The Poetry Box: A Student Centered Constructivist Approach to Poetry Lessons in Secondary Education

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Abstract

Poetry is often compared to paintings because of its abstract and symbolic nature. Poetry lessons, therefore, tend to be elusive and teacher oriented. As the teacher is expected to present most information about poetry to the students in this conventional teaching style, many problems have been observed. Teachers and students have reported that they were not confident about their preparedness of teaching or studying poetry due to the pressures of having comprehensive knowledge of difficult poems; student engagement level was low; and the education did not lead to authentic learning. In order to counteract this, this research investigated the impact of implementing a constructivist teaching method called the Poetry Box on those three problem areas. This was because constructivist teaching has been known to increase students' role as proactive participants in the learning process and create less stressful lessons. In four ELA/ESL classes in a high school, the participants of the research used the method and reported the implications of the lessons regarding self efficacy, student engagement level, and authentic learning experience. The result of this study indicated that students gained more confidence regardless of their levels of English, began to enjoy writing and reading poems, and developed their English language skills when poetic freedom and creativity were emphasized pedagogically based on constructivism. As students became more active, teachers were less pressured to gain exclusive knowledge of poetry and focused more on their role as facilitators of education, which improved their self efficacy.

Keywords: Poetry Pedagogy, Constructivist Teaching Method, Self Efficacy, Student Engagement, Commentary Workshop, Poetry Box

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Introduction

The Freedom and Creativity of Poetry

Poetry is one of the oldest forms of literature that has never ceased to exist in all cultures. Poetic elements and styles can be found everywhere and have steadily been relevant in songs, speeches, and commercials, not to mention in literature. Contemporary singers romantically serenade their desires for love and kisses today the way Catullus demanded his beloved Lesbia "a thousand kisses" in his poem more than two thousand years ago. Inspiring and touching poems are read during wedding ceremonies and presidential inaugurations. States elect their poets laureate, and a great poet may even receive a Nobel prize today.

Although there are many reasons for its longevity, the success of poetry owes a great deal to its flexibility that allows the poet and the audience to freely engage in their creativity and emotions that are often obscured in everyday conversations. Eliade (1964) argued that "pre-ecstatic euphoria" and "an act of perfect spiritual freedom" through "the creation of a personal universe of a completely closed world" may be the origin of poetry (50). In the same vein, Allen Ginsberg mentioned that "poetry is not an expression of the party line. It's that time of night, lying in bed, thinking what you really think, making the private world public, that's what the poet does" (Columbia University, 2004). Salvatore Quasimodo also said, "poetry ... is the revelation of a feeling that the poet believes to be interior and personal which the reader recognizes as his own" (Quasimodo, 1960, 47). Time and time again, people have acknowledged the close relationship between poetic creativity and liberating subconscious level introspection of human emotions that connect all people.

Indeed, poetic creativity seems to come from spiritual freedom when reading the works of poets whose imaginations do not conform to the objective physical reality completely. Emily Dickinson, for example, wrote "I felt a funeral in my brain." This is one of shocking yet compelling figurative images she created in many of her poems through the use of unusual verbs. Ordinarily, people may "see" or "attend" a funeral, but here Dickinson selected "felt" to create her own emotional surrealist language to convey her inner experience without worrying about the accuracy of the information. The syntax of her poem also doesn't agree with the convention either as it lacks the punctuation, letting her express complicated feelings without grammatical restrictions.

The Benefits of Poetry Education in Secondary School

Because of this free association-like self emotional disclosure aspect, poetry has been a significant element of many literature curricula around the world. Especially in secondary school, poetry is written and read to help students understand themselves and their surroundings through development of their interpretations and individual voices (Sigvardsson, 2019). Collie and Slater (1987) emphasize how poetry can teach students the essence of humanity; "... they often explore themes of universal concern and embody life experiences, observations and the feelings evoked by them" (226). And Richard Beach et al. (2016) point out the possibility of using poetry as a tool to create a more inclusive learning environment; "..., teachers can use literature as a means of welcoming students' identities and interests into the classroom. This is especially true of poetry" (160). However, poetry is also found to be one of the least

favorite topics to teach amongst literature teachers because of the exclusivity of personal emotions and language in poetry that make it abstract and difficult to understand (Vala et al., 2012). In fact, research has found that many secondary school teachers are inexperienced with poetry lessons and feel uncertain about how to engage students with poems (Benton, 2000; Dymoke, Lambirth, & Wilson, 2013; Ofsted, 2007; Wolf, 2002). The low self efficacy of teachers result in less engagement of the students. For example, discussing the consequences of poetry lessons given by unconfident teachers, Showalter (2006) states that "Teachers lament that students find it difficult and intimidating" (62).

The Problems

Based on the findings from the present literature, the most prominent problems in traditional poetry lessons seem to be classified into three categories: low level of the self efficacy of teachers and students, low level of student engagement, and the lack of authentic learning experience. That is, as teachers and students get intimidated by and feel unconfident about poetry lessons, students do not actively participate in learning, and the lessons become superficial rather than experiencing poetry authentically.

Main problems	Specific causes
Low self efficacy of teachers and students	First, as poetry was considered high culture for elite readers in the past, readers assume that they need to understand poems in the strict sense of the word even though the language and the cultural context may change, leaving a narrow room for their own imaginative interpretation (Vala et al., 2012). Second, students may not be familiar with the innate ambiguity of poetry as they are trained to find objective facts, and it is rare to grapple with complex feelings verbally in memorization oriented school lessons. That is, "the tension between what a poet wants to express by his words and what the words are able to evoke" can deter students from experiencing poetry proactively (Režná, 2007 as cited in Vala et al., 2012).
Low level of student engagement	This seems to be related to the teaching method. First, students may find it difficult and stressful to learn poetry using the pedagogies and curricula that focus on efferent reading to get specific information from individual lines of poems rather than facilitating aesthetic reading opportunities (Fleming & Mills, 1992). Also, a curriculum that goes over the poems that do not correspond to the age and culture of the students in the class might make students perceive poetry lessons as unpleasant activities and this emotional response may last throughout their academic years and beyond (Vala et al., 2012).
Lack of authentic learning	The lack of authentic learning experiences in poetry classes seems to be derived from the combination of the low self efficacy of the

	teachers and pedagogical choices. That is, teachers may not be prepared to teach poetry as there are so many poems to examine, and they cannot memorize all facts and background knowledge about those poems. Consequently, their unconfidence might lead them to employ an insensitive and superficial approach to poetry during their lessons and ignore students' unorthodox or creative views on poems even though "a teacher should be cautious and try not to disrupt the initial impact of the poem on the students, not to impose their opinion on the students and not to deprive the poem of its liveliness" (ZeleĖáková, 2011 as cited in Vala et al., 2012). This disconnectedness between the student's experience and teacher-oriented lesson objectives is likely to motivate students to take the lesson halfheartedly.

Table 1. Main Problems in Traditional Poetry Lessons and The Causes

The heart of the issue is the assumption that there is only one particular way to interpret a poem. Researchers have pointed out that, in traditional classes, when the teacher asks questions about poetry, "... there is often a feeling on the part of the students that the teacher is slowly but surely edging them to particular answers that he or she has in mind" (Collie & Slater, 1987, 8) and treats the students as if they were"... empty vessels dutifully waiting to be filled up... " (Collie & Slater, 1987, 5). Even when the lesson is effective, the whole process of learning might be dominated by the teacher alone as "some teachers have the confidence and charisma to use the classroom as the venue for a one-man or one-woman show" rather than collaborating with the students (Showalter, 2006, 32). Teaching methods of poetry based on this kind of attitude may rob students of the joy and freedom of poetry and do not allow students to explore poetry for their emotional development. In addition to that, a test focused school curriculum may further cause both the teacher and student to bypass authentic learning opportunities although there is not enough evidence that indicates the efficacy of test-oriented curriculum such as Common Core (An & Cordona-Maguigad, 2019). This situation raises the question about the possibility of creating a more well-balanced curriculum, which has culminated in a quite robust body of literature on poetry pedagogy.

Alternative Poetry Teaching Methods

Linking various theories to classroom practice, researchers and teaching practitioners developed new teaching methods during the twentieth century (Hanauer, 2001). Since the 1970s, the theoretical mainstream has focused on the readers' responses while the emphasis on the teaching of form decreased (Dressman & Faust, 2009).

This type of alternative poetry pedagogy highlights the value of student engagement. For example, Harmer (2001) argues that "Teenagers, if they are engaged, have a great capacity to learn, a great potential for creativity, and a passionate commitment to things which interest them" (39). Showalter (2006) also asserts that "teaching poetry offers the literature instructor some of the most fundamental, immediate, active, even physical ways to engage students in learning" (62). From this perspective, poetry lessons can be enhanced when students can develop their real interest in poetry and become serious about writing and reading poetry. Engaging lessons would develop

"…toward an active, collaborative learning that takes place as the student confronts the text directly" (Showalter, 2006, 35).

Another type of alternative poetry pedagogy stresses the importance of teaching critical theories like Marxism or feminism. For example, Appleman argues that critical theory "provides lenses designed to bring out what is already there but what we often miss with unaided vision" (Appleman 2000, xvi) such as the ideological undertone or biases imbued in poems. Because it is important for the students to enrich their ability to "read and interpret not only literary texts but their lives," the teacher should not just give information about certain poems but also instill the skills in the students with which they can critically and independently analyze poetry (Appleman 2000, 2).

But none of those methods became influential and reliable enough to replace the traditional teaching methods in practice. Also, there is a lack of empirical studies on poetry pedagogy (Dymoke et al., 2013), and only a dearth of research specifically focused on teaching poetry in secondary education (Peskin, 2007). More importantly, there hasn't been any pedagogy that addresses the specific problems of poetry education in secondary schools, and most teachers are not sure about the objectives of instructional design models that come with each pedagogical strategy.

The Purpose of the Poetry Box

Drawing on the diverse constructivist approaches to poetry education, the Poetry Box is designed to directly address the aforementioned five causes of the three main problems with poetry lessons without disrupting the mainstream secondary school ELA curriculum based on the Common Core. To be specific, the method is to achieve the following specific objectives through various activities in order to obtain the three ideal results.

The ideal results	Specific actionable objectives
1. Increase self efficacy of the teacher & the student	A. Helping students learn poetry using their own imaginative interpretations B. Familiarizing students with the innate ambiguity of poetry
2. Increase the level of student engagement	A. Offering students aesthetic as well as efferent reading opportunities B. Selecting poems that correspond to the age and culture of the students
3. Create authentic learning opportunities	A. Trying not to disrupt the initial impact of the poem on the students

Table 2. Objectives to Address the Problems of Traditional Poetry Lessons

Theoretical Framework

To increase self efficacy of the teacher and the student, boost the level of student engagement, and create authentic learning opportunities, the Poetry Box method mostly depends on constructivism theoretically. This is because constructivist teaching has been known to increase students' role as proactive participants in the learning process and create less stressful lessons.

Constructivism theory focuses on active learning through the learner's experiences and cultural factors. Hence, learners' different interpretations and ideas should be shared with their learning community rather than getting ignored from a constructivist point of view (Oakes et al., 2018). John Dewey, the philosophical founder of constructivism, underscored the importance of experiential learning; "We get so thoroughly used to a kind of pseudo-idea, a half perception, that we are not aware how half-dead our mental action is, and how much keener and more extensive our observations and ideas would be if we formed them under conditions of a vital experience which required us to use judgement: to hunt for the connections of the thing dealt with" (Dewey, 1916, 156). This is clearly aligned with the direction of helping students learn poetry using their own imaginative interpretations and familiarizing students with the innate ambiguity of poetry as Dewey would consider teacher-oriented lessons without the learner's imagination and experience to be "a half perception."

Dewey's idea about experiential learning is holistic and allows the students to be adaptive, flexible, and self-aware learners. It nurtures the whole learner and not just the learner in the intellectual environment. It is a student-centered collaborative approach that allows them to learn to think profoundly about the world, become compassionate global citizens, discover real-world situations and actions that could bring positive change. Most of all, it allows students to think about "why." Why is this content important to my life? What can it teach me and how would this be connected to my life? (Charlton, 2012). Thus, Dewey would also support selecting poems that correspond to the age and culture of the students since that is the best way to connect learning to real life.

Unlike behaviorism which focuses on the passivity of the learners as they learn through positive and negative reinforcement, constructivism allows the students to think of multiple interpretations without fear of receiving the negative feedback, which leads to a more student-centered approach to learning. In this approach, teachers are still the authority figures, but they would act more as the facilitator rather than someone who provides information to the students. Naturally, they would try not to disrupt the initial impact of the poem on the students. Students would generally work in groups and become active participants (Oakes et al., 2018). The teachers would be able to provide guiding questions that could facilitate the discussions so that they are productive. This means that students could have ample time to explore aesthetic as well as efferent reading opportunities while learning poetry depending on their own desires.

This remarkable synchronization between the actionable objectives to resolve the issues with traditional poetry education and the constructivist approach to teaching and learning shows positive implications of implementing constructivist instructional

strategies. But what are the actual classroom activities that can be done in a poetry class? What would John Dewey do to teach poetry?

Constructivist Poetry Activities

First, John Dewey would have encouraged students to experience poetry as poets and readers. He said, "when we experience something we act upon it, we do something with it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences. We do something to the thing and then it does something to us in return" (Dewey, 1916). Therefore, he would not have appreciated the teacher explaining everything about poems to the students before they read them. He would have warned the students not to read any explanation or analysis about the poems and asked them to read the poems and struggle to figure out what poetry does to them in return. To fully explore the creative freedom of poetry, he would have recommended the students to write their own poems, thus being faithful to his philosophy of learning-by-doing.

Then, Jean Piaget (1952) would have echoed how crucial active learning is while simultaneously suggesting that the students might be able to utilize cognitive learning strategies such as schema. Piaget (1952) defined a schema as: "a cohesive, repeatable action sequence possessing component actions that are tightly interconnected and governed by a core meaning"(7). He would have considered the different stages of cognitive development of the students depending on their age and provided the right environment to interact with the poems. For example, he would have differentiated the learning environment for 11 years olds and 12 years olds because they belong to different stages of cognitive development (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). Because 11 years olds may not understand abstract concepts, he might have asked the students to utilize drawings and pictures to understand poetry.

Vygotsky (1999) would have, also, joined the discussion by emphasizing the role of sociocultural interactions and language in learning. He perceived the social environment within which the learners interact with persons as a vital factor for learning especially for children. He realized that to enhance social connection for better learning, speech skills have the utmost importance; "... the role of speech, ..., is crucial for understanding not only the structure of behavior, but also its genesis: speech stands at the very beginning of development and is its most important and decisive factor" (20). He would have said that by effectively communicating with "more knowledgeable others," the students would learn about difficult concepts of poetry that they might not understand otherwise. Hence, he would have preferred poetry activities that promote cooperative learning and language development such as group discussions and presentations that offer scaffolding with a teacher working as a facilitator.

Yet, these activities might be considered to be too general and not specific enough to help design individual poetry lessons. Ultimately, students have to read and analyze various poems to learn more about the elements of poetry and even theories. How can it be done more efficiently without too much pressure and control of the teacher while respecting constructivism? Rosenblatt's transactional reading theory may offer an answer. According to the theory, the readers are just as important to the text as the poet, and there is an active process in creating meaning. Rosenblatt (1970:35) mentions that "the same text will have a very different meaning and value to us at

different times or under different circumstances" (as cited in Naylor & Wood, 2012, 16). Reading, accordingly, becomes a two-way process since the poem serves as a stimulus that elicits memories (understanding the poet's world) and personal associations (connecting the reader's mind to the poet's world) (Naylor & Wood, 2012).

In other words, both reading and writing poetry should involve the same amount of free and active introspective exploration. Then, it is conceivable to develop writing and reading skills together interactively creating a cycle of learning. Suppose that the class has to read well-written but difficult poems after writing their own poems about similar topics or styles. Since they have gained experience of writing their own poems, they would be able to relate better to the poet. They would then in turn use those poems as their inspiration and revise some of the poems that they have written. This would greatly strengthen the experiential connection between the students, the poet, and poetry. Moreover, because the students would have used the literary and linguistic devices in writing, they would be better able to remember and identify them in reading. As difficult elements of poetry feel less foreign to them, the students would gain confidence and motivation to learn more about poetry.

	Concrete Experience (feeling what poetry does)		
Active Experimentation (writing & reading poetry)	Students in groups Teacher as a facilitator		**Reflective Observation** (discussion & review)
	Abstract Conceptualization (commentary writing & presentation)		

Table 3. Poetry Learning Cycle Inspired by David Kolb's Experiential Learning Model

The point is that the student has to be the center of reading and writing poetry. Blau (2003) states that "as long as teachers are teaching, students are not going to learn, because the kind of experience teachers have that enables them to learn what they have to teach is the experience that students need to have, if they are to be the ones who learn" (2-3). Thus, the teacher should allow the students to experience learning for themselves instead of just witnessing and recording the teacher's learning. Still, it is important for the students to critically analyze and argue about the poems they read. In other words, they have to be assessed and improved.

For the purpose of assessment and more critical engagement with poetry, Blau proposes utilizing commentary workshops instead of requiring students to write formal essays or take multiple choice tests. By writing and sharing simple and self-directed commentaries about poetry they read, the students could reflect on a line or stanza of the poem freely and profoundly without having to be concerned about the form of their essays. Through this process, most students would be able to develop

meaning or, at least, an interesting perspective that may go beyond the basic ideas of the poetry (Blau, 2003).

Also, they would be able to discuss and collaborate with their partners in order to try to understand complicated texts. Since the reader finds a connection or relationship to the text and sometimes each reader's interpretation could vary, the students would be able to understand that there may be more than one interpretation of a poem that could be justified, enriching their understanding of poetry (Blau, 2003). In commentary workshops, students would work in groups which create a social setting that enhances learning. According to Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), activities and social groups that present problems that could challenge students but do not go beyond their ZPD with proper scaffolding are highly effective in learning (Oakes et al., 2018). Therefore, in a commentary workshop setting, students may work together and learn without feeling intimidated by concepts, theories, and ideas that are beyond their understanding.

Based on the above theories and ideas as foundation, Aaron created the Poetry Box method and subsequently it has been put into practice in real high school ELA lessons by teachers Jamie and Silvia.

The Poetry Box Method

To narrow the gap between the imagination of the poet and that of the reader (the student), there has to be a process of communal experience between the poet and the student. That is, if the student has experienced what the poet is discussing in the poem, the student is likely to understand it better and enjoy it more. The Poetry Box starts with this experiential foundation by positioning the student as a poet who has to write a poem about a specific topic. Whereas conventional classes make students approach poems as readers, the Poetry Box sees the student as a participant of an original poetic experience.

It is important that the teacher facilitates the creative writing process as not all students are skilled in poetry. Usually, students do not know what to write and how to write at this stage. That is why an empty box is given to the student to fill out and develop a poem using the resources and inspiration provided. The student is asked to fill the box with sensory stimuli, such as music, art, objects, pictures, videos, sentences, events, etc. For example, the teacher may ask the student to choose any object in and around the classroom. It may be a pencil or a framed picture. Anything the student chooses can be the subject of the student's poem.

Then, the student needs to see, think, and wonder (Project Zero Harvard School of Education, 2006) about the chosen object instead of waiting for serendipitous inspiration from mythical muses. The student's sensory experience with a tangible object or topic may not be enough to induce an unconscious burst of creativity in his or her hidden literary genius, but it gives ample materials for the student to develop personal connection to it and describe in the poetry box. Simply put, the student would need to describe anything about the object based on his or her observations. Suppose the student chose to write about a desk. Then, the student can write about how big it is and how it feels subjectively. Naturally, the student's subjective

perspective would be more valued than objective facts, and the personal narrative would develop into a poetic point of view.

Some may emphasize the benefit of the desk as it sets up an organized and optimized workstation while others might complain about how boring it can be to sit at the desk and study too long. Most students can fill out the poetry box with a clear attitude, topic, and narrative at this subjective descriptive stage. But the draft may not be considered to be poetic yet due to the absence of figurative language and other poetic devices. That requires the student to consider what can be useful for his or her own draft to become a poem while revising it and reading exemplary poems. Reading well written or canonic poems aloud several times and discussing them with other students in a group engenders deep learning and critical thinking, which is likely to lead to better composition and analytic skills. Even though the skills the student learns from this process is not unlike what a teacher can teach in a conventional lesson, the student may feel more ownership of the knowledge as it is not spoon fed but proactively learned.

Lastly, the student can share the analysis of the sample poem and his or her own poem with other students in a commentary workshop online or in class. By participating in presentations of various poems, creative ideas, and poetic skills, the student may unknowingly prepare for any type of test as well. If it is needed, the teacher might introduce test-taking skills, critical theories, or sample questions and answers at this point. In order to achieve this goal, the teacher might need to remember that different levels of tests should be given to the student.

Four Stages of the Poetry Box Learning Cycle	
Active experimentation (Thinking box)	The student fills out the poetry box with a descriptive draft about a topic.
Concrete experience (Inspiration box)	The student revises the draft while reading inspirational poems.
Reflective observation	The student engages in a discussion about poetry to review. Although it is not a separate activity, it is incorporated in each stage of the poetry box.
Abstract conceptualization (Commentary box)	The student writes analytic commentaries on the poems or other lesson points discussed in the lesson.

Table 4. Four Stages of the Poetry Box Learning Cycle

The Poetry Box in the ELA/ESL Classroom

Participants

Participants in this program were High School students at a mid-size private institution in South Korea. The students were classified into ninth grade ELA and ESL students with limited to no prior exposure to the formal study of poetry in a traditional classroom. The students were divided into cohorts based on their English

language ability between Beginner/Intermediate (20 students) and Intermediate/Advanced (20 students). All participants had experienced English immersive classes at varying levels.

Thinking Box

The first stage of the Poetry Box focused on the ESL/ELA learner's interests in specific topics. While filling out the box with the descriptions of the chosen topic, individual students concentrated on their own subjective sensory and emotional experiences. They began with an ordinary tangible object found in the classroom and then wrote a description about it in small groups or with partners in order to share their unique ideas and feelings about the topic in a collaborative learning environment. Then they had a minute to write descriptive words about the object and five minutes to write a simple rough poem with those words. For example, in one poem about a pillow, a pair of students wrote words and phrases that were warm, comforting, and familiar to them. Through this activity, personal narratives were developed, and several themes about their home and family were discovered naturally. When students read their poems aloud, they noticed that their unpolished poems surprisingly contained literary devices such as repetition, similes, metaphors, alliterations, and rhyme.

Theme	(optional)
Topic	E.g. pillow
Opinion	Rest, home, bed, couch, sleep, comfort, everywhere, colorful
Write a descriptive poem	The pillow, the only reliable resting place Always over the house, in beds and couches on chairs and ground or on my face. It is the object to rely on after a long day of labor. Without it, there is no rest nor comfort to sleep. Without comfort nor rest, it kills the means of sleeping.

Table 5. Thinking Box Student Example

Depending on the class, the teacher needed to scaffold the lesson by asking several questions. There were some students who were not able to generate many words or phrases for their thinking box. For instance, during the class in which classical music was used as the prompt, the teacher asked several questions to elicit words and expressions from the students. While the music was playing, she asked the students: "How do you feel? Is it happy or sad? Where are you? What do you see? Where did the music take you?" These questions helped the students use their senses and imagination so they can write down several words.

Inspiration Box

The Inspiration Box utilized culturally relevant and understandable poems to help the students connect with poetry. The teacher curated a list of inspirational poems to aid students in the acquisition and mastery of poetic skills and devices. By focusing on diverse skills and themes of poetry, the teacher expedited the students' improvement of creative writing skills. Through the experience, students were able to imitate, analyze, and master transferable creative writing skills. It was noticeable that students supported and learned from each other through natural discussions without the teacher having to lecture them. For example, they talked about the use of metaphors, imagery, tone, and repetition while reading model poem "Hammer" by Carl Sandburg. Afterwards, a pair of students used that poem to revise their original poem.

Inspirational Poem	Student's Poem
"Hammer" by Carl Sandburg I have seen The old gods go And the new gods come. Day by day And year by year The idols fall And the idols rise. Today I worship the hammer.	"Desk" by a Student I have glimpsed Peasants leave Slaves arrive Week by week Month by month Speechless leaders fall Smart tyrants rise Yesterday I worshipped the computers

Table 6. Inspiration Box "Hammer" by Carl Sandburg and Sample Student Poem, "Desk"

Commentary Box

The Commentary Box enhanced the students' experience by providing an opportunity to reflect on the lesson's outcomes and helped them improve their skills in articulating their ideas in a social setting without feeling the constraints of grammar or essay structure. As the students gained confidence in writing and analyzing their own poems, the teacher introduced a curated list of poems to be used for the Commentary Box. They brainstormed ideas about the poem's themes or motifs. Furthermore, students were asked to find a word, line, or stanza that intrigued them and write a commentary on it. The class then discussed the commentary and the essence of the poem to gain a more comprehensive understanding of it. Throughout the course, the students wrote longer commentaries about the whole poem and not just about a few words or lines due to their increased confidence in analyzing the poems.

"Fork" by Charles Simic	A student's commentary focused on the mood:
This strange thing must have crept Right out of hell. It resembles a bird's foot Worn around the cannibal's neck. As you hold it in your hand, As you stab with it into a piece of meat, It is possible to imagine the rest of the bird: Its head which like your fist Is large, bald, beakless, and blind.	As I am reading this poem, I noticed that its mood is very dark, negative and even bizarre. The fork is a normal thing that everyone uses. However, in this poem, the writer describes fork as if it were a tool to kill somebody...

Table 7. Commentary Box Student Example

The Results

The ELA/ESL courses that used the Poetry Box method showed recognizable improvement in the three problem areas of traditional poetry lessons.

Problem areas	Implications
Self efficacy of teachers and students	Since the students had the freedom to creatively think about and interpret the poems, they became more confident about reading poetry, and their commentaries became longer, more insightful, and complex. As a result, the teacher did not have to spend a lot of time reading sourced material and literary analysis of the various poems to teach. The teacher served more as a facilitator walking around and assisting the students with their analysis or understanding of certain terminologies. Therefore, there was less time needed to prepare for the course. Furthermore, the teacher was able to use the poetry box to establish a routine for the students. When they arrived into the classroom, the students knew whether they were writing poems or reading and analyzing the poems. This enabled the teacher to better manage the classroom and their self efficacy gradually increased.
Student Engagement	As the students were able to freely connect with the poetry, they became more active and engaged in their learning experience. The students also were allowed to select from a variety of poems to read and analyze, and it made them feel more accountable in their learning. The students enjoyed and retained more information from the lessons that amplified their overall cognitive skills through poetry writing. They became actively involved in their learning and were able to confidently explain a few literary devices such as rhymes, anaphora, spondee, and consonance. It went beyond the basic input process because they experienced the poetry enabling students to think about the poems critically and creatively on their own. For example, when students were introduced to Emily Dickenson's poems, they started to ask each other questions, such as: "Why is the

	capital letter used in the middle of her poem?" "Why did she use a bee to represent fame?" "What is the relationship between industry and funeral?" As they were talking about the tempo and rhythm of her poems, some of the students were tapping their hands, desk, or moving their hands up and down to feel the meter. They would also voluntarily share pictures or drawings related to the topics of the poems to express their ideas and emotions about them more clearly.
Authentic learning experience	The teacher adapted the lesson to expand the students' personal experience in writing poems by utilizing their sensory skills. The class went outside, listened to music, looked at surreal art, and watched short videos. Each new experience corroborated with exposure to new literary elements and opened the students up to a new style of poetry. For instance, on the day they went outside, they read narrative poems, and on the day they listened to music, they read lyrical poems.

The students also began to relate their own poetic experiences with the world around them. For instance, they examined a poem written during the English industrial revolution and related the themes in the poem to their own present experiences or what they have observed. They contemplated the ideas of consumerism, the environment, society, and even their own political ideologies, paving the way for integrated subject learning. Thus, the students became more aware of their own emotions and ideas about various aspects of life; increased their meta-cognitive skills and empathy.

The continuous collaborative learning activities throughout the courses helped them improve their language, communication, and social skills. Particularly, ESL students improved their English skills, and the second language became more personalized. As they thought of different words in pairs, they were able to increase their vocabulary easily. Poetry writing worked as a mirror to the students' identities as it reflected their word choices consciously or unconsciously. They made personal meaning through simple words and explored their own poetic identities in the second language (Hanauer, 2010). This enabled the students to express themselves in English better. Reading poetry also provided the ESL students with authentic learning materials that would help them access the cultural background of the language. They seemed to learn higher-level thinking skills and express their emotions better in the second language through this process (Aladini & Farahbod, 2020). |

Table 8. Problem Areas and Implications of Poetry Box Method

Conclusion

Traditional poetry lessons that do not recognize the importance of the student's role in learning contradicts the true nature of poetic creativity that thrives on imaginative freedom. As a consequence of that, both the teacher and the student have been

suffering from a low level of self efficacy, engagement, and authentic learning. Constructivist approach may be the missing puzzle piece to resolve those issues. Through a constructivist curriculum that taps into the student's gaining authentic experience and making meaning of poems, poetry education can become more accessible and profound. There are various positive effects when this approach is implemented in secondary education. Students may learn to enjoy writing their own poems, reading poetry written by notable poets, and critically analyzing their world as they reflect on their learning. In the end, what was once invisible and confusing may become visible and clear to them while what was once seen as ordinary and empty may become special and personal to the students. Moreover, the belief in the student's capabilities, personal experience, and social learning would lead learners to the real "perfect spiritual freedom" of poetry in the real world.

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