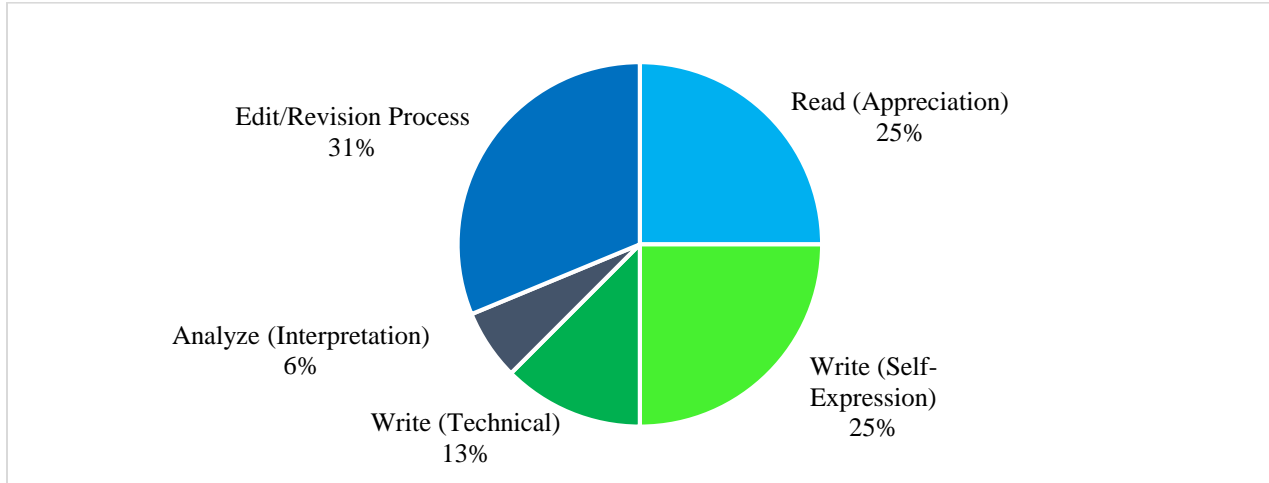


Figure 4 Most Valuable Skills Learned

Discussion

Result Analysis

The post-test showed a statistically significant increase in the number of correct responses from the pre-test. The low p-values, higher means, and lower standard deviations of the paired t-tests indicate improvement. The pre/post-test data shows three important pieces of information – that the students learned the materials, that they performed significantly better on the post-test than they did on the pre-test, and that the post-test covered course material.

At the end of the post-test, students were asked to a series of questions about their testing experience. Two Likert scale questions, with the same rating as the survey questions given previously³, asked students if they believed the exam accurately covered course content and to rate how well prepared they felt for the exam. The participants were also asked to provide a free response answer

³ Likert scale from 1 to 8, where 1 was strongly disagree and 8 was strongly agree

about why they did or did not feel prepared for the exam. For both questions, all students either agreed or strongly agreed. This response suggests that the students were well prepared for a test that covered the content of the course well. When allowed to elaborate on their answer to the second question, students provided a variety of answers. Some took responsibility for not studying hard enough, but also stated that they felt prepared for all of the content as it was reviewed in class. One student explained that “spelling some of the poetry terminology was hard to remember” without realizing that this was not actually covered on the test. The majority of students addressed how the material on the exam was covered accurately in the course and prepared them well. One thoughtful response addressed the idea of transfer, stating “even without that [the study guide], we spent so much time in class really covering this material in an in-depth way, that it stuck with me.” One of the main goals of this course was to provide students with skills to use in their future endeavors.

Individual reflections demonstrated growth and appreciation for their learning

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throughout the course. It is clear that participant confidence in answering questions about their experience increased. Many of them were uncertain of any poetry styles beyond the basic haiku and sonnet forms, and even fewer could identify their favorite poems and poets. By the end, students were able to call enough content related terms and names to fill two large whiteboards.

There are several of the personal experience statements worth mentioning. Question five, which asked students if they would rather read poetry over writing or listening to it, shows a slight dip in the midterm survey, which could be for a variety of reasons. As their confidence in writing poetry increased, their desire to read poetry may have decreased slightly. While the dip is worth noting, the decrease was not substantial, as it was a dip of less than one point. The largest increase in poetry experience is seen in question ten. This question asked students to rate how extensive their knowledge of poetic terms, poets, poems, and awards was. Student response increased from an average of two to six out of eight. It is assumed that while student knowledge of poetry increased dramatically, many students still felt uncomfortable marking numbers that represented strongly agree. Perhaps this could be because they realized that while they were learning a significant amount about poetry, there is still so much more to learn.

Additionally, some of the initial scores on many of the pre-test personal surveys may have been inflated, as students did not realize how weak their skills were. Before the class began, students may have felt their ability to analyze poetry was sufficient; however, they may not have realized the limits of that analysis until they dove into the higher-level analysis required

of a college course with an emphasis on analysis.

Reflection Discussion

In-depth reflection has the potential to lead to an increased awareness that may otherwise not have been communicated. As noted above, students wrote at least one paragraph reflecting on their experiences in the class. Highlights and some of the implications in relation to the goals of the project are highlighted below.

One major goal of the course was to increase poetic appreciation. Several students made note that their general experiences with and appreciation of poetry were enhanced through this course. One student wrote, "I learned so much this semester, and I will definitely be taking away a new appreciation for poetry because of this class." Not only was there an increased appreciation for poetry, but the student also mentioned how much was learned through the seminar. The realization that a vast amount of learning took place in this course is woven throughout many of the reflections, as the course was said to have "taught more than just poetry." Perhaps the class taught valuable transferable skills and/or an enjoyment of poetry. To second this idea, another participant suggested that "the emphasis on learning the joy of poetry over learning the forms and history made the class feel alive." The students certainly learned about the global nature and connectedness of poetry, but they also were given the freedom to roam the world of poetry without being restricted to a concrete set of rules. One student noted the difficulty as something that made the class worthwhile by writing that the course was "Not the easiest class, but those you learn from never are." This confirms that the course was

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challenging. Overall, the course did force students to think critically and deeply about complex topics, which could have added to both the difficulty and learning.

Regardless of what the students took away from the course, the seminar was certainly well-liked. Many students stated that this class was a favorite during the semester, with one even writing that “Honors 200 [had] been one of my favorite classes ever.” Perhaps this class was such a favorite because of the small size and the rich class culture. One student noted how much that participant “loved the discussions we had, and really valued the opinions of [fellow] peers.” The openness and the consistent respect of the course, added to the culture. Also, since the students were all in the Honors Program, a sense of community already existed. However, one student argued that this class did “the best at bringing a sense of community to the Honors Program [over] any event or class before it.” This comment suggests that a close-knit group of students, studying a unique and complex topic, brought even greater unity that furthered the goals of the Honors Program, which was an additional and unforeseen benefit of the course.

Another goal of the course was to teach students transferable skills. Numerous responses highlighted the idea of transfer, some referencing specific skills, revision and academic writing, for example, and others related the transfer to their future careers. One student admitted “I’d never even looked at revision in a positive light before, but now, not only do I understand how necessary it is, but I also see the joy in it,” showing both growth in the skill and reflection on the need. Another commented that “this class taught me a lot of useful skills that I needed to know for my major and career path,” realizing the value of the skills learned in the class.

One comment harkened back to that which was stated in the introduction about poetry units of secondary schools often doing a disservice to students. This student was hesitant about the course, because “poetry units in English classes have made me wary of poetry in general,” and it is probably true that this participant is not the only one who felt this way going into the course after leaving high school. Another comment suggested this same idea, but also connected the trepidation to course growth: “I finished English in high school and was looking forward to never taking another English class. I’m thankful I ended up in this class because it revived my appreciation for poetry and literature that my previous English classes had killed.” These comments show that it is possible to teach poetry in a way that students want to keep learning and looking for more, but this is unfortunately not what is taught in most secondary schools.

In addition to notes on content, learning, and growth, many students reflected on the way the class ran and the elements beyond the curriculum. Several students addressed passion, noting how the “passion and energy [the instructor] had throughout every day was the encouragement, entertainment, and mental boost every class should have but most lack.” These students recognized that the enjoyment of the course was also reliant on the way the course was taught and the interactions between the students and the teacher. It was also noted how the teacher’s excitement transferred to the students as it was distinguished as something almost tangible.

Personal growth is often as important in a course as academic growth. Many students suggested how much they gained from the course and how it helped them with their creative abilities. A quiet student with a

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poetic mind wrote, “this class re-sparked my poetic fuse,” a victory that has the potential to serve the contemporary poetic community greatly. Another student noted how the instructor “pushed us [the students] to become better writers, both in our poetry and in our academic writing.” Since both forms of writing were emphasized in this course, it is important to note the personal growth came in the form of creative and academic writing. Perhaps the most inspiring comment came from one student who battled feelings of inadequacy and a lack of self-confidence throughout the entire course. At the end, the student wrote that the class and instructor “managed to awaken something in me that I had given up on... [convincing] me that I can still write, for that I owe my extreme gratitude.” The student wrote further that the instructor “gave me back something that I was passionate about and that is the most important and valuable thing that I have gained in college.” This comment further emphasizes the reach this course had on the students. Realizing that the impact of this course extended far beyond that of the content and understanding of poetry, inspires the researcher to continue this complicated and involved work and to continue to motivate others to do the same.

Although all students showed growth in their learning and appreciation for poetry, one honest student wrote “I have learned about different types of poetry, but this particular style of writing is not my cup of tea,” and such a reflection is completely acceptable. This course did not seek to make every student fall in love with poetry, which would have been an impossible task. Instead it hoped to help a variety of students understand the versatility of poetry.

As a final note, several respondents mentioned continuing projects like this and would recommend others to take this course if they had the opportunity to do so. One

student also emphasized the enjoyment of having a fellow student as an instructor, because of the teacher’s ability to relate to the needs of the student and adapt as the course progressed. Although another project like this is probably not in the near future for UNC’s Honors Program, the positive feedback seen through in-class discussions, the data presented, and these reflections does show that other opportunities like this one could benefit future university students.

Limitations and Challenges

Many challenges and limitations accompanied this research. Although the data shows considerable growth in the students who took the class, the sample size is limited. Further, this curriculum has only been tested on one group of students. Since each class has a different dynamic, the lessons that affected the students in this seminar positively may have varying effects on different groups of students. Often times people’s greatest weakness can be their greatest strength, and this course was no different. Even though a class size of 14 made for a small sample size, this uniquely small class created a close community. Additionally, since the students were already in the Honors program, many of whom either had lived in or were currently living in the same dorm, a culture was easily acquired. All students were able to voice their opinions, and relationships were formed easily, so even though the small sample size meant that the data may not have as great a reach, the benefit for the individual students made this a minor limitation. Furthermore, since the pedagogy was research-based and provided an access to poetry unlike many older teaching styles, it is assumed that the curriculum pieces will benefit the majority of students who are exposed to them.

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There are a few limitations to the mixed methods approach presented in this study. Since this study provides both qualitative and quantitative data, neither can be addressed in as much detail. This could limit the scope of the data presented and the analysis of each piece. Additionally, since this project tested multiple strategies at once, it is nearly impossible to isolate one and prove its effectiveness. Finally, since this study only tests one curriculum with nothing to compare it to, the data can only show a correlation between student growth and the curriculum. The data can neither prove that this curriculum is more effective than others nor that it would be effective with other groups of students at other grade levels.

Another limitation of this project existed because of a lack of experience. While the researcher had been formally taught English pedagogy, this was the first full-length course taught and created almost exclusively by the researcher. Coupled with this, the students' needs changed as they grew throughout the course. These needs demanded a continually evolving curriculum. The inexperience may have resulted in some 'trial-and-error' activities and moments within the class that may have run more smoothly if the researcher had more prior teaching experience. Due to this inexperience, another challenge arose – not all faculty at the University of Northern Colorado were supportive of the project. Numerous individuals had concerns about an undergraduate student teaching other undergraduate students. However, it should be noted that the course was vetted and that the researcher went through the exact process any other teacher would go through in the University's Honors Program to get the curriculum approved. While not required, the researcher also attended a course approval meeting, which provided invaluable reflection on the goals and

potential outcomes of the course. It should also be noted that the Internal Review Board (IRB) approved the project given that the researcher was an undergraduate student who would be teaching other undergraduate students. In order to run the class, the researcher was recognized as a teacher's assistant and grading was checked by the research mentor and instructor of record. The researcher also met regularly with the instructor on record, who was also the main advisor for this project. With the support of the project advisor and the research participants, this major challenge was overcome.

Another limitation of this project may be seen in this particular sample. Many students self-selected into this course, perhaps because of their interest in the subject or their desire to learn more about the course. A more randomized group may have resulted in different data, since this group may have had an open mind about the topic of poetry. However, some students were forced into this class because they needed to meet their requirements but no other class fit into their schedules, so these students represent participants who may not have had an interest in poetry but still benefited from the class.

Future Work and Implications

There are many options for expanding the ideas presented in this paper. While every curriculum would be slightly altered to meet the needs of the students, a similar course could be taught in a variety of other situations. If this were to occur, then the numbers could be compared to test the effectiveness of this particular curriculum. For example, another Honors seminar could utilize a curriculum with similar pieces or this course could be adapted to meet the needs of secondary students and then the

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data could be compared. To provide an even more accurate look at key curriculum pieces, one or two lessons could be taught numerous times to different groups of students and reflections to those lessons could be tabulated to show if the curriculum pieces were effective in a variety of situations and with different groups of students.

There are both local and global implications to this project. One major implication is the potential for this curriculum or parts of it to be used in other classrooms. Such pieces could act as an access-point for students with this complex art. Since the lessons contained within the curriculum focus on accessible, contemporary poets, students might have an easier time making a connection with the texts. Fostering this connection before moving into more complex texts may help students tackle even the most challenging poems. In addition, each of these students are now poetry advocates, knowledgeable enough to share their understandings of poetry in the unique situations of their lives. Fourteen new advocates in the world allows this project to have a broader reach than could have been achieved by the research alone.

In a more global way, students gained invaluable skills that will serve them as they move towards their career paths. While the topic of the class was poetry, student learning went beyond this, providing experience with effective communication, both in writing and in-person, reading strategies, analysis, and editing, skills that will transfer to their future endeavors. Additionally, the structure of the course promoted a textual transaction unique to each student, over an “only one meaning” approach to understanding poetry. Such a model could benefit any course where

students could be asked to seek a transaction with texts or materials. This cross-curricular implication implies that many classrooms could benefit from the strategies presented in this curriculum. Finally, through guest speakers, opportunities to translate poems into different languages, learning about the history of poetry styles and types, and studying various global poets, an awareness of and a connection to other cultures was created, an outcome that will serve each student as they continue navigating their individual worlds.

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