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The development of young children's understanding of poetry

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore how young children's understanding of poetry develops . The teachers and pupils involved in this study were from a primary school in Middlesbrough. A wide variety of literature on poetry teaching, documentation on the teaching of English and literature relating to educational research was studied to provide background information for the research, highlight research questions and to assist in the design of the research instruments.

The research involved the collection of data through questionnaires with teachers and activities with children. One of the major facts that this research highlights is the apparent lack of reasons as to why poetry should be taught.

The study concludes that primary teachers still appear to be experiencing difficulties in the teaching of poetry to young children. The aims of poetry teaching have for many years been unclear to teachers and professionals. However, this study has shown that young children both enjoy and have an enthusiasm for poetry . Recent research is beginning to suggest why the teaching of poetry is important and the recent Literacy Strategy appears to have taken this research into account.

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Chapter   1

Introduction

Poetry is an area of the English Curriculum that for many years   has been identified by a variety of sources as   in need of professional   consideration , from Arnold (1880), H.M.I. (1921) to the more recent   publication of Reports such as "Education 5 - 9 (D.E.S. 1982), "9 - 13 Middle Schools", (D.E.S. 1983),   the implementation of the "Education Reform Act " (D.E.S. 1988) and culminating with the publication of " National Curriculum, English 5 - 16 ", (D.E.S. 1991).

> *"Children in primary school playgrounds clearly demonstrate an*
>
> *instinctive pleasure in pattern and rhyme. But this will need constant*
>
> *nurturing if it is to develop into an appreciation of the richness of*
>
> *poetry."*   *(D.E.S. 1989, 7.1)*

However, as Walter, (1989) discovers,

> *"Examination of recent literature upon poetry in school reveals how*
>
> *widespread is the view that things often go sadly wrong when children,*
>
> *poems and teachers meet in the classroom. "   (page 36)*

This view of poetry is supported by Benton (1978).

> *"Poetry has had bad luck. It has suffered a double misfortune; neglect*
>
> *where it most needs attention and concern where it is best left alone. "*
>
> *(page 111)*

Is this true ? Poetry has many enthusiasts.

> *" Poetry is at the heart of language. It should never be seen as just the*
>
> *icing on the cake or used as a time filler. It is the best way for children*
>
> *to get the feel for the texture of language, its sounds rhythms and*
>
> *shades of meaning. "   (Webster 1992, page 3)*

However, there also appears to be confusion about the status of poetry within schools, particularly at Key Stage 1, where there appears to be little research. Perhaps as a result, there appears to be a great deal of uncertainty about how young children begin to think of poems as poetry.

It would appear that features of poetry (rhythm) are part of the child's earliest experiences, that the elements of poetry which appeal to pre-school children are the rhythms and the sound patterns. The nursery rhymes, with their strong rhythms and their focus on sound rather than meaning are the form in which most young children experience poetry . These forms appear to be important because they have such a long and varied history.

Lullabies and nursery rhymes, are for most children, their first introduction to poetry. They are used before most children are able to talk. The numerous rhymes are

sung or told to most children from a very early age. The early experiences of poetry are almost entirely auditory. The young children are being told about strange people in strange places by someone who is remembering the rhymes from their own childhood. There are those who would argue that even before a child is born they are being introduced to a form of poetry, in the rhythms that they hear from inside their mother's womb. As the baby grows it is already being introduced to the rhythms of sound. The repeated beating of a mother's heart is usually the first sound that a baby hears.

Children's nursery rhymes have survived over generations, amidst claims that they represent political satire, historical persons or social history (Harrowven, 1979 Opie and Opie, 1952). This "poetry of the ages " (Harrowven, 1979) is the rhymes that were at the time considered too trivial to be recorded on parchment and have thrived orally. A lot of poetry is an oral tradition.

Whilst there are a few nursery rhymes that can be traced back to Roman times where they were hummed or sung to coax children to sleep ,(Matthew xi. 17 ;), the majority of the rhymes known today date from the beginning of the seventeenth century onwards.

> " At least a quarter, and very likely over half of the rhymes are more
>
> than 200 years old......nearly one in four of all the rhymes are believed
>
> to have been known while Shakespeare was still a young man"
>
> (Opies and Opies, 1966, page 7)

In the sixteenth and seventeenth century evidence suggests that the rhymes which existed were the property of the adults and it was not until the eighteenth century that the first book of rhymes was designed specifically for children (Opie and Opie, 1952). Most people could recite a number of nursery rhymes before they knew the meanings of the words that formed them. Young children rarely demand an explanation for the

rhyme's incongruities. They appear to "amuse and delight" the children, and are capable of creating powerful images. The characters in the nursery rhymes will remain with a child throughout his/her life. The rhymes, therefore, are very important.

When they begin to attend school, most children will bring with them a variety of rhymes, jingles, counting rhymes, songs and nursery rhymes that they have learnt at home or nursery school. They have learnt these rhymes through repetition. Most young children enjoy listening to a familiar story or nursery rhyme again and again. Through listening they pay attention to the sounds and words and soon join in reciting the rhymes.

When they begin school this store of rhymes is hopefully extended, but what happens next and when does a young child learn to distinguish that a poem is different from songs and nursery rhymes ? How do the children move from nursery rhymes to poems ? How is a poem different to a nursery rhyme ? Is there a "rite of passage", when a rhyme becomes a poem ? If so, how does this happen ? If not, how do young children learn about poems ?

With the advent of the National Curriculum, are teachers clear as to how and why they teach poetry ? Poetry is an area of the curriculum that fills some teachers with trepidation. The amount of teacher expertise varies greatly from person to person as well as the amount of training that teachers have had with regards to poetry. Do most primary teachers have sufficient training in the teaching of poetry ? In 1990, primary student teachers on a P.G.C.E. course did have input regarding poetry, with poetry a compulsory part of the English course, (School of Education, Durham University, 1990). Was this the case for other teachers ? In a study of student

teachers attitudes to poetry ,Wainwright (1966) suggested that student teachers felt that whilst poetry is,

" No longer good for them , it is somehow good for small children."
(page 40)

In what way is poetry considered good for young children ? What is the importance of poetry to young children? How can teachers develop poetic intuition in children ? Are there any theories as to how poetic intuition develops ? Does development of poetic intuition emerge only from experience of poetry ? With evidence that the recent National Curriculum requirements for poetry were not always being followed sufficiently, (D.E.S. 1991), what are teachers " failing " to do ? With more poetry being written than ever before and children appearing to receive it enthusiastically, (Trousedale and Harris, 1993), this study will examine what is happening in schools today.

The aims of this research study are :-

1. To provide information about what Key Stage 1 children understand about poetry .

2 . To throw light on how understanding of poetry develops in young children.

The research will explore:-

1. Teachers' and pupils' notions of poetic form and their perceptions of poetry.

2. What we know about children's understanding of poetry .

3. What are the aims of teaching poetry to young children ?

4. What is the role of teachers in developing children's understanding of poetry ?

5. Is there a "rite of passage " when a nursery rhyme becomes a poem ?

The study will begin by critically discussing the literature relating to poetry from an historical perspective and examining the way in which poetry has been taught. The researcher will discuss the "value" of poetry and the reasons that are given for the teaching of poetry. The role of the National Curriculum will be examined to look at the guidance that is given to teachers, especially with regards to the teaching of poetry. Studies by other researchers on poetry will be examined, and in particular, studies relating to young children's language development and rhyme. The study will then justify the choice of methodology, instrument design and sample selection , followed by the analysis of the data collected and presentation of the results. The study will conclude with a discussion relating to the research results, what evidence has been provided and what conclusions might be drawn.

Chapter 2

Historical perspective on Poetry Teaching

Introduction

In this chapter the researcher will examine the reports and documentation that have been published regarding the teaching of poetry within the last hundred years. The first section will provide insight into the history of the teaching of poetry and the many problems that the writers of the reports have considered to be of concern during the period 1858 - 1988. The following section will provide information about the teaching of poetry in the last decade, looking specifically at the recommendations that have been made by a variety of people and reports. These problems will be compared with the problems faced in the previous years in order to examine the similarities and differences. In the final part of this section the researcher will examine the problems that a teacher of poetry is faced with today .

Two facts seem to recur throughout the reports and literature. One is the notion that almost everyone who has written on the subject of poetry teaching considers poetry to be a "good" thing and that it should be taught. The second fact that constantly recurs is that the teaching of poetry is consistently criticised for not being done "well". With these two facts in mind the researcher will examine the reasons that are given as to why poetry is viewed as "good", what aspects are viewed as valuable and will critically look at historical views of poetry teaching.

1. Poetry teaching : 1852 - 1988

As long ago as 1852, Matthew Arnold was criticising pupil teachers and claiming that because of these teachers, children were not being taught about prose and poetry correctly. He referred to this problem as the absence of "genuine culture in school". In his report of 1860, Arnold commented,

" Young men whose knowledge of grammar, of the minutest details for

geographic and historical facts, and above all, of mathematics is

surprising, often cannot paraphrase a plain passage of prose or poetry

without totally misapprehending it."   H.M.I.(1921), (46)

Whilst criticising the teaching of poetry he does not appear to be giving any specific reasons as to why he views poetry as important nor how this problem could be rectified. It is almost as if he was taking it for granted that others would share in his view of poetry . By 1880, whilst commenting on "The revised Code of 1862", Arnold was still expressing his views about the "importance" of learning poetry, (H.M.I. 1921) and this time he attempts to explain in his own words why he considers poetry to be important.

" Good poetry does undoubtedly tend to form the soul and character;

it tends to beget a love of beauty and of truth in alliance together, it

suggests, however indirectly, high and noble principles of action, and

it inspires the emotion so helpful in making principles operative.

Hence its extreme importance to all of us; but in our elementary

schools it seems to me to be at present quite extraordinary." (48)

This statement is rather unclear. What exactly is Arnold claiming for poetry in this statement ? Is he implying that poetry is responsible for character forming and that is one of the reasons that it should be taught in elementary schools ? At this time, Arnold was in his thirtieth year as an elementary school inspector and he was also expressing the view that poetry should no longer be an "extra" subject but should be part of regular work in school. He was talking at a time when English Literature was a "specific" subject. It must be remembered that English was a relatively new subject in schools where there had previously been a much stronger focus on Latin. Since 1867 schools offering "specific" subjects were given increased grants. Within the English Literature syllabus, this mainly consisted of pupils learning poetry by rote . The English Literature syllabus of 1867 consisted of ;-

" 1st Year . One hundred lines of poetry, got by heart, with knowledge

of meaning and allusions. Writing a letter on a simple subject.

2nd Year. Two hundred lines of poetry , not before brought up,

repeated, with knowledge of meaning and allusions. Writing a

paraphrase of a passage of easy prose.

3rd Year. Three hundred lines of poetry, not before brought up,

repeated, with knowledge and meaning of allusions. Writing a letter or

statement , the heads of the topics to be given by the inspector."

(H.M.I. 1921,(49))

Under this syllabus, English was supposedly very popular. However, in 1882, after the Arnold report, English became a "class" subject. This meant that it was not a compulsory subject, but if it was to be taught, it had to be taught throughout the school and to a specific standard. Payments were made to schools which specifically taught English.

In 1890 the system of payments was abandoned. In a Report commissioned to look at the working of the Elementary Education Act (H.M.I. 1921) it was recommended that English was no longer to become a compulsory " specific" subject and as a result the numbers of schools taking it rapidly declined. The Cross Report recommended that English should cease to be a "class" subject and hinted that it should be more than an exercise in grammar or "getting by heart" of so many lines of poetry. From 1895 - 1902 , class subjects were abolished, and English, including grammar was expected in every school. (page 52). The teaching of poetry was again usually taught by rote. In 1919, " the Teaching of English in England " was published , with some recommendations about the teaching of poetry. It stated that,

"..the pupil should be made familiar with a body of fine poetry, of value not only for its own sake, but for its uses for comparison and illustration through the later work."   *(20, page 350)*

This report also claimed to be encouraged by enthusiasm for poetry by teachers who loved it, in numerous schools. However, the writers of the report were also aware of

some people's suspicion of the value of poetry in education (92). It was also here that it was suggested that the problem with poetry was not the children, who presented "no difficulty", but the teachers,

"... the teacher for whom poetry has no message should not attempt to take it in class." *(page 92)*

However, this report did claim to find much that " would have gladdened Arnold's heart". The report found that the children who had originally learnt 100 - 200 lines of poetry under the previous syllabuses were being succeeded by children reciting a "surprising" number of poems that they themselves had selected, and who,

" have read and appreciated very many others, who compile and transcribe anthologies of their own and delight in composing poems." *(p87)*

By 1946 a report by L.A.G. Strong (1944) was already commenting on the apparent decline in standards in the teaching of poetry in schools.

".. because poetry has been mistaught and mishandled by teachers unfit to deal with it, that we as a nation, fail to get pleasure from the art in which our literature is richest." *(page 22)*

In 1954 the Ministry of Education (Pamphlet No 26) made further criticism of the standard of the teaching of poetry. It was also pointed out, to remind others, that the teaching of poetry in schools was a relatively " new phenomena."

" *The roots which English poetry is beginning to strike in schools are,*

in most places, not more than ten years deep and are hardly more than

twenty-five or thirty years deep anywhere "   (*page 146)*

This report went on to blame the " stranglehold of Latin poetry on a grammar school curriculum in this country because poetry was Latin poetry" (page 146). In a society with a varied poetic treasury of Shakespeare, Milton, Donne, Hopkins, etc., little attention had been paid to this poetry in either schools or adult culture (p140) . The poetry in schools had therefore been mainly Latin poetry. With Latin poetry there had been concern with the " technicalities of structure, metre and figurative language." This report indicated however, that this was not the way to approach poetry with younger children and because of the way in which poetry was being taught many young pupils were being put off poetry. (p142). The report pointed out that this could not be blamed entirely on the schools. It claimed that other historical and social reasons were partially responsible, but admitted that there were also some educational reasons. In schools that had a "strong classical side" , however, English poetry was being read with enjoyment and with understanding.

" It is no longer true that music and painting have no place in English

life, but it is still unhappily true that the place of poetry is negligible."

(page 140)

One of the other concerns was that before the war poetry was well established in girls grammar schools and was becoming more common in boys grammar schools and mixed grammar schools. However, in secondary schools, " it is not so common to find a genuine devotion to poetry or a fine understanding of it " (p140). In the primary schools it was reasonably common to find simple poetry well presented, and there was some "excellent work done with younger children". This report also noted that " there is much to be done before English poetry enjoys the esteem it should." The Report actually asks the question, What is to be done with poetry in schools?

" There is a general uncertainty of touch about the presentation of

poetry to children and that a great deal of what is attempted is at best,

aimless and fruitless."   *(page 141)*

This 1954 report was also concerned about the teaching of poetry in schools. This was because one of the report's major concerns was that 90% of middle class people had ceased to read poetry in adult life. But was this necessarily due to the way in which poetry had been taught in schools ? Recommendations were made that poetry was to be given a higher priority and ways were suggested in which this could be possible. Poetry was to be supported by reading,

"Whatever methods or approaches are used with particular poems,

these must be supported by a great deal of reading at all times.

....Every pupil at every age needs a good anthology to take out

whenever he feels like".   *(page 142)*

More poetry books were therefore needed in schools. As well as suggesting that there was a need for more poems and poetry books the report actually referred to a number of poems that it claimed teachers would like children to know before they left school. A list of the " Top twenty poems" was named , with the Ancient Mariner topping the list. It is interesting to note here, that it is the adults who were choosing the poems that the children were to read and learn. The report advised that children should be free to choose what they read until "they are ready to discipline themselves". However the choice, that the children have to read from, had already been pre-selected for them by the teachers, the children were only free to choose, in that they were choosing from an already pre-chosen selection of books.

The report concludes by looking to the future of poetry in schools as " it may bring better things". The past was seen as discouraging. However, the report did appear to have discovered some signs of encouragement for the future. For example, courses on poetry that had been arranged for teachers appeared to have considerable appeal, " bigger than expected" (p146). For teachers in all kinds of schools, any course that was arranged for teachers of English, a poetry section " was almost invariably " included. But what was this inferring , that teachers enjoyed poetry or that they needed training in how to teach poetry ?

Since the publication of this report there have been several further reports, which all appear to reach the same conclusion (NATE 1964, DES 1975, CACE 1967, DES 1978, DES 1982, DES 1983, D.E.S. 1991). On the one hand poetry is seen as a good thing and must be given priority within the teaching of English. On the other, the teachers are constantly being criticised for the way in which they teach poetry and are constantly being accused of failing. But what exactly are they failing at ?

In their report , N.A.T.E.(1964), again extols the virtues of poetry. Again the report argued for the support of poetry in school,

" *All children should have frequent opportunities of hearing, speaking*

and enjoying good poetry".   *(page 7)*

This report also stressed the importance of nursery rhymes, because the "human race has a deeply rooted and rich oral tradition which schools must use and nourish" (page 3). Unfortunately for teachers, the report does not go into any detail as to what they were to teach the children about poetry or what poems constituted "good" poetry. This perception of "good "poetry is also implying that there may be such a thing as "bad" poetry or poetry that the children should not be introduced to.

The next major report which referred to the teaching of poetry and the teaching of language, must undoubtedly be The Bullock Report , "A Language for

Life" (D.E.S. 1975). The Bullock Committee again expressed opinions as to why the teaching of poetry was important.

" *Well chosen poetry can enrich language and develop the imagination, in addition to increasing children's sensitivity to people and their awareness of their surroundings.* "   *(2.44)*

However, the Committee was very disappointed to discover that,

" *In the majority of schools poetry was not treated as an important aspect of the curriculum and most children heard it irregularly or as an isolated experience.* " *(2.44)*

Again this Committee appears to be disappointed in the poetry that is being taught in school. What do the writers of this report expect the teachers to be doing and what is the "well chosen poetry" that they refer to ? Very little guidance appears to be given as to what the teachers should be doing . This report is very critical of current practice but does not appear to be offering any solutions.

It is interesting to note here that, as Benton (1978) points out, even the professionals who wrote the report are themselves reinforcing the view of poetry as being something different.

" In the public view it is something rather odd, certainly outside the

current of normal life. "   *(page 114)*

Is it because poetry is different that it appears to be difficult ? The report

appears to be reinforcing the notion that poetry is esoteric. Only three and a half pages

in the Bullock Report (DES 1975) were devoted to poetry. This in itself may give us

some clues about the views of the professionals who wrote the report on poetry.

In 1984, a study was undertaken by the Schools Council Programme, entitled

"Teaching Poetry" (Calthorpe & Ede 1984). This study was developed as part of

students' initial and in-service training courses which were well supported because

teachers were asking for help in the classroom regarding poetry. With teachers

delivering a curriculum , based largely on the acquisition of "knowledge" and "skills"

it was found that many teachers were not confident enough in delivering poetry lesson

(p1). It was noted that there had been little curriculum development in this area and the

numbers of books devoted to poetry teaching compared unfavourably with the rest of

the "English " curriculum . It would appear that here we have evidence that teachers

were wanting more information about the teaching of poetry. Were their requests for

help or guidance in the teaching of poetry to be met ?

In   a report (DES 1982), within the objectives for seven year olds,   with

regards to poetry, there was very little written.

" Listening:-

Listen responsively to the language of the patterns of sound and rhythm of rhymes and poems.........

Speaking ; - (No reference made)

..Reading : -

Read with understanding simple stories, rhymes and passages of information, to themselves aloud......

Writing : -

...Write about personal experiences in prose and in poetry."   (page 5, 2.4)

Another report (DES 1987) in arguing the case for poetry attempted to explain why the teaching of poetry is important.

" Poetry embodies delight in expression, stretched between thought, feeling and form. As we become aware of the "true soundings" of poetry so we become aware of what we ourselves might do with language......... Poetry includes a concept of human creativity and imagination and a notion of energy and value." (page 1)

This report continued to argue that poetry must be taught and that poetry was "most valuable" (p2). It went on to state,

"If language becomes separated from moral and emotional life...then

we run the risk of depriving children of the kind of vital resource of

language which poetry provides."   (page 2)

The alarming part about this statement is that it appears to be echoing the types of comments made by Matthew Arnold, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, written more than one hundred years earlier . Does this mean that after a hundred years , it was still unclear as to why the teaching of poetry was " important" ? "Woolly" statements were still being printed about the importance of poetry in documents and reports written by professionals. Again, high claims were being made by poetry enthusiasts for the "civilising, liberating and humanising effects of poetry" (NATE 1966,p) unfortunately they were still not being elaborated in a way that teachers of poetry are able to use in the classroom.

In 1988, The Kingman Report (HMSO 1988) was published. Again we have the importance of poetry stressed, in a somewhat "romantic" way.

" Tentative beginners can be led to felicitous discoveries of new words

and phrases (and even thoughts) by the exigencies of rhyme. "

(page 38)

What exactly do they mean by this ? How are teachers supposed to understand this comment ? Is it guiding teachers ? The Kingman report also discovered that within the teaching of poetry, very little had changed since the Bullock report. They

noted similar features of teaching that had been noted in the previous report and again found this to be "very dispiriting".

"In national terms poetry is frequently neglected and poorly provided for. Its treatment is inadequate and superficial." (*page 38*)

This report, however did attempt to explain reasons for this. Rather than just commenting that poetry was recognised as a good thing "and should be encouraged whenever possible", it also noted that there appeared to be a lack of resources and methods for the teaching of poetry. With this point in mind, it must be necessary to ask if the current National Curriculum document has got it right. Is it guiding teachers sufficiently ?

2. Poetry Teaching in the current Decade

" The place of poetry in the national curriculum is not as assured as it might be. "   *(Andrews 1991, page 5)*

Following the Education Reform Act of 1988, The National Curriculum Council was established and specified appropriate attainment targets, programmes of study and assessment arrangements for each of the foundation subjects, (Education Order, (1989). Statutory requirements were made for the teaching of English and were to be implemented at Key Stage One in 1989/1990, (DES 1989). English was to be

divided into five attainment targets. Speaking and Listening, Reading, Writing, Spelling and Handwriting. There was no strand for poetry.

Within the programmes of studies, reference was made to "poems" and "rhymes" at Key Stage One, but poetry was not being treated as a specific genre and was nearly always linked to references about stories. e.g. " telling stories and poems" (p14) and " favourite poems and stories" (p15). In the Programme of Study for Writing, Spelling and Handwriting there was a reference that children should,

*" *   play with language, for example by making up jingles, poems, word games, riddles and games which involved word and spelling patterns."   (page 18, 20)*

Even in the Non Statutory Guidance, no section was included on poetry, even though a section had been included on Drama(p16).It is again disappointing to discover that even in the section concerned with planning schemes of work for reading, the words "poem" or "poetry" are not included at all. The only reference is to .."stories, rhymes. rhythm and memory", as an aid to predicting texts.

The following year, 1990, The National Curriculum Council published further Non Statutory guidance to "build on existing Non Statutory Guidance for Key Stage One." Again no section was included on poetry. Poems were mentioned within a range of "rich and stimulating texts" at Key Stage One which were recommended to be read. However, it is interesting to note that at Key Stage Two this range was to include

"more challenging material such as poetry."(pB4) Are the writers indicating that poetry is too challenging for pupils at Key Stage One? It is difficult to fully understand what the writers are implying here. As part of a list of a variety of techniques to help children to master spelling "composing stories and poems" was included (pB8). Again a separate section was included on Drama, but not on poetry. As part of the conclusion of the document , the writers claimed to have drawn information from a variety of documents, but why was so little on poetry included at Key Stage One?

In the Cox Report (DES 1989) the reason for a strand of poetry not being included was given,

"We believe that, throughout the school years, all children should have ample opportunities to write poetry, either singly or in groups; this is made explicit in the programmes of study. However, we have not included a poetry strand in the statements of attainment because we do not feel that any pupil should be required to write a poem in order to achieve a particular level of attainment."   *(17.29)*

Could this mean that poetry may be consigned to oblivion ? Andrews (1991) claims that previous Government sponsored reports and proposals seem not to know what to do with poetry and that that these reports (DES 1975, HMI 1987) do not offer any solutions about Poetry Teaching. This also appears to be the case for the National Curriculum. If children at Key Stage One are not required to write poetry, will teachers try to teach it ? Will the pressure, as some people suggest (Andrews 1991) to

fulfil attainment targets and assessment requirements mean that poetry will be forgotten ?

With regards to the current teaching of poetry in school, the 1994 Dearing National Curriculum indicates what the pupils of Key Stage 1 should be doing.

Speaking and Listening

1a They should read and listen to nursery rhymes and poetry, learning some by heart.

Reading

1a They should read from genres that include stories, poetry, plays and picture books.

1c The material that should be read and discussed to stimulate pupils' imagination and enthusiasm should include -

- language with recognisable repetitive rhymes and patterns.

1d The literature covered, should cover the following categories-

- poems and stories from a range of cultures

- poems and stories with familiar settings and those based on imaginary or fantasy worlds.

- stories , poems and chants containing predictable language

- stories and poems that are particularly challenging, in terms of length or vocabulary

2b In opportunities to develop phonic knowledge children should be -

- recognising alliteration, sound patterns and rhymes relating those to patterns in letters.

2c In understanding and responding to stories and poems pupils should be given opportunities to...

- read favourite stories and poems , learning some by heart.

- hear stories and poems read aloud frequently and regularly including some longer and challenging material.

- prepare, present, and act out stories and poems they have read.

Whilst poems have been included in this most recent document, it appears to be implying that poems and stories are very similar, and there is no evidence as yet, that poetry is to be treated as a distinctive genre.

The National Curriculum Report does not appear to be offering teaching practitioners a solution to a problem that has been apparent for many years. How do you teach poetry to young children ? The National Curriculum is purely a descriptive

account presented through extracts. This is not sufficient . It does not help individual teachers , nor does it appear to be providing a solution to the concerns of earlier reports. With regards to poetry, the National Curriculum does not appear to have "got it right ".

3. Problems in Poetry Teaching at Key Stage 1 and in the Early Years.

There is currently widespread support from a variety of professional sources for the teaching of poetry in school (DES 1975, HMI 1987). Unfortunately according to a variety of reports and articles, there is also evidence that the work that is currently, as well as previously, carried out is failing to reach specific standards. But what exactly are these standards and what are the teachers failing at ? Is it teachers at all Key Stages that are "failing" or just certain Key Stages in particular? It has already been noted that there are no levels of attainment for poetry, so what is being measured when teachers are accused of "failing" ? Which children and which teachers are things going wrong with ? Paffard (1978), points out,

> " Though most little children delight in rhyme and rhythms, they often leave school with an attitude to poetry somewhere between indifference and hostility. "   (page 100)

Are the children somehow catching this indifference from teachers and school ? Is it the teachers or the curriculum that appears to be "failing"?

The Bullock report (DES 1975) discovered that,

" In three quarters of the classes of 5 year olds, children responded with enjoyment to nursery rhymes, action songs and counting rhymes....and ... in slightly more than half of the 6 and 7 year old classes, poetry was read to the classes." (2.46)

However, as the children became older they appeared to have less contact with poetry. In the classes of six and seven year olds, just more than half of the classes had poetry read to them. For the older children, poetry tended to be related to other work and was occasionally used to stimulate children's writing. Does this mean that the children's enjoyment of poems has disappeared ? Could it be the influence of the teachers or school ? Could it be because of the difficulties associated with moving away from the sounds and patterns of language to the meaning of the poems? As the Bullock Report also found that the majority of pupils did not read any poetry voluntarily either in or out of school and that most children heard poetry irregularly, questions must be asked as to what is happening in schools .

The notion that children somehow " go off " poetry as they get older, is supported by Findlay and Potter, as cited in Taber, (1991). Whilst they were involved in a workshop project with primary and secondary aged children they found that ,

".... the poetry writing that was produced by the primary pupils was more developed and more polished than some of that produced by the secondary pupils."   *(page 48)*

But is this necessarily due to the way in which poetry is taught in schools ? There appear to be implications that as a child gets older, he or she appears to have less experience of rhyme and poems at school than when they had first started school. Why should this be the case ? Is it because of the teachers, a lack of resources, a lack of knowledge or interest ?

However, there is little evidence on what teachers think, feel and actually do about teaching poetry, nor about their apparent unease over the teaching of poetry, especially the teaching of poetry to young children. Millward and Thompson (1994) suggests that one of the main problems with poetry is that, this is because, whilst children enjoy poetry, adults tend to worry about it.

Trousedale and Harris (1993) comment that even at the present time teachers are still experiencing difficulty in knowing how to provide positive and stimulating experiences for students of poetry. They point out that this is because many teachers are very reluctant to repeat their own negative experiences of poetry. Benton, (1978), indicates that ,

"Handling poetry is the area of the primary/middle school curriculum....where teachers feel most uncertain of their knowledge,

most uncomfortable about their methods and most guilty about both."

(page 112)

This view was previously claimed by Arnstein (1966) , who argued that it was both the lack of preparation and memories of their own youth that appeared to cause unease in the teaching of poetry. The memory that poetry is " difficult " is also expressed by Duke (1990),

" *In workshops and on graduate courses, teachers repeatedly indicated*

that poetry is the most difficult kind of language".   (page 443)

This was also noted by O'Hara (1988), who claimed that teachers' own experiences of poetry at school had not been very good. Many regarded poetry as being difficult. Poetry was therefore given a low priority by many teachers who claimed that the demands of the language curriculum were being met by using alternative language activities which they felt more comfortable administering.

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Benton (1988), was also concerned about the unease over the teaching of poetry . He expressed concern that most writers on the subject of poetry teaching had concentrated on pupils' creative work, rather than their responses to what they have read. Few writers, he claimed, had examined closely what actually happened in the classroom. Benton claimed that books were primarily concerned with the writing of poetry by children as though this were the main aim of reading poems, and claimed that there was a need to focus more on the experience of poetry and less on the

teaching of poetry. Benton advocated that there should be no requirement to produce written work but to experience poems being well read, performed and enjoyed by others. He suggested that strategies were needed to learn to read poems without teacher domination.

So what exactly is happening in schools, especially in the primary schools where studies suggest that teachers still appear to lack confidence in teaching poetry? Is poetry being ignored because the teachers are not sure what to do with it ? As pointed out in the previous section of this chapter even the professionals who are writing guidelines for teachers do not appear sure what to do with poetry in the early years at school. More recently, some individual teachers have been making quite successful attempts in exploring a variety of ways in teaching poetry . These teachers have written books to help other teachers. The books usually include material that has worked successfully for the individual teachers They have written about what they personally do in teaching poetry. (Brownjohn, 1981; Styles, 1988; Webster, 1992.) Unfortunately, this personal practise is very difficult to transfer.

As teachers we need to know the value of poetry. As Walter (1989) states in his article about failing practice in the primary school,

"The successful practice of teaching poetry, as of teaching anything

rests upon a coherent set of justifications and theory of what is

entailed.....The theory must justify the relevance of poetry to young

children...   (page 142)

This theory appears be missing. Poetry appears be viewed as valuable and this value is unquestioned. Poetry teaching is criticised but little help is offered to teachers. Whilst there are notions of individuals having successes, there is little evidence that this is being transferred to other teachers. How can it be perceived as valuable if it is not being taught in the classroom ?

If the professionals are claiming that teachers are not getting it right in the classroom with regards to the teaching of poetry, why does there appear to be an apparent rise in the popularity of poetry with young children (Fenwick 1995) ? By this, Fenwick is referring to the numbers of poetry books that are being bought. However, it is not clear if it is the parents or the children who are buying the books. With more poetry books for children being bought than ever before, how are young children learning about poetry and why do they appear to enjoy it so much ?

Chapter 3

Primary Children developing Poetic awareness

In this chapter the researcher will to attempt to examine the extent to which a historical overview is relevant today. The following sections will examine recent research relating to poetry and young children. Part of this chapter will look in particular at young children's "natural" interest in poetry and the importance of rhyme in language development. As noted in the previous chapter the "value " of poetry had previously appeared rather elusive. Poetry was considered "important", but the reasons that were given as to why it should be taught appeared rather "woolly". Are teachers today any clearer about the "value" of poetry ? Has the "value" of poetry changed in any way more recently ?

1. Children's Natural interest in poetry

It is very easy to say that young children, "naturally like poems ", and in fact, many writers on the subject of poetry, do assume this position. Unfortunately, the majority of the writers do not elaborate any further on this comment. Benton (1978), comments,

> " Children have a natural affinity with verse, song, riddles, jokes, word
>
> sounds, rhymes, chants and so on. "   (page 113)

This natural liking is also commented on in the introduction by Andrews and Orme (1993),

" Children have a natural ear for rhyme and rhythm. " (page 3)

Wainwright (N.A.T.E.1966), claims that,

"..the stuff of poetry, rhythm and imagination, are in the bones of young children."   *(page 40)*

What do they mean by this ? That because children enjoy rhyme and rhythm they must naturally enjoy poems. Orme (1992) attempts to elaborate further,

" Young children enjoy poems, they enjoy reading them and writing them. They enjoy the rhythms, sounds and patterns of poetry and will often choose a collection of poems in preference to a novel."
(page 4)

Unfortunately, Orme does not indicate the precise ages of the children that he is referring to as "young". He appears to be taking it for granted that the reader will know to whom he is referring. Why does he claim that poems are preferred to novels? Are the poems easier for the children to relate to, is there a natural affinity to poems or is it merely because they are shorter to read ? Is it the poems themselves that the children like or is it the features of the poems e.g. rhythm, that they like ?

Arnstein (1962), in her introduction, claims that, children bring to the study of poetry an eager and lively interest and that they have a fascination with language and a "built in" ability to use language in unique and original ways. Again there is the automatic assumption that children naturally like poems and poetry. What evidence is there to support these remarks ? As most of the writers on children's poetry are themselves people who enjoy poetry, it appears to be a rather taken for granted assumption, and one that should be challenged.

There have been several studies over the past years which have investigated reasons why poetry is not so popular with adults and older children as it appears to be with younger children. However, there are very few studies which have examined young children's responses and likes and dislikes of poetry. Most of the studies have looked at reasons why children have " gone off " poetry as they have grown older. The reasons for this have been attributed to a number of factors. However, the studies do all appear to agree that young children do enjoy poems. But why do young children appear to enjoy poems so much?

The 1921 Cross Report, states, *" It is natural for man to delight in poetry. "* but does not attempt to elaborate any further. Why is it natural? What exactly do the writers of this report mean by this fact ? Who is this " man" that the report is referring to, adult , child, or teenager ?

Scannell (1966), on the topic of children's understanding of poetry remarks,

" Understanding for them is often foreknowledge, as if sometimes, they

have been born with meaning inside them. " (page 129)

Scannell goes on further, to suggest that young children respond automatically and sometimes dramatically to impressions, and with regards to poems, seem to notice important details without any previous training in observation. Clark assumes that children are sensitive to the sounds of words but does not elaborate any further on this point. Their views, however, that young children naturally like poetry, are very similar to those of Brierley (1987) . In his book on child development, Brierley points to several factors which may regard the learning of the understanding of poetry as a natural phenomena.

It is suggested by Horace Barlow. in the preface to Brierley's book,

"It is as if the infant brain develops to a point when it can profit from

an experience and if it misses that experience it cannot profit from

another. "

Is this the case for poetry ? If a child does not experience poetry in the early years does it mean that they have lost the experiences that poetry brings with it?

Barlow, speculates further,

" If you do not ensure that children undergo certain experiences by the
age of seven, they will have lost forever the chance of benefiting from
them. " (page xi)

The claims that were made in the previous section, that children need to be introduced to poetry from an early age, as they appear to " lose interest", later in the junior years may give this claim a certain credibility, but there may be other factors, apart from a natural liking of poetry, which may have contributed to this thinking.

There is known to be an optimum time in the early years for brain development to master the skill of language,   for example if a child does not encounter language by the age of ten, they may be unable to acquire it subsequently. Can the same be said for the introduction of poetry ? Do young children need to be introduced to poetry in the early years, to nursery rhymes and poems?

Brierley, highlights the crucial importance of pre-school years, throughout his book. The importance of language, and the importance of rhyme in the early years is also stressed by Kornei Chukovsky (1963) in which he examines the way in which young children acquire language, and in particular the way in which young children acquire the language of rhyme. For Chukovsky, the acquiring of rhyme is a very important development for a child.

" Rhyme making during the second year of life is an inescapable stage

of our linguistic development. Children who do not perform such

linguistic exercises are abnormal or ill. These activities are indeed

exercises, and it is difficult to think of a more rational system of

phonetics than such repetition of all possible sound variations."

(page 63)

Chukovsky claims that young children are only able to acquire their " linguistic and thinking habits" through communication with other human beings and that a young child has a natural sensitivity to language that is " dulled " by the time a child reaches the age of eight. For the majority of young children, the process of learning words is very quick in the first five years of their life. Chukovsky comments that a child quickly builds up a " reservoir " of words by the age of three, to which new words are added to more slowly, adapting and inventing new words as they proceed .

In Chukovsky's study, three generations of children and their poetry were observed. He studied how the children made up verses, and the rhymes and rhythms that the children used. Chukovsky comments that young children tend to notice rhyme and to repeat it. He claims that this is due to the fact that children think of words in " pairs". He assumes that every word has a " twin" , an opposite, in meaning or quality, e.g. running, sitting.

" Children who have just began to talk in phrases make use of rhyme to

ease the task of pronouncing two words in a row. It is easier for the

very young to say " night-night" than " goodnight" , " bye-bye" rather

than "goodbye". The younger the child the greater is the attraction to

the repetition of rhyme. "   *(page 63)*

Chukovsky, notes that this rhyming of words is also similar in different cultures and different languages.

" In the beginning of our childhood we are all "versifiers", it is only

later that we begin to learn to speak in prose. The very nature of

infants jabbering predisposes him to versifying . "   *(page 64)*

It would appear that Chukovsky is claiming that most children are " naturally predisposed" to rhyme as soon as they begin to speak. Is it therefore this affinity with rhyme that helps them to appear to enjoy poems at an early age ?

Chukovsky goes on to claim that the, " spontaneous versifying ", to which he refers, " with the stimulus of clapping and stamping or jumping", is no longer indulged in when child reaches the ages of six or seven. What has happened ? Has maturity alone somehow affected the way in which a child responds to a rhyme ? According to Chukovsky it is at this age that a child progresses from this " emotionally exclamatory verse" to a more literary genre. Is this age therefore significant in that it appears to be

viewed, with regard to rhyme, as a stage of progression, or maybe a " rite of passage" in development?

2. The value of poetry

(a) Making sense of language through rhymes and poems.

Nursery rhymes appear to put children in touch with vocabulary as well as experiences. Opie and Opie (1977) claim that, " nursery rhymes constitute the best start as far as language and imaginative experiences go". Nursery rhymes have been passed from generation to generation; the rhymes that exist today would appear to be popular with children as they have survived by their popularity. Unpopular rhymes will have perished through time. Young children are exposed to these rhymes from a very early age. Through these rhymes the children appear to be making sense of language.

There have recently been suggestions that the use of nursery rhymes is " on the wane", and that they are not as popular as they once were (Bennett, 1984). Opie and Opie, (1977), however claim that nursery rhymes are still important , but that one of the roles of nursery rhymes has changed slightly. For example, at one time children used to learn to read from nursery rhyme books, but that this is not the case nowadays.

Whilst they still appear to be putting the child in " touch with vocabulary", it must be remembered that these rhymes were originally intended for adult

consumption . It was the adults who read or told the rhymes to the children. Young children enjoy the repetition of rhyme and appear to remember nursery rhymes easily. Many of these rhymes will be remembered throughout their life.

One of the reasons given as to the value of nursery rhymes is because the human race has such a deeply rooted rich oral tradition which schools must use to help sustain the tradition (N.A.T.E. 1964). Orme (1992), claims that it is "impossible to over emphasise the importance of nursery rhymes in early poetry work, " because a pre-school child does not find repetition boring. This view is supported by Marsh (1988), who also claims that the experience " of nursery rhymes, jingles, playground chants and pop music " are a crucial factor in learning about poems.

So how do young children move on from nursery rhymes ? Scannell (1966), suggests ,

"Young children who are just past the nursery rhyme stage, yet cut off from a great deal of poetry because of the limitations of their personal experience and the immaturity of their perceptions, are best encouraged through the work of good comic poets such as Lear......"
(page 129)

Is this what actually happens ? That children move from nursery rhymes to comic poems ?

Understanding about rhyme

G. Heard (1989), claims that the learning of rhyme is a process of osmosis. Heard states that young children find it very difficult to distinguish between a story and a poem (page). The exposure to poetry is therefore viewed here as a crucial factor.

The exposure to poetry at an early age is also viewed as important by J. Cass (1967). She also agrees that children appear to "absorb" poems before they understand them. They enjoy listening to them, and that they use their imagination to give them insight and understanding. She claims that the appeal of poetry to young children is because of word images, not pictures in a book. She goes on further to say that pictures in poetry books actually distract the children whereas the pictures in story books are a totally different experience and that the story is remembered because of the pictures. Cass, comments that,

"Adults should be able...to give children poetry of the right kind and

at the right moment when they want it, as we give children other vital

experiences just when they are needed." (page 44)

Cass continues with regards to children's understanding and she claims that,

"Young children accept and understand what they are needing at the

time when they hear or read a nursery rhyme." (page 74)

The children are learning to make sense of what they hear and Cass claims that the "Topsy-turvy" helps the children to distinguish the difference between sense and nonsense. Could this be one of the reasons that there has been such popularity of nonsense rhymes and poets?

Some of the nursery rhymes for young children which are popular have the most bizarre concepts involved. For example, there are rhymes which mention going to sea in a sieve or a washtub. Highly unlikely, but extremely popular and memorable. There appears to have been a tendency to present objects in a deliberately incorrect way. Have these children's rhymes survived because the young child's interest lies in the sounds and sound patterns or because of the incongruity?

Having been passed from generation to generation these outlandish rhymes appear to be suitable for children to have survived. This rhymed " topsy turvy" as it is referred to by Cass, is seen as very attractive to young children. Is it purely for amusement or to verify knowledge? In order to make sense of the rhymes a child needs to know the real meanings. Does the topsy-turvy within the rhymes strengthen the children's awareness of reality? Are nonsense poems therefore beneficial as the children are rarely confused by them?

The popularity of nonsense poems may be as Parsons (1992), points out because they are helping children to differentiate between the real world and their imaginative, make believe world. The nonsense poems appear therefore, to have a

similar role to nursery rhymes. The nonsense poems , like nursery rhymes are easily remembered by children. Cullingford (1979), found large numbers of children who could recite nonsense poems. However, when it came to remembering poetry, Cullingford discovered that the poetry that the children remembered was usually different to that which they had learnt at school.

"..the types of poetry children remembered were those that had been learnt outside school, nursery rhymes, advertising jingles and the general rhymes, that children shared with each other. " (page 59)

2. The value of poetry

(b) Development of phonemic awareness

Bryant and Bradley (1985), claim to have discovered how important the ability to recognise rhyming words is with regards to reading development. They were investigating young children's reading difficulties and looking at rhyming words in particular. Bryant and Bradley claimed that listening to the sound of words and having an awareness of words precedes reading.

" The child who understands rhyme must know something about the constituent sound of words. "   *(page 50)*

However, they found it difficult to believe that illiterate people could not appreciate rhyme. Bradley and Bryant claimed that a typically intelligent child of only five or six years old could look at and recognise rhyming words. They attempted to find out if young children are capable of appreciating rhyme and how well they are able to do so. Bryant and Bradley suggested that,

" A child's insensitivity to sounds, may well have been one of the main reasons for the difficulties which they encountered as soon as they began to read."   *(page 50)*

By measuring a child's sensitivity to rhyme before beginning school Bryant suggested that it was possible to predict how well a child would learn to read after they had began school. After studying 200 pupils they discovered that,

" Initial rhyming tests did predict their progress in reading and spelling three to four years later, even when the effects of differences in intelligence were removed."   *(page 57)*

Bryant and Bradley , discovered that children whose reading levels fell far below what would have been predicted were,

" ...very poor at detecting rhyme or alliteration."   *(page 52)*

The children in the longitudinal study were given rhyming and alliteration tasks in which they had to identify words that rhymed and to be aware of alliteration. Their study is suggesting the importance of speech sounds and rhyme in aiding reading. Bryant and Bradley claimed that rhyme was important because it is the "stuff of word games and of course nursery rhymes". They concluded that the skill of rhyme is affected by experience.

" Measures of children's sensitivity to rhyme and alliteration predict

their progress in reading, and teaching them about rhyme and

alliteration enhances that progress. "   *(page 60)*

Fox and Routh (1983), discovered that if a child had difficulty with speech sounds at the age of six, they would be "poor" at reading and spelling three years later. The original tests that they had done had shown that again these children who were "poorer" at reading and spelling had problems breaking words up into phonemes.

A later study by Lundberg (1987), agreed with the findings of Bryant. In studying Swedish kindergarten children she found that there was a relationship between young children's awareness of sound and progress in reading at school. The tests in awareness of sound involved breaking words into syllables and phonemes. This study also showed that by developing children's phonemic awareness in the kindergarten, teachers could help children to be more proficient readers at the age of ten. Giving children experience of the sound patterns in the language and helping

children to attend to , and discriminate between the sounds in the language helped them to become better readers.

More recently Yopp (1992), has studied the importance of "phonemic awareness " as a prerequisite for learning to read. He defines phonemic awareness as,

"..an understanding that speech is composed of a series of individual

sounds. "   *(page 703)*

Yopp suggests,

"Teachers of young children should recognise the important role they

can play in contributing to their students' phonemic awareness by

spending a few minutes daily engaging their students in oral activities

that emphasise the sounds of language.   *(page 703)*

The importance of the sounds of words has also been researched by Goswami (1994), He called this ability to reflect on the sounds of the words rather than the meaning of the spoken words as "pholological awareness". He claimed ,

"Young children have very little difficulty in segmenting words into

syllables, onsets and rhymes.....Young children, find it very difficult to

detect phonemes in spoken words.... Segmenting a word like cat into

three constituent phonemes is a difficult task for a pre-reader, whereas

recognising that cat rhymes with hat is not."   *(page 32)*

Bryant and Goswami, (1990), attempted a "causal developmental model" of learning to read .

"Early experiences with rhyme. - Awareness of onset and rime units. -

Ability to categorise words by onsets and rimes. - Associations of

onsets and rimes with spelling patterns. - Use of analogies in

reading."   *(page 35)*

So is the learning of rhyme a "natural" development or is it something that is nurtured? In examining the findings of Bryant, Bradley, Yopp and Goswami. it would appear that a young child's " natural affinity" with rhyme needs to be nurtured to a certain extent especially with regards to reading. It would appear however, unlikely that most children will attend to features of the language if they are not directed to them. Left to ourselves we are inclined to simply use language. Guidance and experience is required to make language a site of interest. Is this, therefore, the case for how a young child's understanding of poetry develops ?

Research questions emerging

Since the war the amount of poetry published and written for children has steadily increased (Benton, 1978). At one time there were very few poetry anthologies specifically for children. Today more attractive and beautifully illustrated

poetry books and poetry anthologies for children are being published than ever before. The popularity and sales of poetry books for children are steadily increasing. There are also indications (Fenwick, 1995) that many of these poetry books are to be found in schools.

The increase of the quantity and quality of children's written poetry appear to have been due to a number of factors. One is the introduction and popularity of the comic and nonsense poems of such authors as Rosen , Mahy, McGough, etc However, Orme (1992) claims that whilst "funny" poets have helped the increase in the popularity of poetry books, it must also be remembered that children's enjoyment is not merely limited to comic rhyme.

What is it about these books that the children enjoy so much ? What is it that children understand about poetry when they read the poems? Is their understanding learnt or is it innate? Has something happened to children's poetry to make it appear more popular ? Or has it always been popular ?

The number of books that have been written on the subject of children's poetry have also increased. Since the publishing of Margaret Langdon 's book " Let the children Write ", as noted in the previous chapter, several enthusiastic teachers and writers have written numerous books with a variety of ideas, techniques and strategies of how to approach poetry in the classroom. e.g. Styles(1988), Brownjohn(1994), Hughes(1967), Corbett(1986), Moses(1992) etc. However, this may have been due to the continual criticisms that have been made of the way in which poetry has been taught in the classroom rather than because of the apparent rise in the popularity of poetry.

Resources.

The HMI Report, (D.E.S. 1987), discovered that,

"It is rare to see poetry books on display in school libraries." (page)

This report also found that there were few poetry corners for reading of poems for pleasure. These findings were supported in a study by O'Hara, (1988), who found that there were few poetry anthologies in schools. If there were some they were usually limited to the school library rather than the classroom. This would appear to be rather disappointing as books that are provided within school are viewed as an important factor, as discovered by a study by the Schools Council Research of Studies by F. Whitehead.

" The provision of books by the primary school plays an important part

in determining what children read." (page 280)

The provision of poetry books and anthologies is therefore essential if children are to be encouraged to read / experience poems. More recently the D.E.S. (1991) report discovered,

" Most schools have reviewed their book resources in the light of the

National Curriculum and many had identified weaknesses. In general,

there were too few poetry books and reference books." (page 19)

The report also discovered that few schools had adequate collections of poetry books in their libraries and Key Stage 1 classrooms to support the National Curriculum. Were these books for the children to read themselves or for a teacher to read to the children and for the children to listen to ?

That there are not enough poetry books in schools for children is disappointing. Fenwick (1995), however, disagrees, and suggests that many of the poetry books and anthologies being published recently, are in fact finding their way into schools. He also points out that more recently there are poetry books being written specifically to be included as part of children's reading schemes .

Priority of poetry

After visiting a number of schools, interviewing teachers and speaking to children, O'Hara (1988), claims that within many schools poetry still has a low priority,

" ..difficult to avoid the feeling that the teaching of poetry is a relatively neglected art in schools, and opportunities are not being taken advantage of. " (page 58)

He goes on to say that,

" Much more needs to be done, in the early years to project children

into this magical language world, marked by strong rhythms and

imagination associated with mime, song and movement." (page 58)

His small scale study of 7 - 9 year olds discovered that it was this age range that had

the least amount of contact with poetry. But what about the younger children? In a

previous article, O'Hara also claimed that,

" Children's experiences of poems and contact with poems and poets

certainly did not appear to be guided by any sense of sequence or

progression through the primary school." (page   271)

If this is indeed the case, how are young children developing an understanding of

poems? There seems to be no apparent evidence that teachers have given any real

consideration to the development of a policy for poetry in the Language Curriculum

Marsh (1988), argues for the placing of poetry at the centre of the English

Curriculum. He claims that poetry teaching is very inconsistent and that whatever the

age of your pupils, they would not usually appear to have been through any developed

programme of study concerning poetry. Blackledge (1994), suggests that poetry must

be an essential part of future curriculum planning , especially for Key Stage 1 and Key

Stage 2. Maguire (1966), claimed that,

"If teachers understand the educational value of poetry and plan its presentation from the earliest years, then children will respond to the art with confidence and interest, not suspicion. " *(page 28)*

Again we are being reminded that we need to be aware of the educational value of poetry . However, is it only the role of the teacher to educate the children about poetry? No mention is made here of the role that a parent or other adults or children may have in the introduction of nursery rhymes songs and poetry.

In exploring reasons as to how understanding of poetry develops , Andrews (1983) argues that it is an open question as to how much is native to a child in his/ her poetic devices and how much they have learned through exposure to poetry. For example , he found that young children were using onomatopoetic words even before they had been introduced to them. These findings were supported by Arnstein (1962), who had also remarked on a child, who at the age of two, liked poems that meant more than they say. Arnstein also claimed that unless a child is exposed to poetry, they will naturally write in prose form.

Chukovsky claims that pre-school children are constantly inventing their own rhymes, an ability which they appear to lose by the age of seven. Why is this ? Parsons (1992), also observes that , up to the age of seven children do not find repetition boring. This is why it is possible to incorporate traditional rhymes with infants and youngest juniors, even if they already know them. But are teachers aware of this?

Arnstein (1962), claims,

" Nothing grows from nothing and with the constant exposure to poetry

the children unconsciously absorb the characteristics that distinguish

it from prose and draw upon these. " (page 66)

M.Rosen (1989) states,

" Every child no matter how young comes to school with " knowledge"

or as I prefer to call it " culture".   (page 15)

He says that children need to be asked about this culture when they begin school .
Young children all start school with a wide variety of experiences and this must be
taken account of when children are introduced to poetry at school. Cass (1967) states,

"Just because the words often appear to trip off the tongue easily we

are   inclined   to   think   that   they   suit   a   young   child's   limited

understanding and experience. "   *(page 48)*

Are young children capable of understanding a wide variety of poems ?

What exactly is being done in school with young children to help them to
develop an understanding about poems ? Is it as simple as Paffard (1978) suggests?

" Small children are brought up on nursery rhymes, songs and traditional jingles. These they are told are " poems". (page 94)

This would appear to be rather a simplification of the process of learning about poems. Is it true? Is the age of a child significant in any way in the understanding of poetry ? Arnstein (1962), believes that the age of a child is significant in initiating poetry, claiming that it is more difficult to initiate poetry with older children as they appear to already have preconceptions about poetry. Is this necessarily the case for all children ?

The recent research into the importance of rhyme with regards to language development and reading and spelling in particular , for example Bryant and Bradley (1987), Goswami (1994) could be giving teachers insight into the importance of poetry through rhyme . Here we appear to have the evidence that the teachers need to support the educational value of poetry. However, as long ago as 1921 (H.M.I.), the importance of phonetics was stressed with the suggestion that student teachers should "devote an hour weekly to Phonetics and speech training " (p 46) and that the "teaching of grammar "should be closely allied with phonetics" (p 84). It would appear from the recent evidence that the "value" of poetry is becoming clearer. Is this concern for "phonics" the real value of poetry? A child's poetic knowledge i.e. rhymes and sounds appears important in developing phonemic awareness which in fact involves looking at individual features of poetry .

In view of the apparent absence of research into young children's reading of poetry (Atkinson 1985), and into poetry and young children in general, the purpose of this research study will be to throw light on how young children's understanding of poems develops. Most pupils read poetry for the first time at school (Muir, 1937),

" Teachers cannot be freed from all responsibility inasmuch as to them is entrusted the early introduction of poetry to the developing personality." *(page 1)*

but,

"poetry is not simple....It is the most highly charged form of expression of which language is capable." *(page 1)*

Is this the case for poetry today ?

With suggestions that a young child's grasp of nursery rhymes is a pointer to how easily they will learn to read or write (Fisher, 1989), what is being done in schools today with young children to help them in learning nursery rhymes and moving on to poems? What is being done to help them develop an understanding of poems? What do they understand about poems and are teachers today still facing difficulties in knowing how to provide experiences of poetry for children ?

Chapter 4

Methodologies and Procedures

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodologies and procedures used in the research project. The research method refers to the strategies used in gathering and analysing data to answer the research questions and the procedures refer to the way in which the research is carried out.

In examining the literature on poetry and young children, it would appear that there is little research available on how young children's understanding of poetry develops. There appears to be a variety of concerns about the teaching of poetry in schools as well as claims by professionals from several studies that the teaching of poetry is an important aspect of the English Curriculum. There are also claims that teachers are " failing " in the teaching of poetry as well as evidence which suggests that teachers are uncertain about the teaching of poetry. Unfortunately there also appears to very little guidance as to how teachers should develop poetry within the Language curriculum and how to develop children's understanding of poetry. The vast majority of the related research has focused on children who attend secondary school , aged 11-16, and children of junior age, 7-11. It is the younger children to which I address my research, particularly the children in the 4-7 years age group.

As outlined in the previous chapter the questions arising from the literature review provide the detailed justification for the research, and the aims and objectives of the study are therefore :

Aim.

To investigate how young children's understanding of poems develops.

Objectives.

1. To obtain information about images young children have of poems and from where they are derived .

2. To investigate if there is a relation between the teachers' individual thinking / experience of poetry and that of their pupils.

3. To try to discover if a " *rite of passage* " is involved when a rhyme becomes a poem in young children's understanding.

It was hoped that these objectives would be achieved by collecting data on :-

a) Young children's understanding of poetry, derived from their reaction to poems read by the researcher.

b) Interviews with teachers on their approach to poetry.

c) Definitions of a poem produced by children of different ages. (This was added in response to the results of a pilot study of (a) and (b).

Methodology.

Having asked the questions, the researcher has to focus on what she will need to provide answers to these questions. What kind of information is needed ? What kinds of data are needed ? What and whose opinions must be gathered ? To find out what images young children have of poems and from where they are derived, it must be decided who is going to attempt to provide the answers. Will they be provided from the children themselves or the adults who teach them ? To find out how much of the children's thinking is based on experience and how much is reflected from the teacher, again it must be decided whom to ask. As the questions being asked are of a complex nature, and there appear to be no clear-cut answers , to undertake an investigation into young children's understanding of poetry it would appear necessary to obtain data from both young children and their teachers.

The next decision to be made is how data can be collected for the research project, and which research methods would be most suitable. There is a wide variety of research methods available to the researcher, and each method must be considered to find the most appropriate data collection instruments. The design and selection of particular methods of gathering data is known as instrumentation. . The instruments used will be the means of getting in touch with the respondents' views on the research questions.

Morrison, (1993) claims that the two main forms of instrumentation are written and face- to - face, interpersonal methods. The written forms include

questionnaires and documents, whilst face-to-face forms include interviews and observations. These forms will be examined in more detail to determine which are the most suitable.

Interviews

There are several types of interviews from which the researcher may choose, ranging from highly structured to unstructured. A highly structured interview is one that will have all the questions worked out in advance, and all the respondents will be given the questions in the same sequence, with the same wording. The respondents choose their responses from a multiple choice of questions, known as " closed " questions. This type of interview will enable responses to be quantified. However, this type of interview gives the researcher no freedom in tailoring the questions to individual respondents. An alternative is the semi-structured interview. This type of interview is not as tightly structured and allows more freedom for individual responses. The wording of the questions may be the same, allowing some standardisation, but the open ended questions allow the respondents to answer in their own words and the sequence may be changed . The unstructured interview may be even more open, with the researcher having a checklist of points or topics to be covered. The questions are therefore tailored to individual needs, with the answers also being given in the respondent's own words. This conversation style of interview, an informal interview, is very different to the rigidly structured , formal, interview. The researcher has to decide upon the type of data that is required , before deciding on the type of interview most suitable. If the researcher wishes to make comparisons or generalisations , then the

more structured, closed type of interview will be required. An interview could be suitable for teachers, and for pupils in this study since its aim is to investigate the development of children's understanding of poetry.

Observational Data

Three main kinds of observations can be used. A highly structured observation has pre-arranged categories and the researcher will know what she is looking for. A semi-structured observation will use an agenda, but the data gathering will be less systematic. In an unstructured observation the researcher will usually observe what is taking place before deciding on its exact significance for the research purposes. The structured approach will take more time to prepare and provides quick data analysis, whilst the unstructured approach is quick to prepare but the data analysis is more complex to complete. When a researcher wants to use observational data it must be decided if the observation is to be structured or unstructured. The systematic structured observation will produce numerical data for the researcher allowing comparisons to be made. Unstructured, or semi-structured observation will amass quantities of data in a variety of forms which is more difficult to compare. Observational data will provide evidence for this study .

Questionnaires

Another method that may be used to obtain information to answer the research questions could be in the form of a questionnaire. The questionnaire can be

constructed using either open or closed questions. A highly structured questionnaire asks closed questions , ranging from Yes/ No answers to multiple choice answers. The questions being asked, however, must be very clear to avoid ambiguity. Alternatively a rating scale may be used allowing differentiation of response. An open ended questionnaire allows respondents to reply in their own terms and opinions. One of the problems here, however, is that it is difficult for the researcher to make comparisons between respondents. This method may be suitable to use with the teachers . If it were to be used with the children it would have to be in a very simplified form.

After examining a variety of possible research methods which could be used in this study it was decided that the most appropriate way of obtaining data in this instance would be to carry out a qualitative enquiry. It seemed practicable to undertake a qualitative enquiry because of the kind of information that was being sought and the subject matter.

D. Ary et al (1990), states,

" Qualitative enquiry differs from the quantitative approach to a study

of social and behavioural phenomena in its rejection of the argument

that the aims and methods of the social sciences are, at least in

principle, the same as the aims and methods of the natural or physical

sciences. "   *(page 444)*

A qualitative enquiry assumes that the subject matter of the human sciences is very different from that of the natural sciences, therefore requiring different methods for investigation. A qualitative inquiry is viewed as a *"personal"* kind of research acknowledging subjective perception and biases of both participants and researchers. This type of enquiry assumes that human behaviour / experience is influenced by other factors such as culture, history and society. It is seen as *"context bound"* and therefore the setting for a study of human experience must be naturally occurring. e.g. in a school rather than in a laboratory. The qualitative inquiry takes place in the field in which the subjects are found, and focuses on human experience. The data will be in the form of words rather than in number and statistics. In order to help establish credibility of the gathered data, triangulation, using more than one source of data, can be used to establish the validity of the data.

Qualitative data with rich and personal descriptions should illuminate the research questions, but there would also need to be some structure to the data for answers and comparisons to be made. In order to address the research questions and capture a richness of data it appeared appropriate to obtain information from both adults and children face to face. This would involve dealing with real people rather than faceless recipients from a questionnaire. Obtaining the qualitative data directly from the adults and the children also meant that the data would be gathered both verbally and non- verbally. Both their replies and the way in which they interacted with the subject could be observed.

Ethics.

" Ethical concerns encountered in educational research... can be extremely complex and subtle, and can frequently place researchers in moral predicaments. "

(Cohen,1994 page 347)

Researchers must be aware of the ethical dilemmas that can be faced. Whilst endeavouring to pursue truth, their own values can be threatened. The researchers must proceed as ethically as possible without threatening the validity of the research.

Researchers working in classrooms assume certain responsibilities towards both the teachers and pupils from whom they obtain their data. The children's and teachers' rights and interests must be ensured. Any subject of the research project should leave the research situation without anxiety, and with self esteem. The subjects if at all possible should leave with a feeling that something has been learnt. The researcher in this study will endeavour to follow these guidelines.

The Headteacher, governors and teachers were all made aware of what was to be involved in the research project. In negotiating access to the school for research purposes the aims of the research and the interests of the researcher were identified to the Headteacher and teachers. Permission for access was applied for at an early stage and was not taken for granted. Informed consent was obtained from the Head teacher and the teachers of the school.

Informed consent is defined by Diener and Crandall (1978) as,

" The procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions."   (page 53)

The informants and the school were to be given access to the data at any stage of the study should they require it and feedback was to be given at the end of the research. Responsibility was accepted by the researcher for maintaining confidentiality and privacy and individuals' full names and details were not to be collected as they were not considered necessary in this study. The children who were to be studied were to be referred to by only their first name and age.

Fine and Sandstrom (1988) recommend that even from young children, you should seek informed consent, giving the young children some explanation of what is being done.

" Our feeling is that children should be told as much as possible, even if some of them cannot understand the full explanation. Their age should not diminish their rights, although their level of understanding must be taken into account in the explanations that are shared with them. "   Fine and Sanstrom(1988) (cited in Cohen and Mannion, (1994) page,...)

In accordance with these recommendations, informed consent was also to be obtained from the pupils. The children were to be asked if they would help the teacher/researcher with a study that she was doing at university for which she needed to do some homework. It was also remembered throughout the research that young children were involved and that they should not be regarded as being on equal terms with the researcher. The children were to be given the choice as to whether they wanted to participate and to refuse if they wished to. This however could be problematic for a number of reasons. Young children often want to please a teacher/adult and may feel that they must participate, even if they don't really want to. The children may also feel that they have to participate because they feel threatened. It is very rare for a child to say "no" to a teacher or an adult at school and they may be afraid of the consequences.

Construction of Instruments.

After examining the range of instruments available, suitable instruments had to be chosen. The researcher needed information from both the teachers and the pupils. In finding out what images young children have of poetry and from where they are derived, the researcher needed to obtain verbal data from the children which could possibly be related to their teachers approach to poetry. To collect data on the teachers' approach to poetry , again verbal data would appear to be required from the children. It would be rather difficult to ask the children directly about their images of poems. An alternative might be a questionnaire but, whilst a questionnaire is usually

relatively easy to administer and is not too time consuming or expensive, collecting the data could be problematic. The ages of the young children to be involved in the study could involve several problems. The questionnaire would have to be of a very simple form as some of the children might not be able to either read or understand a questionnaire. This would also be something that the children would not normally be expected to undertake. With a questionnaire having to be in a simplified version there might be difficulties in analysing the data and ensuring that the research questions were being answered. An alternative, Direct Observation of the children as they were engaged in poetry lessons, might be possible . This would involve working amongst the children to observe them at work. This might be done with or without a video aid , which could be viewed at a later date to analyse the children at work. However, this type of observation would be rather time consuming. It is also possible that this method might not necessarily provide detailed answers to the research questions

Choosing the instruments for the adults seemed less problematic. The aim of the second objective was to investigate if there was a relation between the teachers' individual thinking/experience of poetry and that of their pupils. Verbal data was required in either the form of a questionnaire or an interview.

It was therefore decided that there would be two stages of data collection. The first stage would involve the pupils and the second, the teachers.

Construction of tasks for children.

For the first stage of the study, rather than ask the children specific questions relating to the research questions, it appeared more appropriate to design a task for the children which would enable them to talk with one another about poems. Previous research completed by Millward and Thompson (1994), had been carried out by engaging children and adults in a variety of tasks. The children had to complete specific tasks which were then analysed and coded. It is an approach similar to this which seemed best suited to this particular study particularly because of the subject matter. The children were also of a similar age and there appeared to be a possibility of a comparison of data .

This activity would require the presence of an adult for at least some of the time. It was considered important that the children should feel comfortable with both the adult/researcher and the other children in the group. An activity was chosen which would give the children an opportunity to talk with one another about poems. It was also selected to be educationally worthwhile in both task and outcome. It was also the intention that the activity should be manageable and rewarding for the children.

From a choice of poems pre-selected by the researcher, groups of children were to choose a favourite poem as a group. Each group of children was selected by their class teacher and consisted of four children. Four groups of children were to be selected. The selection of poems was to be decided by the researcher after working

with children from her own class. The selection of the poems and the criteria used are explained in a further section of this chapter.

At a later date the children were to be given the opportunity to read or enact their favourite poem in an assembly. The children in this school regularly chose work or had the opportunity to take work to read or show at a weekly "House" assembly. In small groups the children were to select a favourite poem amongst themselves. In selecting a favourite poem the children had to talk to each other and to communicate their meaning to each other. As the children were young , there would probably be some children who were just beginning to read or who had insufficient experience or skills to read the poems that would be pre-selected. There would undoubtedly be either a group or individual children who would not be able to read the poems for themselves. It might therefore be necessary in certain cases, to have the poems read to the children. In having the poems read to the children the aural aspect of the children's poetic experience might be highlighted. The reading of a poem is a quite a different experience to listening to a poem.

It was not the purpose of this study to exclude the non reader or a child who was just beginning to read. The study was concerned with their understanding of the poems, not their ability to read the poems. The intention was therefore, to have the poems read to the children, as well as to have a printed copy of the poems available for the children who were able to read. The children would not have the poems identified as such. No mention of the word "*poem*" was to be used by the researcher unless or until a pupil used the term first.

The intention of the study was to read the poems to small groups of four or five children and to re-read them further if the children required a re-reading. The texts that were to be chosen were to be short, and varied in terms of content and structure. The poems that were to be chosen were to be poems that the children would probably be unfamiliar with. The intention of the study was to engage the children in discussion with one another, not in an adult/child discussion. The children were to decide which poem was their favourite. As they were to a choose a poem to read or enact in an assembly ,the poem chosen should be one that they all enjoyed. Having a personal interest in the outcome should encourage the children to focus on what was meaningful to them, rather than to an adult.

By letting the children choose the poem by themselves the intention was that they would discuss the poems in terms of their own interests. After reading the poems several times the children were to be asked to select their favourite. The discussion was to be recorded on to audio-tape. In providing an opportunity for the children to talk together it was hoped that they would display words or phrases to show some understanding of what a poem is. The identification of any knowledge or understanding of poems would be recoverable from the taped recordings and subsequent transcripts. The role of the researcher / interviewer was to encourage the children to have the poems re-read, in order to select a favourite poem. The role of the researcher/interviewer should also be as unofficious as possible in order to encourage the children to talk with one another rather than to talk to the researcher. If possible this would be more effective if the children were to be left alone at this point to make their decision amongst themselves. The audio-tape would be kept switched on,

recording the children's talk and any data would be collected from the transcripts at a later date. An audio-cassette would be unable to identify any non verbal communication between the children and would lose certain signals such as facial expressions. Nevertheless, it should be useful in supporting the teacher's evidence and should provide more child-centred talk than with an adult present.

Procedures for children's activity.

It would not be possible to carry out this activity in a normal time-tabled classroom situation. A time and place had to be arranged for the task to be completed. With permission from the other teachers and Headteacher, it was decided that the activity should be completed during a period that was time-tabled for teachers to work either with small groups or read stories to year groups. A rota system ensured that each teacher had at least one of these times available each week to work with a small group. This period followed afternoon break on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. The system that the teachers used worked well and the children were used to taking it in turns to work in their classroom in small groups at this time of day. It was decided that the most manageable procedure would be for the researcher to carry out the activity with the children from the other classes in this allocated time. The time available was approximately twenty to twenty-five minutes. This was deemed an adequate length of time for the children without being tiring for them. This was also the only practicable time available to the researcher, as the researcher's teaching responsibilities were otherwise fully taken up.

For the type of activity that the children were to complete, the time of day was not considered to be a major issue. There was no written work for the children to complete, but they did need to be alert to join in the discussion. Although the activity was being carried out at the end of the day it was to follow the children's playtime .

It was arranged that the children in groups of four, were to be selected by their own class teacher and would be selected to work with the researcher in her own classroom. The teachers who selected the children would also be the teachers who were taking part in the study. The issue of validity is acknowledged here. There may be problems with this method of choosing the children. The teachers may specifically select children who are responsive to poetry. If it is discovered that the children selected are struggling with poetic form, will this mean that others may be having even greater difficulties?

The children selected would be children who wanted to work with the researcher and who were capable of expressing themselves verbally, both individually and in a group. The activity was to be carried out over a period of two weeks, early in the Christmas term, 1995.

The children in groups of four, were each to be presented with an A4 sheet of paper with five poems written on it. The poems were to be numbered 1-5. The children were to be asked to select a favourite poem from a choice of five poems that would be decided at an earlier date by the researcher and members of her own class. The teacher/researcher was to explain briefly what they were to do and why they were

doing the task. This was also a way of obtaining consent from the children. The pupils were to be informed that they had been chosen to work with the teacher / researcher by their own teacher. The children were to be asked if they would help the researcher with her own homework and to explain that other children would also be doing the activity. The teacher/ researcher was then to read each of the five poems to the children. The children were to be supported as much as possible, to be encouraged and supported in any requirements for re-readings of the poems or parts of the poems. This act was designed to help stimulate the children's discussion about poems. Working as a group the children were to draw upon a range of talk, to discuss, question, agree, etc. The children were to be encouraged to talk as much as possible.

If the children were able to reach a decision together it was at this stage that it would be considered if it would be worth going any further. The children could be asked to make a second choice and so forth. Could the children give reasons for their choices? Was it possible to shift towards meaning, thinking of what they could see or feel?

Selection of poems.

The children from the researcher's own Reception / Year 1 class helped in making the selection of poems that were to be used in the study. The researcher read a variety of poems to her class at "storytime". The children heard poems regularly and enjoyed listening to them. A variety of poems written by different poets both past and present were read to the children. Whilst the children responded eagerly to the comical

poems, asking for them to be repeated, the researcher noticed that the poem by Stevenson, Shadow March, was causing a different kind of reaction. Instead of laughing and joking the children thought that this poem was "scary". The language and some of the words used in this poem appear more complex and the pace of the poem is slower. The children attended to this poem quietly and appeared to give this poem greater concentration. The ending of this poem was met with silence rather than the "chatter" from the other poems.

The children expressed views on many of the poems. The final choice of poems was made by the researcher. Using her experience of working with young children, and the responses that the children gave to the poems a list of five poems was chosen, varying in style, length and subject.

The final choice of poems was :-

1. Humpty Dumpty by Michael Rosen

2. Calico Ban by Edward Lear

3. Shadow March by Robert Louis Stevenson

4. Sea Monster by Charles Thompson

5. The man from the land from Fandango by Margaret Mahy

A copy of these poems is included in the appendix.

Role of Teacher/ Researcher

There has been a certain controversy as to whether teachers should participate in research activity, and if they do, what their involvement should be. Some claim that it is unethical and unprofessional to use children like guinea pigs. Lieberman, (1956) claims that the average teacher , through the pressures of work, is not familiar with research principles and techniques.   There was also an underlying assumption that research conducted by teachers was of an inferior quality, lacking in sound methodology. Others (Corey, 1953, Stenhouse, 1970, Hopkins, 1993) argue that teachers' participation in action research, can enable them to make better decisions and to become more effective practitioners. The researcher in the role of teacher / researcher will undoubtedly influence the data that will be collected but the activity is such that this influence will be kept to a minimum. As G. Verma (1981) argues for the role of teachers as researchers,

> " Research activity is one of the most effective ways for a teacher to do better what he/she is expected to do, i.e. teach."   and   "... whatever the views, teachers are the main consumers of the finding of educational research... and   if teachers are to understand the implications of research data and critically to examine practice in the light of these implications, then they must be involved at some level of the research process. "   (page...)

The teacher/researcher in this study is exploring a particular aspect connected with her own specialism , poetry. As teacher/researcher, the role is complex and likely to involve role conflict. The teacher/researcher is responsible for developing understanding in her own pupils and the role conflict between teacher as educator and teacher as researcher must not affect the pupils' learning. This problem was to be overcome, in this study by excluding the teacher's / researcher's own pupils from the actual research and consequent analysis. The children in her own class, however were to be involved in the pilot study and in the selecting of poems to be used in the main study.

It was the intention that the data would be collected in each classroom by the researcher in the role of teacher / researcher. This would help in overcoming the problem of the researcher being viewed as an outsider. The children should also feel more comfortable in their own surroundings. However, an adult will always be viewed as an outsider to a child in a classroom situation. An adult and child will view shared experiences differently.

The interaction between the investigator and the subjects can also influence the way in which conclusions are drawn. The researcher must remain objective and avoid , to the best of his/her ability , ways in which the data may be influenced or distorted under scrutiny.

Construction of Teacher's semi-structured interview.

For the second stage, a semi-structured interview with the teachers would as Morrison(1994) claims, " *combine concern for structure and concern for freedom and individuality.* " This method of enquiry appeared more appropriate than a questionnaire, yet would still gather detailed data.

The term interview is defined by Cannell and Kahn (1968) as,

"... *a two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research - relevant information and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation.* "

The data that is to be obtained from the teachers must be able to be related to / compared with the data from the children. A questionnaire would appear rather impersonal and might not yield the richness of data that an interview would. A structured interview would yield data that could be compared, but the recipients would be unable to elaborate in any detail. An informal interview with unstructured response questions would give freedom for individual answers, but would make it difficult to quantify the answers. As a research tool in this instance, a semi- structured interview with the teachers seemed most appropriate , especially as the data were to be analysed in conjunction with data from the children.

A semi-structured interview was used because as Morrison (1994) states,

"This has greater potential for an honest response whilst still preserving a measure of compatibility across respondents."

The contents and procedures of the semi-structured interview were to be organised in advance. The wording for all the respondents would be the same to allow some comparison of answers to be drawn. However, the questions would be open-ended permitting detailed answers to be given. The questions that were to be asked were to provide selective data. The questions would be agreed in advance and all the recipients would receive the same questions in the same order. Each recipient would be permitted to elaborate on their answers as much as they required. The researcher/interviewer would also have a list of prompts to clarify certain questions as need dictated, and probes to ask for elaboration of particular questions. This type of interview is both focused and flexible to a certain extent, hopefully taking into account the personalities and the feelings of the teachers to provide honest and personal answers. An interview schedule would be used to provide a framework for the interview that should not be too restrictive.

Design of Interview Schedule

The questions for the semi-structured interview, were specifically designed to get the teachers to think about poetry themselves, as well as to talk about it. In talking

about the nature of poetry, whilst considering the questions, the teachers' own interest or lack of interest in poetry might be revealed.

An attempt to find out why they taught poetry and why or if, they considered poetry to be important, might help in understanding how they taught it. The researcher might, or might not, be able to relate the teachers' thinking about poetry to their teaching of it. The questions were also designed to help uncover any difficulties that the teachers might associate with the teaching of poetry. For example, " What are the problems in teaching poetry ?"

By focusing on the problem, rather than by putting teachers on the spot to provide answers, the researcher intended to identify specific problems which might give indications about their practice. The semi-structured interview was therefore designed to give insight into the teachers' perceptions of poetry in general, as well as to provide information into the work they carried out with their own pupils.

Sampling

The size of the sample of the study had to be both manageable and adequate. As a full time teacher there were certain constraints already in place. Cost had to be kept to a minimum due to a lack of funding and the time allocated to the actual research was at the discretion of the employer. As there was also a time constraint in which to complete the project itself, the timing of the research was a critical factor.

Whilst a large sample would have been desirable, it would have been unworkable in this instance.

The sample was chosen from,

1. Children aged 4 - 7 years of age from a large primary school.

2. Teachers of children in the 4-7 years age range from the same large urban primary school.

The primary school in the study is situated in an area of east Middlesbrough, Ormesby. Ormesby was originally a rural village on the outskirts of Middlesbrough. The area , although generally built up, has a large National Trust park and its own shopping area. The parents of the children who attend the school are mainly white, working - middle class and mainly live in privately owned housing. The primary school, whilst having a large number of educational policies, did not have a poetry policy.

Whilst the sampling frame should ideally have been from a wider population, again this would have been unmanageable. A random sample with all children having an equal chance of being included in the sample was not possible. A non-probability sample, (or purposive, or convenience sample) is used when a probability sample (or random sample) is not feasible. A non- probability sample is better suited for this type of research, as some members will unfortunately have to be excluded from the sample for a variety of reasons. As some of the children will be very young there may have to

be purposeful selection of certain children. A non-probability sample is also less complicated and less expensive to set up. It is therefore also convenient and economic.

However this type of sampling undoubtedly carries more risk of bias. When this type of selectivity is built into a non probability sample it must be acknowledged that it will not represent the wider population. Convenience sampling or opportunity sampling of this type, "seeks only to represent itself or instances of itself in a similar population rather than attempting to represent the whole differentiated°population " (Morrison, 1994). The opportunity sample is the sample of the population to which the researcher has access. The access is to a small section of a large primary school. The research data will only represent itself and is not seeking to make generalisations.

Pilot study of Children's activity.

The activity in the pilot study was devised to provide information about children's understanding of poems. The activity was designed to encourage the children to talk and discuss poems with one another. The pilot study was carried out at a large urban primary school on the outskirts of Middlesbrough, in October 1995.

Selection of children

Having chosen a final list of five poems, as explained in a previous section I obtained permission from one of the Year One teachers to work with a group of children from her class. The session immediately followed afternoon break. Due to the

teachers having a "story rota" allowing two teachers time to work with small groups of children, the activity was unusual for the children involved, to the extent that they only usually worked with their own teacher. The group were to consist of two boys and two girls.

The children who were involved in the pilot study were all five years of age. They had all started school in January 1995 and this was only their third term at school. The children knew the researcher well and appeared excited . None of these children were competent readers.

Procedure.

The procedures as outlined in the previous section were carried out as planned. Each child sat around a table. In front of them was a copy of the five poems. They were told why they were in that particular classroom and had the activity explained to them. The children listened as the teacher read the poems to them. The children recognised and referred to the poems by number throughout the activity. The children were confident and enthusiastic, they chatted freely and openly. They began to repeat the words as the poems were re-read and often asked for re-readings of particular poems and parts of poems. The pilot study lasted for approximately twenty minutes, and had to stop as it was time for the children to return to their own classroom. The children had enjoyed the activity. They had all contributed and had talked freely. As they left the classroom they were already reciting their favourite parts.

<u>Results</u>

It was, however, not possible to leave the children to discuss the poems as had been originally intended. The children relied heavily on the researcher to help them read parts. It was also obvious that in the time that had been allowed for the activity, it was going to be difficult for the children to agree on a favourite poem. The children tended to work individually rather than as a group, but they all contributed to the discussion in a positive way and used a wide variety of language to describe the poems.

With this particularly young group of children, it also became apparent that they did not recognise the poems as such. They did not appear to realise that these rhymes were poems. Poem 1, Humpty Dumpty by Michael Rosen, was referred to as Humpty Dumpty with the funny ending, but child 1 could not elaborate on this any further. Neither this child nor any of the other children in the discussion used the term "poem". This appeared rather surprising as the researcher knew that these children had regularly had poems read to them.

This may have been due to a number of reasons which must be considered in the analysis of the main project . Were the children feeling under pressure from the researcher ? Did the way in which the researcher asked the questions affect the answers ? What did the children think the researcher wanted ? What did the children think that the researcher was looking for ? What signals, both verbally and non verbally was the researcher giving to the children ?

The time constraint unfortunately, had meant that the researcher had been unable to elaborate further on certain questions . For example there was insufficient time to ask the children which poem they liked the least and why. However ,after talking to the children for twenty minutes the researcher considered that the main areas had been discussed and did not want to extend the time further in case the children became tired or bored with the activity. The children had all been keen and enthusiastic for twenty minutes. Had the activity taken longer , their interest might have flagged. Rather than lengthen the time of the activity , it might be considered to be worthwhile to follow the initial discussion with individual interviews.

The pilot study informed the researcher that the poems chosen were suitable and that the activity did indeed get the children talking about poems. It was also evident that these particular young children appeared , during this activity, uncertain as to what a poem was. This had already been noted when making a selection of poems for the children to discuss. Several of the younger children appeared not to have heard of the term "poem". The children had however, heard and recognised the term "rhyme", where the emphasis is very much on sound. Whilst this may have been due to the circumstances, as a result of the children's talk about the five poems and observation of their apparent uncertainty about what a poem was, the pilot study led the researcher an idea for an additional research question

Modifications of the original proposals.

It was at this point that the researcher decided that a further research method might be desirable. Was it necessary to know what a poem was ? Was there a " rite of passage" when a rhyme became a poem and if so was it the result of teacher instruction alone ?

In devising a research method to examine children's definition of a poem, a similar study by Ray Tarleton (1983) was referred to. Tarleton had completed a study with children in the secondary school on " Children's thinking of poetry ." One of his research questions was " Do children at this age, really know what a poem is ?" He was also examining how much of the children's experience of poetry was the result of teacher instruction . He devised a series of tasks, one of which would be ideally suited for this research project.

His first question was " What is a poem? " The children were asked a direct question which, Tarleton hoped, would be, "sufficiently open-ended, probing, and novel to awaken interest and stimulate ideas."

His question was as follows,

" How would you explain what a poem is to an English speaking Martian ?"

Tarleton was looking for responses that would show;

a. Children's thoughts.

b. Teachers' thoughts.

Tarleton's initial question appeared to be suitable in providing additional data to help highlight the initial research questions. Obtaining a definition of a poem from young children might show whether their understanding was expressed in either the terms used by a child or terms used by a teacher. The language that the children used or did not use might help answer the research questions. The children's responses would also show if the language used reflected the thoughts of a child or a teacher. What sort of language would the children use in trying to define a poem?

Definitions of a poem.

This activity was to follow closely the design of Tarleton. However , the children in Tarleton's study were much older and therefore more capable of writing their own definitions of a poem. There was no time constraint on his activity and the children had been allowed to write as much or as little as they wanted. For a study of younger children the design would have to be altered slightly. The intention of a direct question in order to stimulate the children was to remain the same. The question was to be changed slightly to, " How would you explain what a poem is to an alien? ", as this was considered more appropriate and easier for the children to understand.

Tarleton's activity was also changed in that the young children in this study were still to be encouraged to put their own ideas and thoughts into words, but those who were not capable of writing their own ideas down were to be encouraged to use a scribe. The children were also to be informed not to be too concerned with the spelling and punctuation. It was their ideas not their writing that were going to be looked at.

As this activity was very specific, and quite simple to administer and implement, it would be possible to use a wider sample of children than for the activity of choosing a favourite poem. Data from only a few individuals would be difficult to compare, so it was decided to obtain a definition from as many young children as possible. This meant that it should be possible to obtain a definition from every child in the sampling frame, all of the children from the large primary school to which the researcher had access.

Procedures for collecting definitions of a poem.

A specific time was to be provided for the individual children to write down their own answers and opinions without interruption or discussion with others in response to the question, "How would you explain what a poem is to an English speaking Alien ?" Their individual responses would either be written by themselves on to a sheet of paper with their Christian name and their age, or else scribed by the teacher / researcher on to a sheet of paper. The children were to be encouraged to write as little or as much as they wanted to. They were also to be encouraged to use any examples of poems that they knew.

For this activity help was required from all of the teachers in the school. Their consent was requested and given and all of the teachers were willing to let their pupils contribute. Consent was also given from the pupils as they were informed as to why the definitions were required.

For the children aged seven and over the activity was to be carried out by all of the children present during a morning in the Christmas term. The children were to write their definitions in a session that was usually for sustained reading. The teachers informed the children what the activity was for and why they were doing it. The children were then to have the question read to them and they were to be given as much time as they wished to write an answer.

Whilst the procedures for collecting definitions of a poem from children aged seven upwards were clear and uniform, the procedures for collecting the definitions from the younger children were more complicated. The younger children might be hindered in writing their definitions because of limited writing skills.

To ask Key Stage One teachers to collect the definitions was not feasible. They already had a heavy workload and planned work programme. The researcher decided that an aural definition would be more appropriate from the younger pupils and an alternative procedure had to be devised. To ask each child individually, in isolation, for a definition would be too time consuming , and unworkable in this instance.

The children were organised in five infant classes: three parallel Reception/Year 1 classes and two Year One/Year two classes. However three times per week the children had a "story time" that split the children into three groups, Reception, Year One and Year Two. The researcher decided to use this opportunity to obtain the definitions herself.

The teacher/researcher, in this instance was to collect the data from the children, who were either to attempt to write their definitions themselves or to use the teacher/researcher as a scribe. Consent was to be obtained from the children by asking them to help the teacher/researcher with her homework, as would be done with the older pupils. Pencils and paper were to be made available for those who wanted to write their own definitions. Those who did not want to write a definition were to be encouraged to use the teacher/researcher as a scribe. Those children who could not or did not want to write a definition were to have their rights acknowledged, and no pressure was to be placed upon these children. This data would be additional to the children's activity.

Sample

The sample to be asked for a definition, were the children in the study primary school who would be present at school on the day that the data was gathered. There were 365 children on role at the school. Definitions were obtained from   children. All of the children present who were able to provide a definition did so. The children

who did not provide a definition were the younger children who could not answer the question.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and Validity must be addressed in any research project as they are the two most important criteria for the evaluation of the measuring instruments used. Reliability refers to the need ,

"for consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents."   *Morrison, 1994*

This infers that the results of an evaluation, would be similar, if an alternative group of respondents, in a similar context, could be found. Reliability is therefore the extent to which an instrument is consistent in measuring what it sets out to measure. Results cannot be valid unless the data have been recorded accurately and consistently, that is, they are reliable.

The validity of qualitative data can be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data as well as how the participants are approached. One of the problems of qualitative data, however, is that the opinions of the respondents, their attitudes and perspectives may all build in a measure of bias which the researcher must recognise .

By ensuring standardisation of procedures for gathering data and tailoring the instruments to the concentration span of the respondents and addressing other factors, for example, that the tasks with the children would be completed without other children present in the classroom, validity will be ensured to a certain degree. Other factors to be considered are the avoidance of subjective interpretation of the data, avoiding poor coding of the data, avoiding generalisation and avoidance of selective use of data.

Cannell and Kalm, (1968), suggest that with interviews the questions that are asked must look as if they are measuring what they claim to measure and that the attitudes and opinions of the interviewer should not contain bias. This is because there may be a tendency for the interviewer to seek answers supporting preconceived notions. The questions being asked must be very clear.

The researcher in this study has attempted to pay attention to the problems of reliability and validity at each stage in order that the effects of the researcher as interviewer may be lessened, but is aware that they will never be entirely eradicated.

It was decided that this research project would be carried out in the Christmas term of 1995 and that it would consist of three parts .

1. Children's responses to five poems.

2. Semi-structured interviews with teachers.

3. Children's definitions of a poem.

Data collection

The researcher was a teacher at the primary school in which the study was carried out. The researcher was already aware of the planning for teaching poetry , both long term and short term,   by the team of teachers, but was not aware of what the individual teachers did to ensure that the poetry that was planned was taught , or how the teachers approached the poetry lessons.

As far as the researcher was aware there were neither notions of progression in teaching poetry nor was a poetry policy being implemented. Neither was there any assessment or evaluation of the children's understanding of poetry or work relating to poetry that the children had completed.

Methodology 1 Children's Responses to Five Poems.

The procedures were carried out as outlined previously. The discussions were recorded on to audio tape and the taped transcripts are included in appendix three.

Methodology 2 Semi-structured interviews with teachers.

Each of the five teachers who were to be involved in the study knew the researcher personally, as a colleague and part of the lower school team. They were also aware of the researcher's personal interest in poetry.

In obtaining their permission to ask them specific questions, the researcher informed them individually, of the reason for the interview and thanked them for their support. Only one teacher declined to offer to help in the study. This was on the basis that she did not have sufficient free time, and thought that she did not have anything useful to offer the researcher. This remark might have been different if the study had been about number or reading. Was her remark saying something about the status of poetry in the classroom? The teacher involved was an experienced teacher with more than fifteen years of experience in the primary school.

Problems in Administration

The apparent reluctance to help with the study was again noticed when the other teachers saw the semi-structured interview schedule that had been prepared. Every one of the teachers asked if they could take the schedule away to complete on their own. None of the teachers wanted to discuss the questions with the researcher but were willing to take the schedules away to complete them in private.

All of the schedules were taken away, completed individually and returned to the researcher later the same day. The teachers completed the schedules on their own. The teachers remarks on returning the schedules ranged from,

"I hope that you find this useful."

to

" That was like sitting an exam."

The original intention to interview the teachers was therefore not carried out . The procedures were modified and the data that was collected was in the form of completed interview schedule forms.

Methodology 3   Definitions of a poem.

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to examine the young children's definitions of poems to discover if there is an indication of their understanding of a poem in the answers that they gave. Although definitions were obtained from all of the children in the study primary school, only the definitions from the children in the 4-7 age range will be examined in this research study which is mainly concerned with young children's understanding of poetry.

Procedure

The definitions were collected orally from the younger children during the afternoon in the month of December 1995. The written definitions from the older children were collected one morning in December 1995.

Every child who was attending school that day and could write independently wrote a definition on to a sheet of paper. At the top of the paper they wrote their first name and age. The papers were given to the researcher later the same day.

Problems in Administration

Collecting definitions from the younger children was more problematic because they were unable to write independently. It was also with the younger children, that the problem arose when they were unable to explain what a "poem" was. With the children who were unable to describe a poem, the researcher asked these children if they could tell the researcher what a nursery rhyme was.

Chapter 5

Results

Introduction

(a) Scope of chapter.

The purpose of this chapter is to report the results of -

1. Children's responses to five poems.

2. The semi-structured interviews with teachers.

3. Children's definitions of a " poem".

(b) Background.

The researcher was a teacher at the primary school where the study was carried out in. The researcher was already aware of the planning for teaching poetry , both long term and short term, by the team of teachers, but was not aware of what the individual teachers did to ensure that the poetry that was planned was taught , or how the teachers approached the poetry lessons. Poetry was included as part of the English planning, but there was very little detail as to what should be taught or how.

As far as the researcher was aware there were neither notions of progression of poetic experience nor was a poetry policy being implemented. Neither was there any

assessment or evaluation of the children's understanding of poetry or work relating to poetry that was completed by the children.

Methodology : 1   Activities with children

Introduction

The activities were designed to get the children talking about poetry to highlight their understanding of poetry.

Procedure

The five children were to sit as a group in a classroom around a table. The children   each had   a sheet of A4 paper with the poems type written . The poems were to be read to the children and they had to decide amongst themselves upon a favourite poem. The discussion was   recorded on audio tape.

Selection of children

The children were aged between 5-7 years old. They were from the classes of three different teachers. These teachers were each to complete   an interview schedule at a later date . The children were to be selected by their own teachers to help the researcher.

Selection of poetry

The poems that were used had been selected by children from the researcher's own class at a previous date as mentioned in the previous chapter. The poems were of different styles, lengths and subject.

Method of Analysis

The taped recordings were to be transcribed at a later date. The data were then analysed by establishing categories which seemed to indicate children's understanding of poems.

Methodology: 2. Semi structured interviews with teachers.

Design of Interview Schedule

The questions for the semi-structured interview, had been specifically designed to get the teachers to think about poetry themselves, as well as to talk about it. In talking about the nature of poetry, whilst considering the questions, the teacher's own interest or lack of interest in poetry may be highlighted.

By trying to find out why they taught poetry and why or if, they considered poetry to be important, it might help in understanding how they taught it. The researcher might , or might not, be able to relate the teacher's thinking about poetry to

their teaching of it. The questions were also designed to help uncover any difficulties that the teachers might associate with the teaching of poetry. For example, " What are the problems of teaching poetry ?"

By focusing on the problem, rather than by putting teachers on the spot to provide answers, the researcher intended to identify specific problems which might give indications about their practice. The semi-structured interview was therefore designed to give insight into the teachers' perceptions of poetry in general, as well as to provide information into the work they carried out with their own pupils.

Selection of sample

~~Each of the five teachers who were to be involved in the study knew the researcher personally, as a colleague and part of the lower school team. They were also aware of the researcher's personal interest in poetry~~.

In obtaining their permission to ask them specific questions, the researcher informed them individually, of the reason for the interview and for their support. Only one teacher declined to offer to help in the study. This was on the basis that she did not have sufficient free time, and thought that she did not have anything useful to offer the researcher. This remark might have been different if the study had been about number or reading. Was the teacher's remark saying something about the status of poetry in her classroom? The teacher involved was an experienced teacher with more than fifteen years of experience in the primary school.

Problems in Administration

As noted in the previous chapter the apparent reluctance to help with the study was again noticed when the other teachers saw the semi-structured interview schedule that had been prepared. Every one of the teachers asked if they could take the schedule away to complete on their own. None of the teachers wanted to discuss the questions with the researcher but were willing to take the schedules away to complete them in private. This therefore meant that the researcher was going to have to compromise . The advantages of an interview would not be possible.

A critique of the quality of the data and the implications of this , is offered in detail in Chapter 6.

Methodology 3.; Definitions of a poem

Introduction

The purpose of this section was to examine the young children's definitions of poems to discover if there was an indication of their understanding of a poem in the answers that they gave. Although definitions were obtained from all of the children in the study primary school, only the definitions from the children in the 4-7 age range will be examined in this research study, which focuses on that age group. Data from the older groups will be analysed separately.

Procedure

~~The definitions were collected orally from the younger children during the afternoon in the month of December 1995. The written definitions from the older children were collected one morning in December 1995.~~

~~Every child who was attending school that day and could write independently wrote a definition on a sheet of paper. At the top of the paper they wrote their first name and age. The papers were given to the researcher later the same~~ day.

Problems in Administration

~~Collecting definitions from the younger children was more problematic because of them being unable to write independently. It was also with the younger children, that the problem arose when they were unable to explain what a "poem" was. With the children who were unable to describe a poem,~~ the researcher asked these children if they could tell the researcher what a nursery rhyme was. This was preplanned . The children were all asked exactly the same question, " What is a Nursery Rhyme? "

The definitions therefore fell into three categories.

1. Written definitions of a poem.

2. Oral definitions of a poem.

3. Oral definitions of a nursery rhyme.

Method of Analysis

The definitions would be analysed by categorising them. It may be possible to use categories similar to Millward (1994), so that the data may be compared at a later date.

Results 1   Activities with children

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to examine the Key Stage 1 children's responses to five poems to illuminate the research questions. The language, words and phrases that the young children used to discuss the poems, will be examined to look for understanding of poems.

Three separate groups of young children, (five in each group) were involved in talking about the poems. The poems that the children discussed were;

Humpty Dumpty   by Michael Rosen

Calico Ban   by Edward Lear

Shadow March   by Robert Louis Stevenson

The monster   by Charles Thompson

The man from the Land of Fandango by Margaret Mahy

All of the children involved in the study appeared excited and they were all keen to listen and talk about the poems. None of the children appeared intimidated by the task.

Throughout the activities a pattern appeared to emerge in the way in which the children responded to the poems. The same pattern emerged with each group of children. At first the children listened to the poems and there were very few comments. However if there was a comment , it was an immediate response which then involved the children looking to one another for support. The children were therefore making a judgement before they could account for the judgement. Their immediate response was followed by a considered judgement that they sometimes appeared to have difficulty in accounting for. Their views often changed as they listened to the other children discussing the poems and their immediate response often changed to a more thoughtful judgement. For example, in the first transcript one of the children's immediate response was, " I like that one." as they pointed to poem number two. The children then looked to one another for reassurance of their choice. The children were also happy to account for their likes and dislikes of a poem. Consideration must be given in the final analysis as to what the children thought was expected of them in this activity. For example, were the children used to the format where a teacher elicits

response or did the teacher ask the children to develop responses. In this particular instance the children were requested to give a response to the researcher. The methodology guided a response from the children.

Initial classification of comments.

These categories were selected by looking at how other researchers had classified this type of data. The categories in this research are similar to those used by Millward and Thompson (1994). They are;

1. Awareness of rhyme.

2. Making sense.

3. Awareness of form.

4. Display of previous knowledge

<u>Awareness of rhyme.</u>

One of the most interesting features of the study was that these very young children were displaying a knowledge of rhyme. The first use of the term rhyme was used with the first group when they were asked how they knew that what was written down were poems.

" Because it's like.... rhyming words. "

The children claim to know they are poems " because they rhyme." The first answer given in the second transcript as to how they knew they were poems was again " it rhymes. " However, when the children began to elaborate on their answers it becomes apparent that what they meant by the term "rhyme" was not what was expected. One of the children attempted to explain rhyme to the others in the group . " It's like flippity flop ." The child appears to be recognising sounds rather than rhyme. He is using the term "rhyme " instead of assonance. His lack of a language to describe the features of poetry is very significant. However, it is telling us that this child is aware that poems have a certain sounds. It would appear that it is only his lack of vocabulary that is preventing him from explaining more specifically. He is aware of the term " rhyme" in connection with poems and has used this term to explain a different aspect of the sound of poetry. When one of the children pointed out to other members of one of the group that there was no rhyme in The man from the Land of Fandango, after attempting to look for the "rhyme", and failing to do so, the children then appeared to be rather puzzled. However, they still insisted that poems have to rhyme. Later in the session this changed and the children moved away from the rhyming element and claimed that poems were " like songs. " Again the children are focusing on the rhythmic quality of poems. This knowledge appears to be there without being formally taught.

The final group again claim to know that what is written down are poems because " they rhyme."   It was observed that when the Michael Rosen version of Humpty Dumpty was read the children all added " again " to the end of the poem. They explained that they did this so that the poem would rhyme. However, when they were asked which word·" again" rhymed with they were unable to find a word to rhyme with it but were still insistent that the word should be changed.

" You have to say that to make it rhyme."

It appeared that the children in this group were also referring to the rhythmic quality of the poem, but again this group did not have the language to fully express themselves. These children remained very insistent that poems had to "rhyme." By continually altering the last line of poem to , " Had scrambled eggs AGAIN" , the children were actually making the line rhyme with " men". The children were displaying a knowledge of rhyme apparently instinctively.

With the final group of children, which was also the youngest group, the children immediately altered the final line.

" And put the king's horses together again."

"And put Humpty Dumpty together again."

It would appear that they did not like the Rosen version of the poem. It was apparent that it did not rhyme and the children's first instinct was to make it rhyme almost automatically. Again the children are showing an awareness of rhyme.

Making sense.

Whilst the young children were discussing the poems it became apparent that the children were also attempting to make sense of the poems.

On rereading Calico Ban to the first group of children, child 3, commented, " They can't dance in the cup !" When he was asked why the mice couldn't dance in the cups he replied , " Because the cups are too little for the mice to get in." The child then proceeded to show the researcher how big he thought the cups were, (about 5cm in diameter). This child had obviously been trying to make his own sense of the poem. His mice were of normal size, but the cups he was imagining were very small. A discussion followed of how big mice are and this in turn was related to an actual experience of one of the children who had seen mice and knew how big they really were. However, there is no evidence here that the pupil is treating the poem Calico Ban any differently to a story.

In the next group again the children refer to actual objects to help them understand about the poem. The mice remind the children of Thomas's rat. Thomas himself them goes on to inform the group about his rats. But, as one of the children remarks, " They're not mice." To which another begins a discussion of the mice he has

in his garden and describes what they do. The understanding here appears to have come from association.

It would appear that real experiences are important to the children and they share their experiences with the other children in an open and yet informed way. They are helping each other to make sense of the poems. When asked if real mice would dance in cups this group of children were unanimous, " No!", then on reflection Thomas using a real experience remarked that actually his rat "has been in a cup." Is this the way that children will accept poems ?

The next example comes from the first Transcript. On rereading poem number 4, the children again try to make sense of the poem by relating it to their own experiences and actual knowledge. The children as a group work out that this is a sea monster that lives at the seaside through associating " sandy bed" with their own visits to the seaside.

" It's about the sea because the only slimy thing is like...seaweed."

" The salt is in the sea."

The children also comment that the monster in the poem must be big because,

" He must be big if he eats ships."

" He has to be big if he eats some ships."

" He wants to eat big ships."

This almost appears to have been done as a comprehension exercise by the children. Are they doing this for themselves or because it is what they think the researcher wants them to do ? The teacher expectations must be also be examined at this point. What are the expectations that the teachers have already set up for children to respond to text ? Do the children expect to be asked what happens next ? or Why did he do that? Whilst these are suitable questions for narrative text, explaining causes and effects, this is not necessarily the type of questions for generating poetic response. Is this exercise getting the children to think poetically ?

Whilst discussing poem 4, in one of the other groups several of the children attempted to substitute one of the words of the poem. After hearing the final line, " and ate another bag of ships." several children immediately responded by shouting out " chips".

" It should have said chips."

" Instead of chips it says ships."

Child 2, actually shouted " Chips" and giggled as they thought that there had been a mistake. The children appear to be responding through humour and previous knowledge. However, it could merely be just the incongruity, a glimpse at the power that words have. The children are being challenged to look at the words in the poem. The words are making the children look, wonder and remark on the words. It is inviting the children to look at the world differently. They had never had a bag of " ships" but they had eaten a bag of chips. They appear to have dismissed the poetic quality by treating it as a mistake.

The second group of children again use humour to make sense and pick up several points that the first group had noticed. On rereading poem 4, three of the children immediately respond by shouting out " Chips!", after reading the word "ships". They also seemed to think that the word had been misread. they obviously expected "bag of chips". It wasn't until the poem had been discussed as a group that the children became aware of why " bag of ships" had been used. They had made sense of the poem by relating it again to a previous experience. The children were also aware of and could respond to sound and sound patterns. In discussing the poem the children also worked out that the "slimy" related to seaweed,

"It's about the sea, because the only slimy thing is like...seaweed".

The children then worked out that the salt referred to the salt in the sea and that the sand was from the "seaside". On asking the children where the monster lived, previous personal and general experience was again used. One of the children named the local

seaside resort, Redcar, as the place that the monster would live whilst another claimed that it lived in Loch Ness.

" In a pond where the Loch Ness monster lives.

Which of the children are correct ?

Awareness of form

The children listen carefully to the poems and display an awareness of form. In the first transcript, child 3 makes a very unusual comment. After everyone had read part of poem 3, he commented that,

"I don't think corners should be there".

He was making an immediate response about the words used in a poem. When asked why the word shouldn't be there he replied that,

"It's too long."

One of the other children then joined in to agree with his comment. To the children the wrong word had been used. It didn't fit. the word actually broke up the flowing rhythm slightly and the children were observant enough to both notice and comment on this. They were able to explain amongst themselves reasons why they thought it was wrong.

All of the children knew the original Humpty Dumpty rhyme: this previous knowledge was a taken for granted assumption by them all. The children use the term nursery rhyme whilst in conversation with the others and take it for granted that the other children know what they are referring to. This learning has taken place some time previously and is recalled effortlessly by the children.

As well as taking it for granted that the other children all know the nursery rhyme " Humpty Dumpty", some of the children are aware that there are several other version of this rhyme with a different ending.

In Transcript 1, Michael Rosen's version of Humpty Dumpty is likened to another version where the last line is,

" Where you have scrambled eggs again."

In discussing this with the other children it would appear that this child is assuming that the other children know this poem.

Results 2 Interviews with teachers

Introduction

One of the main observations of the study that involved the teachers, was their reaction to being asked questions about their own views on poetry and the way in which they teach poetry. None of the teachers were willing to be interviewed on the subject of poetry . However they did take away the interview schedule and answered the questions in private. All of the completed schedules were returned almost immediately. The main advantage of the teacher's taking away the schedules was that they were returned quickly , that same afternoon. However, one of the disadvantages was that the interviewer did not get a chance to ask for elaboration on any of the answers. The answers therefore tended to be rather short.

Training of teaching poetry.

One of the reasons that the teachers may have found the questions on the schedule so difficult may have been due to the insecurity that they themselves felt about the teaching of poetry. The teachers were also aware that the researcher was an English specialist with a specific interest in poetry. Two of the teachers claimed to have only had training as part of their P.G.C.E. course, with the fifth teacher having had some training on poetry as part of a general writing course.

With the teachers appearing to have had so little training themselves, it may be that their teaching of poetry, is a reflection of their own personal understanding of poetry, which is not necessarily a disadvantage.

Understanding of poetic form

In answering Question 1, " What is special about form? " the key factor appeared to be " rhythm". All of the teachers considered this to be the most important aspect. One of the teachers actually linked this to language development.

" repetitive sounds reinforcing language development."

However, it is not clear if this teacher is referring to rhythm or alliteration. It is the rhythm however, that makes the texts poetic, that links poetry to oral experience and draws attention to the words and the language.

It was also noted here that the short sentences often used in poetry were "not overpowering to children", and that it was special because poetry can be any length.

T ".can be 2 lines to 2 pages."

Here the teacher is explaining that the form of poetry is different to other genres.

Teaching / sharing poetry

In answering one of the key questions, as to why the teachers taught / shared poetry with children, one of the teachers actually related the teaching to their own personal enjoyment of poetry.

Three of the other teachers mention that they taught poetry for enjoyment but did not comment as to whether this was their own or the children's enjoyment. None of the teachers mentioned that the purpose of teaching poetry was for the purpose of following the National Curriculum or that it was part of a curriculum.

Only one teacher did not attempt to answer this question. This same teacher had considered " memory training " as a major factor of why poetry was considered important. In not mentioning poetry is this teacher inferring that poetry is not seen by her as something that is enjoyed by the children ? It would appear that this view, however, was not shared by the other teachers.

Choosing poems

In answering question 4, the teachers each had a different method for choosing the books that they read to the children. Several teachers used poetry related to a topic, whilst another read poetry that had been selected by a child, giving poetry a personal quality. One chose poetry that the children "would relate to" and another chose short and simple poems that the children would understand.

Introducing poetry

In replying to how they introduced poetry to children, nearly all of the teachers approached it as they would a story, by reading it to the children, especially at "storytime". One of the teachers explains further by stating that after the poems have been read to the children that she would discuss with the children how poems are different to "other forms of writing".

The teachers appear to be unconsciously treating the poems differently to a story. The children are invited to listen to "a poem". Already at the age of 5/6 they are learning that there is a difference between a poem and a story, merely by listening to the teachers' invitation. They are being told "this is a poem".

Helping children to respond to poems.

In answering how the teachers help children to respond to poetry," repetition" is the more popular reply, repeating and joining in with the rhyming words and learning to recite poems.

One of the teachers also mentions drawing pictures. By drawing pictures, being able to be sensitive to the poetic, the children are being allowed to make sense of the poem with an individual interpretation. By " making it easy to relate to", the teacher is helping the children to focus their attention on relating the poems to their own experiences.

Problems of teaching poetry to young children.

Replies included,

". lack of experience."

" No greater than the problem of teaching to a mixed ability group."

One teacher comments that," it can be harder than story for poorer children", but fails to elaborate further. Is it because the teacher finds it difficult to teach "poorer" children or because the "poorer" child finds it more difficult to understand poetry than an "average" child? Or is it because story was more familiar ? Stories are more familiar to children and much more accessible. This view is an immediate contrast to T3, who claims that there are "few" problems because all children can experience some level of success with poetry. The only problem that this teacher encounters is when a child wants to write their own poetry, but are still unable to write sufficiently. T5. comments, that it is important that young children " don't get obsessed with "rhyming", a notion that is also shared by T1. However, it is not clear if these teachers are referring to the writing of poems. One of the teachers goes on to claim that children have a problem with vocabulary, " to link rhyming words". Another problem, identified by T2, is the lack of experience that some children have. However, it is not clear if this is " general" experience or the lack of experience of poems.

Poems that are accessible to children

It is interesting to note here that on answering what kind of poems are accessible to children T1 answers,

" All nursery rhymes."

Here the teacher is telling us that she considers nursery rhymes as "poems"

Aspects of poetic form that children enjoy.

The teachers appear to be in agreement as to some of the aspects of poems that children enjoy.

T1. "Young children enjoy the repetitive nature."

T2. " ..rhyme and humour."

T4. " ..anticipating the rhyme."

T3. "..nonsense rhymes.....silly rhymes - ones that don't work."

One of the interesting features of this part of the study appears to be that in all cases poetry is read/shared for the purpose of enjoyment. It was encouraging to note that teachers wanted to share their own enjoyment of poems with the children.

T5 " ..to show my enjoyment of it."

T3 " I like poetry and children like it and listen well."

T1 "..familiarity with words for enjoyment"

" ..Enjoyment with humour."

T2 " enjoyment"

Another area highlighted is that the teachers appear to introduce nursery rhymes together with poems to the young children.

T3 "Nursery rhymes are an important part of the infant curriculum, and planned for".

"I include nonsense rhymes and nursery rhymes."
Here the emphasis is on sound and idiosyncrasies.
T1 "All nursery rhymes are accessible to children."

Teacher 3, mentions that even young children who are not able to write for themselves are able to experience the success of " inventing" their own poetry, by using an adult as a scribe. This teacher believes that even very young children are capable of " writing poems", of understanding what a "poem" is, and that it is a different genre from a story. This view that young children " know" what a poem is , is shared by Teacher 5. By commenting that she has to make sure that, " ..they don't get obsessed with rhyming." she is suggesting that the children are able to recognise both a poem and rhyme.

With regards to poetic form T3 remarks that children enjoy "silly rhymes - ones that don't work." There is the notion here that young children are using the rhymes to make sense of the world around them. To know what "won't work" the children need to be aware of what "will work". In changing the traditional rhyme to an "Old Lady who lives in a flat." This teacher is reinforcing to the children that you can't really live in a shoe.

One of the other suggestions made by T5 is that simple poems should be available like simple stories. She claims that there are still not enough poems that are accessible to children. That simpler poems should be available for young children is also regarded by T3 as an important part of developing children's experiences of poems. This teacher refers specifically to the poetry books that are more recently being included in reading schemes. However, she does not exclude more difficult texts for young children apart from those that she refers to as displaying " archaic language".

Another comment that needs further discussion is the fact that T1 appears to regard nursery rhymes and poems as the same. Is this true? Are they a "type" of poem, maybe a "poem for children"? However, nursery rhymes are different in the fact that they have no title and are usually referred to by the first line.

The purpose of this section is to examine the young children's definitions of poems to answer the original research answers and to discover if there is an indication of their understanding of a poem in the answers that they gave. Although definitions were obtained from all of the children in the study primary school, only the definitions from the children in the 4-7 age range will be examined in this research study. By looking at the language that the children use it may be possible to discover if their understanding is reflected from the teacher (by using language that a teacher would use),or from themselves(by using a metalanguage), words or phrases that a child would use. The definitions may also reflect the idea that there is a "rite of passage", that at a certain time a child learns what a poem is.

For these young children the most popular reply to the question "What is a poem?" included the word rhyme. Of 101 children aged 5-7 years who replied to this question, 78 children's answers included the word rhyme.

23. " A poem rhymes. It has a tune." is how 7 year old Dominic describes a poem. Whilst he may not have the language to describe a poem in further detail , he is already displaying an awareness that a poem is "*different*". To use the word "rhyme" , means that he may understand what a rhyme is. He is also aware of the rhythmic quality of poems. A "sound" of a poem is important.

The song like quality of poems is referred to by many of the children in a variety of ways.

(23) " It has a tune".

(3) " It's when you sing songs."

(42) " A poem is a sort of song...."

(52) " A poem is a little song..."

(53) " A poem is a short song but you don't sing it."

Three of the children said that, " A poem is a song that rhymes."

Six of the children said that. " A poem is like a song."

Four of the children actually said that, " A poem is a song."

Another observation in looking at the collected data is that some of the children refer to nursery rhymes and how poems are similar.

(13) " A poem rhymes. It is different." Six year old David then goes on to quote Michael Rosen's version of Humpty Dumpty. For David, this adaptation of the traditional rhyme is a poem .

(42) refers to a poem being a sort of song that rhymes like Humpty Dumpty.

(62) " It is like a nursery rhyme."

(79) ".........like a nursery rhyme."

Another observation of the definitions is that the children appear to like poems. None of the comments from the children are negative comments.

Several of the children comment that a poem is "different". However they do not elaborate further.

(20) comments that a poem doesn't begin , "once upon a time". At the age of 6 years

Helen is already aware that a poem is different to a story. Whilst she may not have the

language to describe what exactly a poem is , she is aware of what it is not.

Discussion

1. Teachers.

In conclusion it would appear that several important areas have been

highlighted. The first is that the topic "Poetry", appears to have caused some concern

to several of the teachers. The answers received from this small sample, show how

different their views are on poetry. There also appears to be a "suspicion" of poetry.

The researcher found that some of the comments made when the interview schedules

were returned to be quite extraordinary. The teachers who had completed the

schedules were all very experienced primary teachers, who had been teaching from

between six and twenty years. Even though the teachers had all been reassured as to

what the intentions of the researcher were, most of them had found the task difficult.

Generally, the teachers appeared to have been slightly intimidated by the questions that

they had been asked. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the teachers were to have been given

the opportunity to talk to the researcher, but all the teachers' had declined.

The researcher at this point, had to ask herself several questions to try to

establish why the exercise had been so difficult for the teachers and why they appeared

to have been so apprehensive.

It must also be remembered that these teachers knew the researcher well. Had this in itself been an advantage or a hindrance ? Would the outcome have been different if the teachers had not known the researcher personally, nor the researcher's interest in poetry? Would the outcome have been different if the teachers had been less experienced ? Had it been the design of the semi-structured interview schedule that in fact turned out to be a form of questionnaire caused the problems ? Had it been the questions that were being asked or was it because of the topic, poetry, that the teachers were being asked to discuss ?

The researcher knew that the teachers had each done their best in answering the questions in this instance, but had to bear in mind that this would not necessarily be the case if this exercise was to be repeated in the future.

Whilst one teacher's apparent enthusiasm of poetry comes across in the answers that she gives, an apparent unease comes across in another. Yet, these two teachers are delivering the same curriculum on poetry to young children in the same school. Is this affecting the children's understanding of poems or is a child developing their own understanding by making sense for themselves of what they hear and read?

Children Talking about poems.

The children appear to make immediate judgements about the poems and then appear to have difficulty accounting for their judgements. Their views change as they

listen to the other children discuss the poems. The immediate response appears to be followed by a more thoughtful judgement.

In the first transcript one of the children's immediate response was, "I like that one", and he pointed to the second poem. It was also noted here that the children looked to one another for reassurance.

The children appear to be developing an understanding as a group and help and support each other. In Transcript 1, when one of the pupils asks, " What does pay you a call mean?" another pupil answers his question. " It's like a visit." The pupils are clearly supporting each other in this exercise. They are helping each other to understand the meaning of the poems.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusions

In this final chapter the researcher will re-examine the research data obtained for the purpose of this study and relate it to the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. From the literature a number of questions arose, forming the basis of the research . The researcher hoped to throw light on how young children's understanding of poetry developed . This chapter will attempt to draw conclusions and implications from the research as well as including a critique of the chosen methodology. The recent developments in the teaching of English, especially the proposed introduction of the "Literacy Hour " will also be discussed and the chapter will conclude by making suggestions for further research.

As mentioned in the previous chapter the sample chosen was a non-probability sample and as such the findings can only be taken representative of the population surveyed and not of the population nationally.

Critique of Methodology

In reviewing the methodologies used in this research project, the author acknowledges the fact that there were problems in certain areas. If this research were to be done again, there are certain areas where improvements could be made. One of

the main problems was the fact that the teachers interviews turned out to be more like a questionnaire because of the way in which it was received by the teachers. The researcher had assumed that the teachers would both want to talk to the researcher as well as have time to talk. Both issues were in fact problems. When it came to the actual data collection, none of the teachers were willing to talk, but were willing to take the schedule away to answer the questions themselves. It would appear that the teachers were apprehensive , maybe to the researchers " expertise" or to the topic "poetry".

Secondly, in transcribing the taped interviews with the young children the researcher was also aware that on reflection the interviews had still been quite heavily led by the researcher even though the problem of this had been acknowledged in the design method.

The third area where there were problems was in obtaining the definitions from the younger children. This could have been given more consideration as it was very time consuming and these definitions were not obtained as constructively as the definitions from the older children. These problems are all acknowledged by the researcher.

Recent Developments.

Since the completion of the research project and subsequent analysis, further literature has been published regarding the teaching of English. The National Literacy

Strategy is the most recent publication and is due to be implemented in almost all primary schools from September 1998. The main focus of this report is the introduction and implementation of the "Literacy Hour". The main purpose of the introduction of the "Literacy Hour" is to raise national standards of Literacy. The term "literacy" applies to the uniting of both reading and writing. Within this document it is noted that one of the aims for literate pupils is to,

> " know, <u>understand</u> and be able to write in a range of genres in fiction
> and poetry. " (page 3)

It is the first time that any English document has referred to understanding with regards to poetry. There is also an emphasis on the teaching of phonics. Reference is made to the fact that many teachers have often been over cautious about the teaching of phonics. This report claims that it is "vital" that pupils are ,

> "taught to use these word level strategies effectively." (page 4)

The report actually acknowledges research evidence that pupils <u>" need to be taught this"</u> and that it is insufficient merely to be exposed to books.

> " At Key Stage 1 there should be a strong and systematic emphasis in
> the teaching of phonics and other word level skills. " (page 4)

The document suggests that even in the Reception class attention should be given to rhymes and poems, and that children should have experience of them.

" Range ; - Fiction and Poetry : a wide variety of traditional, nursery and modern rhymes, chants, action verses, poetry and stories with predictable structure and patterned language. " (page 18)

The word level work that the teachers were to follow was

1. to understand and to be able to rhyme through - recognising, exploring and working with rhyming patterns, e.g. learning nursery rhymes. " (page 18)

Throughout the document the ranges of literature to read includes poetry. In Year 1, again reference is made that the children should have experience of "poems with patterned and predictable structures, language and repetition." In each term the document guides teachers as to what they should be teaching pupils in English . Throughout, this also includes poetry. Poetry appears to be acknowledged for the first tine as a different genre. It is actually given a high profile .

It would appear that the National Literacy Strategy is meeting an important need. It has a very prescriptive nature, especially with regards to the teaching of poetry. As this research project has found, teachers vary greatly in both the priority that they give to poetry , and how they teach poetry in the classroom. The training

pack that is sent to schools so that they are able to deliver the National Literacy Strategy includes detailed and precise instructions as to how the training should be delivered. The Project's training pack informs teachers as to how and why they are to teach the Literacy Hour. Within the training pack reference is specifically made to the recent research on the importance of rhyme and reading. The teachers are now being told why they should teach poetry.

However, there is a great deal of training involved in delivering the National Literacy Strategy as well as some difficult and complex terms used in the training. Will general teachers feel confident enough in delivering this highly structured strategy? This Strategy is being introduced very quickly. Training packages have arrived at every school with the instructions as to how they are to be delivered . This involves several training days and/or sessions. How competent will the teachers be who have to deliver these packages ? How will teachers receive the training ? The pilot studies were indeed such a success that the Literacy Hour is being implemented one year earlier than originally planned because it was deemed as such a huge success. Are schools and teachers ready to deliver it ? From the findings of this research there are implications that more thought may be needed on the concept of progression within the understanding and the development of poetry.

Suggestions for further research

Whilst this project is now completed the author/ researcher is still interested in the findings and could suggest several areas that may be investigated in the future with regards to the teaching of poetry to young children.

1.   In this project, whilst definitions of a poem were collected from all the pupils in the primary school only the definitions of the younger children were analysed. At a later date it may be possible to analyse the definitions of the older children , especially to look at the concept of progression that may exist . Are there stages of progression in poetry ? It is already apparent that the younger a child, the more precise their definition is. The younger children's definitions mainly include the words rhyme and song. As the children get older the definitions appear to change in a series of stages. Is this the case for most children ? As already mentioned the Literacy Strategy does not include a concept of progression with regards to poetry. Is this important ?

2.   With the implementation of the Literacy Strategy will teachers become more confident in teaching poetry to young children ? Whilst they are being told about the importance of rhyme and reading, will they teach more poetry and what poetry will they choose ?

In conclusion it would appear that young children enjoy poetry and are able to display a "knowledge" of poetry. From an early age they are aware of the features of poetry and are able to express some of these features.   Recent research and

developments are acknowledging the importance of poetry and especially the importance of the ability to rhyme to help young children with their reading. However, when the children's responses to poetry were compared to the teachers it became obvious that whilst the young children really enjoyed poetry and had an enthusiasm for it, this was not apparent with the teachers. The teachers were much more apprehensive about the teaching of poetry to young children. With the training that is to be given with regards to the Literacy Hour teachers are being given the opportunity to learn more about the teaching of poetry for themselves. Teachers now <u>have</u> to teach poetry.

As this research has highlighted young children enjoy poetry and have an enthusiasm for it. Will the introduction of the Literacy Strategy be able to sustain this enthusiasm they progress through school ?

Appendix 1

Teacher's Interview Schedule

Teaching Experience.

1. What is special about poetic form ?

2. Why is poetry important ?

3. Why do you teach / share poetry with children ?

4. How do you choose poetry for children ?

5. How do you introduce poetry to children ?

6. How do you help children to respond to poetry ?

7. How do you encourage children to read / experience poetry ?

8. How do you encourage children to write poetry ?

9. How do you plan for poetic experience ?

10. What aspects of poetic form do children enjoy ?

11. What kinds of poems are accessible to children ?

12. What kind of training have you had about teaching poetry ?

13. What are the problems of teaching poetry to young children ?

Appendix 2

The poems that I have chosen are -

1. Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
   Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
   All the King's horses
   and all the King's men.
   Trod on him.

                                        Michael Rosen

2. Calico Ban
   The little mouse ran
   To be ready for tea,
   Flippity flup
   They drank it all up
   And danced in the cup-
   But they never came back to me !
   They never came back-
   They never came back -
   They never came back to me !

                                        Edward Lear

3. All around the house is the jet black night
   It stares through the window pane
   It crawls in the corner, hiding from the light,
   And it moves with a moving flame.

   Now my little heart goes a beating like a drum,
   With the breath of the Bogie in my hair;
   And all around the candle the crooked shadows come
   And go marching up the stair.

                                        Robert Louis Stevenson

4. Deep down upon his sandy bed
   the monster turns his slimy head,
   grinned and licked his salty lips
   and ate another bag of ships .

                                        Charles Thompson

5. The man from the land of Fandango
   Is coming to pay you a call,
   With his tri - colour jacket and polka dot tie
   And his calico trousers as blue as the sky
   And his hat with a tassel and all
   And he bingles and bangles and bounces,
   He's a bird ! he's a bell ! he's a ball !
   The man from the land of Fandango
   Is coming to pay you a call.

                                        Margaret Mahy

Appendix 3

The Year 2 children entered the room to find me sitting at a table. There were four sheets of paper on the table with the poems type written on to them. The children came and sat at the table with me. The children had been sent to work with me by their teacher. They had been asked if they wanted to work with me. As the children sat down, they each picked up the papers and started looking at them.

J.Y. " Hello. Will you come and help me ? I've got some things written down here and I want to use one in an assembly. I don't know which one. I wondered if you would help me ?"
" If I read them to you will you tell me which one you like ? "

Read 1

At the end child 1 laughed.

Jy. " That's number one, now I'll read number two. "

Read 2.

Giggles are made at the end.

Read 3.

The children are looking at each other and are making expressions.

Jy. " That one was a little different, Wasn't it ? "

Read 4.

2. " Chips ! " Giggles." It should have said chips.
Jy. " It was ships instead of chips.

Read 5.

1." I like that one." Points to Calico Ban.

Jy. " You like that one, Calico Ban ? "

The children looked at each other for reassurance.

3. " I like the monster one."

4. " So do I. "

Jy. " Which one is the monster one ? "

Points to number four.

Jy. " Oh, that one, Deep down... "

3. " Yeah, I like that one . "

Jy. " Why do you like that one ?"

3. " It's like ... instead of chips it says ships. I think it's funny. "

Jy. " Why do you like the Calico Ban one ? "

1. " Because it's like ..rhyming words. "

3. " It's like Flippity flop. "

All giggle.

Jy. It is , isn't it.

Reread Calico Ban.

3. " They can't dance in the cup. "

Jy. " Why ? "

3. " Because the cups are too little for the mice to get in. "

Giggles.

Jy. " Are they ? They could be, couldn't they ? 2

3. " But they're only that big. "

Shows me with his hands how big he thinks the cups are.

2. " They're only little. "

Shows me how big she thinks the cups are.

Jy. " It depends how big the mice are. "

3. " Well Carls got a shed and he's got mice under there. I've seen them. He's got a snake as well. "

Ugh. Gross.

2. " I don't want to hear about them. "

Jy. " Which one do you like ? " Asking child 4.

4. " I like the monster one. All around the house... "

Jy. " Let's all say. All around the house. "

We all read the first part.

3. " I don't think corners should be there."

Jy. " You don't think corner should be there ? Why ? "

3. " It's too long for the word. "

Jy. " It crawls in the corner. "

3. " It's too long. 2

2. " I don't think it's too long. "

Jy. " You don't. What about the next bit ? Now......"

Child 3 laughs at the word Bogie.

" Is that, that one...."

Jy. " Which one do you like best ? "

" Number 4. "

" So do I . "

" I like ,Deep down... "

" I like that one. "

Jy. " Why ? "

" Because it's funny. "

Jy. " Is there one that you didn't like at all ? "

" No. "

" No. "

Jy. " You didn't like the man from the land of Fandango ? "

The child pointed to the poem .

3. " Oh, I do. He's a bird, he's a bell, he's a ball. It's quite funny that.

Jy. " You think it's quite funny ? "

3. " The man from the land of Fandango. "

giggles.

Reread 5.

"..to pay you a call. "

" Pay. Call . "

" What does pay you a call mean ? "

Jy. " It is unusual isn't it ? "

4. " It's like a visit . "

Jy. " It's paying a visit. He's paying you a visit . "

3. " Oh no, he might come to me. "

Laughter.

Jy. " What about the first one ? "

2. " I like that one. "

Rereads 1.

" It sounds like that funny one where you have scrambled eggs again. "

Jy. " Oh, yes. You've heard that ? "

3. " Humpty......
.........all over again. "

Laughter.

Jy. " You want to have something else, don't you ? "

" Trod on him. "

" All over again. "

Jy. " Don't you think trod on him is finished ? "

" No. "

" I do. "

" I think we should use scrambled eggs again. "

Jy. " And all the King's men had scrambled eggs again. "

3." Humpty....
  All the King's horses ,
  And all the Kings men,
  Trod on him and had scrambled eggs again. "

Jy. " You're changing that one, aren't you ? "

4. Reads " Humpty ....
  Trod on him , all over again. "

Jy. " That has changed a bit , hasn't it ? What have you done to it ? "

" They've made it longer. "

Jy. " You've made it rhyme. "

1. " Humpty....
  and had scrambled egg again. "

Jy. " What are these called ? "

Points to the sheet in front of them.

" Poems. "

Jy. " How can you tell ? "

" Because they rhyme. "

Jy." That one doesn't."

" I like the monster one . "

Jy. " So they all rhyme, that's how we know ? "

" It's like a song. "

Jy. " What about this one ? "

Reread 5.

Jy. " Where is the rhyme there ? "

" Sky and .... "

" tie. "

" There isn't one. "

" Fandango. "

Jy. " Fandango and call , they don't rhyme do they ? "

" No. "

" No. "

Jy. " Right. So you've all agreed on number four ? Is that what you're saying? . If you were going to say this in an assembly, you four would read this one out ? "
I'm just trying to find out what sort of poems you like. "

All read the poem together.

Jy. " Deep down upon his sandy bed.. "

" What does that mean ? "

" He's got a sandy bed. "

" He's got a bed with sand on it and he's going to lay down. "

Jy. " And where is the bed ? "

" In the sand. "

" No it isn't. It's in the sea. "

" It's at the seaside. "

Reread Deep down...

" It's like down on the ground. "

Jy. " The monster turned his slimy head. What do you imagine there. ? "

Ughhhh.

Jy. "...Salty lips. "

3. " It's a sea monster. "

Jy. " So it's a sea monster ? "

" With big slimy lips. "

" He's a sea monster and he ate some ships. "

Jy. " Big or small ? "

" Big. "

3. " He must be big if he eats some ships. "

" But he won't be able to fit on his bed. "

" He has to be big if he has to eat the ships. "

Jy. " Well thank you very much for working with me to help me to choose a poem. "

I had to stop at this point as children from my own class were due to return to the classroom.

Tape transcript 2.

The Year 2 children entered the classroom . Break had just finished, and the children had been playing outside. The children's teachers had asked for children who wanted to work with me. Each teacher chose two children.

JY " Hello , come and get a chair and come and sit with me."

"I can't read this."

JY " I know some of you can't read very well, I'm going to read you these. Can you see there are five?"

" I can read this."

" They're poems ."

Jy " How do you know they're poems ? "

" It rhymes."

" It say's poems at the top. The 5 poems I have chosen are."

Jy " Right. What I want you to do is choose a favourite between you."

Read 1, and the children join in with me.

" Again. " (He adds extra to the line)

Jy " You want to put "again" on the end. Why ?"

(no answer) read 2

Children join again.

Read 3

Read 4

" Chips !"

" Chips !" and "Chips ! " (both together)

Read 5

(Head teacher enters)

Read rest of 5

Jy " Which one do you like best? " " Thomas? " (1)

1." Humpty Dumpty."

2. " He gets trod on."

Jy. " Because he gets trod on ? Is that why you like it ? Which one do you like ? "

3. " Humpty Dumpty."

Jy " You like that one? "

2. " Because he gets trod on again."

Jy. " Shall we say that one again ?"

(All read)
All the children say "again " at the end.

Jy " Which one is your favourite (4) ?

4." No. 4 "

Jy Read 4 again.

Two children say "chips "at the end, "correcting" me

Jy " Which is your favourite one?"

" The man from the land of Fandango."

Read 5

Jy " Look at no. 4. Why do you like that one ? What's it about? "

2." It's about ships."

3." And monsters."

Reread 5

2." It's about the sea, because the only slimy thing is like .. seaweed."

Jy " That's right. And grinned ......"

1. " The salt is in the sea."

2. " And I know, it's sand and salty."

3. "It's a sea monster."

Jy " You think it's a sea monster ? Where does the sea monster live ?"

3." At Redcar"

2." In a pond ...where the Loch Ness Monster lives."

Jy " What about... and he ate another bag of ships."

1. " Chips."

2. " It's about the sea."

3. " It's a sea monster."

4. " It's at the seaside."

Jy. " It's about a sea monster at the seaside ?"

Jy. " Is it a big or a small monster ?"

All. " Big."

Jy. " What makes you think it's big ?"

3. " Because he wants to eat big ships."

Read 1

All. "Again." at the end.

Jy. " Why do you want to put again on the end ?"

1. " Because it rhymes."

Jy. " To make it rhyme ? What does again rhyme with ?"

All read the poem again to find the rhyme. (can't tell me which word it rhymes with.)
(All say again at the end.)

2. " You have to say that to make it rhyme."

(can't say)

Jy What about No.3 ?

Reread 3

Jy " What do you think that one is about ? "

" Oh Yeah, The window pane one..."

" You know the old castle like.. the one with old cracked window panes..."

Jy." Right..."

Jy. " It crawls around .."

Children join in rereading the rest of the poem.

Jy. " What do you think that this is about ?"

2 ." It's about the night time."

Jy. " Listen to this...Now my little heart goes beating like a drum..."

2. " It goes like, Bang , Bang, like a thumping .."

" It's about your body I think..."

Bangs on the table.

" My brother has got a scab on his rib there "

Points to where his ribs are.

" Well I've had both my ribs cut in one day. "

Jy. " Oh dear..."

Finish reading the end of the poem.

Children join and read with me.

Jy. " It reminds you of the night time does it ?"

" Yes "

" Yes and it reminds me of Humpty Dumpty. "

Jy. " It reminds you of Humpty Dumpty ? Why ?"

" Because it reminds me of this one. Humpty Dumpty...."

1. " Oh do that one about the banana. Tell them the one about them eating bananas ."

2. " It's rude though. "

1." He puts it down his underwear. "

Jy. " Try it then. "

1." Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall,
    Humpty Dumpty had a great fall,
    All the King's horses and all the King's men,
    Had scrambled egg again.

Jy. " So far the choice is between 5 and 1. Which one do
you like ?"

" Humpty Dumpty ! "

3. " I like number four."

Jy." Why don't you like Humpty Dumpty ?"

Jy. " Why do you like number four better ? "

3. " I like it because of the sea monster on his bed . "

Jy. " You like it because of the sea monster . "

Jy. " Let's all say the sea monster one to hear what it sounds like. "

" Yes. "

Jy. " You said chips again instead of ships. "

Jy. " So. Thomas(1) and Joseph (2).You like Humpty Dumpty and Nichola and Zoe
you like number four ?"

Jy. " Do any of you like Calico Ban ?"

Read Calico Ban.

Children again joined in reading.

Jy. " What does that one remind you of ? "

2. " Thomas's rat. "

1. " My rat's. "

" He's got one called Wednesday, and I've got another one. "

" I know . "

3." They're not mice!"

2. " I've got mice, they're in my garden. When I leave crumpet's out, the round ones,
they start to nibble it   . We've got a brown one and a grey one. They're called
Flotto and Moddo, like the biker mice."

1. " I doubt they're like pets ? They're like wild, aren't they ?"

4. " My Auntie has got mouse and they are quite tame."

Jy. " Do you think those mice danced in a cup ? "

" No. "(All together .)

1. " Our rat has been in a cup. "

Jy. " Has your rat danced in a cup or has it been in a
cup . "

Jy." Wellthank you all very much for helping me. There are two of you who like 1 and
two of you who like 4."

The session had to end rather abruptly because my own class were beginning to return
to the classroom.

Appendix 4

1. James (5)

    A poem rhymes.

2. Rachel (5)

    A poem rhymes. It has words that match.

3. Peter (5)

It's when you sing songs and match them to books.

4. Lewis (5)

A poem rhymes.

5. Stephanie (5)

Poems are long and some don't rhyme.

6. Joshua (5)

Poems are short.

7. Christopher (5)

Some poems are older and some are from now.

8. Lewis (5)

Poems are slow or quick.

9. Jonathan (5)

Poems are small.

10. Kirsty (6)

Poems are short.

11. Amy (6)

A poem rhymes.

12. Cheryl   (6)

A poem rhymes.

13. David (6)

A poem rhymes   . It is different.
(quoted Humpty Dumpty......
had scrambled eggs again.)

14. Adam   (6)

Some poems rhyme and some don't.
A rhyme is something that sounds the same.

15. Christopher (6)

A poem rhymes.

16. Paul (6)

A poem rhymes.
Let me see
you could be
a dragon
in a wagon.

17. Stephen (6)

A poem rhymes.

18. Aminah (6)

A poem rhymes.

19. Kelly (6)

Poems are short.
" a little boy rolled out of bed and bumped his head."

20. Helen (6)

A poem doesn't begin, Once upon a time.

21. John (7)

A poem is shorter.

22. Gemma (7)

A poem rhymes. It sounds funny.

23. Dominic (7)

A poem rhymes. It has a tune.

24. Christopher (7)

A poem rhymes.

25. Matthew (7)

A poem rhymes.

26. Cheryl (7)

A poem rhymes.

27. Paul (7)

A poem rhymes.

Roses are red spiders are black.
Don't look now but there's one on your back.

28. Kirsty (7)

A poem rhymes.

29. Joanna (7)

A poem rhymes.
"Humpty.......Trod on him.

30. Nicola (7)

A poem rhymes.
" I have a hair and it is made out of pear.

31. Laura (7)

A poem rhymes.

32. Michael (7)

A poem rhymes.

33. Carla (7)

" I have a head and it's made out of bread."
A poem has words that sound the same.

34. Melissa (7)

A poem rhymes. Poems are shorter than stories.

" A little dog rolled out of bed and bumped it's head

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