The Poetry of Early Childhood

Nicholas Powell

Laurea University of Applied Sciences

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The thesis aimed to inspire early childhood educators to teach the art of poetry, and thus aid the development of the linguistic intelligence of young children. A project-based thesis was undertaken in conjunction with a working life partner, the International Childcare and Education Centre (ICEC), in Espoo, Finland.

The development task involved the implementation of a poetry programme - *A Month of Poetry* - for preschool aged children (6-year-olds) in Espoo, Finland, and the production of a book of lesson plans and poetry pedagogy for early childcare educators, titled *The Poetic Teacher: a guide to making poems in the early years* (Powell, 2021).

The theoretical background focussed on Howard Gardner's (1983) Theory of Multiple Intelligences, an influential contemporary theory of learning, as well as the theory and methods of guided discovery teaching and learning. Practitioner-action research was the methodology employed in the implementation phase of the project, which aimed to adapt and expand the poetry pedagogy of Kenneth Koch for use in contemporary early years education.

A key finding was that guided discovery teaching methods provided a comprehensive and effective means of poetry teaching in the early years. A key outcome was the instantiation of this finding, in the form of a poetry programme that was replicable and met the needs of curricula. The documentation of the project, in this thesis and the accompanying guide for teachers, represented an attempt to inspire teachers to practice poetry with children in early childhood education settings.

Although research has shown that there are shortcomings in poetry teaching as it is currently practiced and understood, new perspectives were found to be possible.

Keywords: poetry, early childhood, guided discovery learning

Contents

1   Introduction

The starting point for this functional thesis is the current state of poetry teaching in early years education following the implementation of the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2018), which outlines the main areas of children's linguistic development.

Poetry is a language art that, when practiced, has the capacity to strengthen the linguistic intelligence: that set of skills and knowledge that constitute our facility with words and languages. Various other kinds of intelligence have been proposed, undermining the notion of intelligence as a stand-alone category. This has had a profound impact on education, prompting a shift towards inclusive, differentiated teaching methods. Guided discovery learning is one such method: a constructivist, inquiry-based method that prioritises exploration and experimentation, with the teacher providing guidance rather than direct instruction.

The poetry pedagogy of Kenneth Koch is an example of guided discovery learning that pre-dates Howard Gardner's (1983) Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI). There is much to learn from Koch's early experiments with poetry in classrooms. In the present thesis, the contemporary teacher steeped in constructivist ideas will find Koch's pioneering ideas adapted, expanded, and mapped onto contemporary curricular aims.

As an artform, poetry has a unique number of connections to the non-linguistic, transversal competences, and intersects with many learning areas. However, recent research has indicated shortcomings in arts and multi-literacy activities in early childhood education and care (ECEC). As a practicing poet and early childhood educator, this is an area of potential development in which my interests intersect.

The overarching aim of this thesis is to inspire early childhood educators to teach the art of poetry. It will investigate the ways in which poetry supports the development of the linguistic intelligence, how guided discovery teaching methods compliment the use of poetry, and explore the skills and dispositions required of the teacher in guided discovery poetry teaching.

The implementation section describes a poetry project conducted in a pre-primary/preschool classroom, as well as the creation of a poetry pedagogy guidebook for teachers. The project is rare in that it is designed for students in an English language immersion setting.

2   Functional Thesis

The terms *functional thesis* and *project-based thesis* are often used interchangeably to refer to a dissertation and related project that has a developmental target in a real world context.

In this project-based thesis, practitioner action research is the methodology for testing and evaluating poetry pedagogy in early years education. Practitioner action research, sometimes called participatory action research, is an approach used by practicing professionals for undertaking individual and shared reflection on issues related to areas of potential development. As Lapan (2012) points out, it involves self-reflection, tight time frames, and a work-related focus geared towards improving practice and pedagogy. Individual reflection may broaden to involve other professionals in shared inquiry. McNiff (2003, 23) refers to "on-the-job research undertaken by people in any context, regardless of their status, position, age or previous experience".

A working life partner organisation provides a context for implementation of the functional component of the thesis. For the research to have developmental merit, it should be tested and evaluated with regard to previous research and standards of quality. Adherence to research ethics guides the design and implementation.

The role of children in early years research is considered. Roberts-Holmes (2018) outlines the case for research that is participatory and that listens to children's voices, increasing well-being as well as the likelihood that children will engage in participation throughout their lives. Clark's (2017) Mosaic approach values children's verbal and non-verbal input in the research process. A mosaic is formed of children's artworks, reflections, responses and initiatives. There is room in this approach for multiple perspectives, adult as well as child.

2.1   Project Aims

The goal of this project-based thesis is the design and implementation of a poetry programme for pre-primary/preschool aged children (6 years of age).

The project, *A Month of Poetry*, aims to introduce children to:

- the inclinations of poetic language.
- a range of poetic forms.

The project aims for children to:

- craft, voice, and write poems, individually and collaboratively.
- reflect upon their own poetry and the poetry of others.

The publication of a teacher's guidebook, *The Poetic Teacher: A guide to making poems in the early years* (Powell, 2021), aims to provide a resource for educators that continues to address the development need in the future, as an accessible and practical poetry teaching toolkit comprising lesson plans and pedagogical resources based on principles and methods of guided discovery learning.

This functional thesis gives impetus to the development of poetry pedagogy as constituting a core component of the linguistic curriculum. Poetry is often considered a fringe, peripheral, artform. However, in early childhood education there are benefits to placing poetry closer to the centre of language and arts curriculums. The pleasure that children experience when they create poetry, although difficult to quantify, can be a motivating force in their emergent literacy skills and their ongoing appreciation of literature.

The project was designed with reference to the the larger aims and objectives of ECEC, as specified in the Act on Early Childcare and Education (2018), hereafter referred to as the Act on ECEC (2018, 2), which calls for "versatile pedagogical activities based on the child's play, physical activity, arts and cultural heritage, [that] enable positive learning experiences". Any project under the auspices of ECEC aims to help children understand and respect diverse cultural backgrounds.

The guided discovery teaching methods used throughout the project aim to be in alignment with the Act on ECEC (2018), which aims for ECEC to recognise individual needs and provide appropriate support, to develop interpersonal skills and guide responsible and sustainable action, and to encourage respect of others and participation in society. Furthermore, the Act on ECEC (2018, 3) calls for a child-centred model that will "ensure that the children can participate in and influence matters concerning them."

Besides developing the linguistic skills necessary to produce poetic texts and thereby strengthen linguistic identities, positive experiences with poetry support curiosity and interest in language arts, texts, and cultures. The project aims to facilitate diverse forms of expression, with close links to visual art and music. Poetry will be used to explore a sense of self and community, and to explore and interact with our environment. As children grow, move, and develop, poetry (in particular, rhymes) will accompany physical activities such as yoga and dance. The teacher can choose from a cornucopia of poetic forms, traditions, and aspects of poetic culture in order to enrich each learning area.

2.2   Collecting Feedback

Listening to children's viewpoints is indispensable in early years research. As Roberts-Holmes (2018) points out, genuine listening is consistent with developing cultures of meaningful participation. Children's feedback will be sought throughout the activities, in group discussions and conversations with individual students. Feedback opportunities will be framed with questions adapted from the Highland Literacy (no date) online resource: *Using the Six Hats to Respond to Literature*, which is based on de Bono's (1985) *Six Thinking Hats*. Below are some examples of questions for generating feedback.

- How many poems have we made together? Do you remember which line you came up with in this group poem? What is this poem about? How are these poems different from the other poems we have made? (white hat: information)
- How did you feel while making these poems? What did you like/dislike about making these poems? (red hat: feelings)
- What worked well in the way we did this? Who wants to say something that really worked well when we made poems in this way (in a small group/whole group? (yellow hat: good points)
- What problems did we have doing it this way? Was it too hard/too easy? If so, why? (black hat: problems)
- What could have been better? How would you teach poetry if you were the teacher? What else could we do to make our project more colourful and more interesting? (green hat: new ideas)

By answering these questions children will evaluate the activities with regard to their feelings and thoughts about the advantages and disadvantages of the activities, as well as their emerging knowledge of poetry and ways to improve the methods used.

To ascertain what has been learnt, conversations will explore children's thoughts about poetry, such as the differences and similarities between poetry and other kinds of texts. Children will have input into how they would like to present their poetic art to a wider audience, such as peers and parents. Attention will be paid to finetuning child-centred questions in order to elicit meaningful feedback.

Interviewing children is not a straightforward process. As Kyrönlampi and Määttä (2013, 58) write, the interview as a process is "adult-centred". There are ethical considerations to do with the exercise of power and the tedium of the interview for the child. There are questions related to the usefulness of interviews in building trust and reaching the child's world. Therefore, the current project favours informal, child-centred feedback opportunities.

Pedagogical documentation will be used to plan and evaluate individual lessons as the project progresses. Observations will document children's skills, strengths, areas for potential linguistic development, levels of motivation and participation, the nature of interactions between children, and interactions between children and the teacher guiding the project.

Feedback will be gathered from the teachers and managers within the organisation, through questionnaire responses and a written evaluation at the completion of the project. The questionnaire evaluates the project in light of the project aims and the objectives of the Act on ECEC (2018) and the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2018), hereafter referred to as the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018).

Observations and feedback will indicate to what extent the goals were reached.

- Twenty lessons are planned for the project. This quantitative goal will be measured.
- There are twenty children in the group. A quantitative indicator is for each child to participate in the project and produce poetry of their own, as well as in collaboration with their peers.
- I will analyse examples of children's poetic work in order to identify elements of poetic language and signs of linguistic development.

The analysis and evaluation will rely on a grounded approach, whereby certain themes and issues are induced from the data. This is illustrated (Figure 1) by Roberts-Holmes (2018, 180) as a cyclical flow between data reduction (generating themes), data display, and the discussion of themes and data in light of the literature.
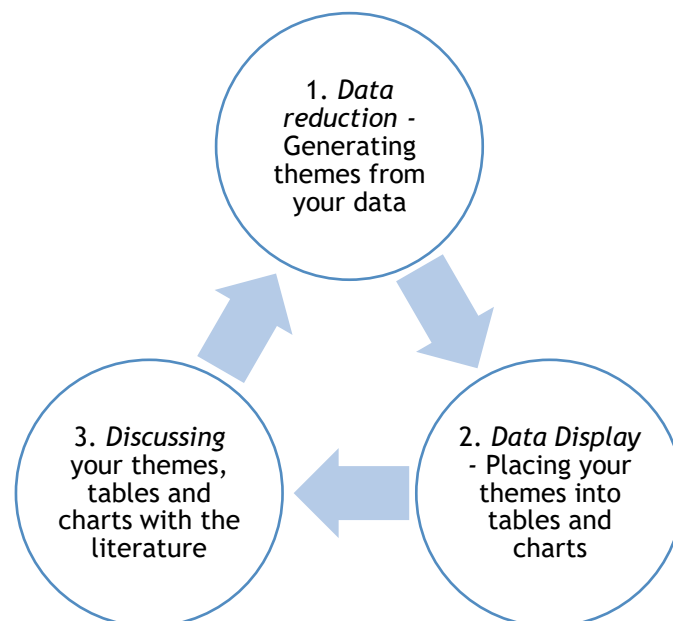

Figure 1: The relationship between data reduction, display and analysis

In addition, pertinent themes will be deduced from the literature, in what Roberts-Holmes (2018, 184) refers to as " deducing the themes or topic areas from the literature."

Extracts from a research diary - comprising reflections, thoughts and feelings that occur throughout the project - will be presented and analysed in a self-evaluation of the project and my own performance and professional development. This will be done by undertaking an "appreciative enquiry" (Hammond 2000, cited in Watkins et. al 2007, 3): a strengths-based approach in which we take into the future the best practices of the past.

Following each lesson I will undertake a reflection on my classroom practice, evaluating my communication, my ability to generate interest and spark participation, the effectiveness of the methods used, what worked, and areas to develop.

2.3   Working Life Partner

The project was undertaken at the International Childcare and Education Centre (ICEC), in Kilo, Espoo, between November 2020 and January 2021. The ICEC was founded in 1989 and has expanded to include eight branches across the Helsinki and Espoo regions. In 2019 the ICEC became part of the Pilke group.

The Kilo school is located at Siuntionti 3, Espoo. It opened in 2018, with purpose-built facilities in close proximity to a forest area. The school can accommodate up to 120 children, with 6 groups ranging in age from toddlers to pre-primary. The project was conducted in the 'school room' with the preschool (esikoulu) group. There are twenty children in this group, two teachers and one assistant.

The ICEC is multicultural. It celebrates difference and encourages diversity. The ICEC follows the English early years foundational stage curriculum (2017), the Finnish National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018), Espoo City Early Years Curriculum (no date), and Espoo Pre-Primary Education Curriculum (no date). Activities are informed by a creative learning philosophy and the High Scope (2021) method of teaching.

At the ICEC, the teacher facilitates a balanced day for the children. This requires assessing the child's learning and development, and planning based on observations. Every area of the environment is utilized to create learning situations, such as a drawing and writing area, role play area, construction, maths and science, nature table/ sensory area, games and puzzles, book corner, sand and water, musical instruments, arts and crafts table, and painting easel. The structure of the environment helps to delineate the curriculum learning areas, and vice-versa. Spaces in the classroom correspond to learning areas. This structure enables the teachers to design a comprehensive and balanced learning program.

The language of instruction is English. Children also participate in Finnish language activities ('Suomentunti') and bilingual lessons (Finnish-English).

3   Theoretical Framework

3.1   Key Concepts

Poetry

No single definition of poetry will hold all its heterogeneous practices. Still, it is helpful if the teacher understands what the term encompasses, and can put it into terms that children can understand. Historically, poetry is a contested term. As Owen (2012, 1065) summarizes, it can be traced to a set of Greek terms: "*poiésis*, making; *poiéma*, a thing made, a work; poiétés, a maker, poet; *poiétike* (techné), the making (art/technique), poetics". Or as we moderns sometimes say, poetry is a craft. Mirriam-Webster (2019) defines poetry as:

> "Writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm."

Beyond creating a 'specific emotional response', poetry may also elicit thoughtful, creative, or intellectual responses. Notwithstanding this quibble, the above definition is a distillation of what Owen (2012, 1065) calls the "assumption that the word refers to something that transcends its history or has a conceptual core that runs through all the variations in its use". While, as Owen (2012) points out, a cultural authority of one kind or another may intervene and declare that something is not real poetry, for the early childhood educator, a definition such as the aforementioned is clear and generally assented to. We must add, however, that the poetry of early childhood does *not* have to be writing. It can be spoken word; it can be fragments of speech combined in a collaborative work.

If, in addition to writing, poetry encompasses spoken word, then the teacher now has a workable definition of poetry as: "Writing or spoken word that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a response through meaning, sound, and rhythm." These are the fundamental characteristics and techniques of a craft that can be taught.

We return to the Greek origins of the term poetry when we talk in terms of the poem as a made thing, a verbal or written cultural product. Children easily grasp the idea that a poem is something one 'makes', just as one 'makes' any other piece of art. It is through *doing* poetry

that we learn what it has meant to others who have come before us, as well as what it means for us.

According to Middleton (2012, 1068), up until the mid-20th century, it was not unusual for poetry to be read aloud at "everyday private gatherings, where ordinary readers entertained a circle of listeners [. . .], a commonplace oralcy that deeply shaped both the composition and reception of poetry [. . .]" Nowadays, early childhood education is one of the few commonplace settings where poetry might still be practiced by ordinary readers, in a 'circle of listeners' sitting together on the carpet or mat.

All cultures throughout history have produced poetry. According to Brown (1991) it is a human universal. Brown's (1991) list of human universals, re-printed in Pinker (2002, 437) includes: "poetic lines characterised by repetition and variation; poetic lines demarcated by pauses; metaphor; onomatopoeia." Poetry and its inclinations are part of common humanity and the general cultural inheritance, a shared pursuit with the capacity to harness many voices, such as those in a multicultural classroom.

Valéry (1958, 64) described poetry as an "art of language" and "a language within a language". Understanding poetry as a separate language within our everyday language is the key to unlocking its fundamental qualities and inclinations. The poetry language differs from ordinary language in the following respects. The sound and musical qualities of words (alone and in combination) are just as important as their meaning. Koch (1998) reminds us that music has the power to make whatever is said convincing, by the beauty of the way it is expressed. According to Koch (1998) learning the language of poetry can be understood as getting a 'poetry base', a foundation from which one can begin to read and write.

Early Childhood Education

Pursuant to the Act on ECEC (2018), the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018), guides the provision, implementation, and development of pedagogical activities in the early years. It elaborates the concepts and practices that promote children's holistic growth, development, health and wellbeing. The National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018, 42) defines five learning areas that demarcate the objectives and contents of pedagogical activities: "Rich world of languages; Diverse forms of expression; Me and our community; Exploring and interacting with my environment; I grow, move and develop."

Within the learning area, 'Rich world of languages', the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018, 43) states:

"The task of early childhood education and care is to strengthen the development of children's linguistic skills and capacity as well as their linguistic identities. ECEC strengthens children's curiosity towards and interest in languages, texts and cultures".

Compulsory pre-primary education in Finland is guided by the National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (2014), which, like the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018) demarcates the same five learning areas, including 'Rich world of languages'. The education and care of the children referred to in this project is guided by both curriculums, which overlap considerably.

Development Need

Research by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) (2019) has highlighted shortcomings in early childhood art education, expression, literacy skills and multiliteracy activities. Among FINEEC's (2019, 16) key findings:

"Approximately 10% of the staff at ECEC centres said that no activities strengthening multiliteracy were available at all. Only one half of staff reported that their group says nursery rhymes, makes up rhymes and plays with sounds and syllables every day. In addition, only one half of the respondents said that books are read in the group on a daily basis."

One of FINEEC's (2019, 23) main development recommendations: "Literature and reading aloud should be part of every child's day in ECEC" recognises:

The importance of a rich linguistic environment (reading aloud, saying nursery rhymes, rhyming with words, and playing with letters, sounds and language) for the development of the child's thinking, learning and interaction skills is widely known. Still, only one half of ECEC staff reported that they read books and texts containing rich language to the children and played with language every day. ECEC staff and heads of ECEC centres must in future increasingly pay attention to offering a rich linguistic environment on a daily basis. (2019, 23)

In order to rectify the situation, FINEEC (2019, 23) recommends that "the operating culture should be modified to support arts and culture [. . .] In addition, the position and contents of artistic subjects in the education and in-service training of ECEC staff must be examined."

3.2   Theory of Multiple Intelligences

According to Howard Gardner's (1983) Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), intelligence is not a single, stand-alone category that can be measured by psychometric tests. Rather, Gardner (1993) considers an intelligence to be comprised of problem solving skills directed at real problems in a given domain. Intelligence, Gardner (1983) writes, also entails the ability to locate or create problems, thereby making it possible to generate new knowledge, and when appropriate, create effective products. An intelligence can be thought of as an intellectual strength in a cultural context. Intelligence, Gardner (1993) insists, is always linked to a task, an activity, a shared pursuit. Gardner's (1993, 63-66) criteria for ascertaining whether an intellectual strength is an intelligence include: "an identifiable set of core operations [. . .], an identifiable developmental history [. . .], an evolutionary history and plausibility [. . .], susceptibility to encoding in a symbol system". Based on these criteria, Gardner (1993) posits a list of eight intelligences: spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, mathematical-logical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, and linguistic.

Intelligences are, according to Gardner (1993), not to be confused with *learning styles*, and are specifically linked to content and context. For example, the linguistic intelligence can be linked to the content of poetry, in the context of verbal or written communication and language arts. We have specific intelligences *because of* contents and contexts that exist in the world. Whereas a stylistic account might conclude that learners apply a particular learning style across all contents, Gardner (1993) holds that learners may display different learning styles, depending on which kind of intelligence is at work. Gardner (1993, xxv) reminds us that an individual who is "reflective or engaged with one content can turn out to be impulsive or inattentive with another content". This insight has had implications for modern educational principles of equity, inclusion and differentiation, preventing the pigeonholing of different temperaments and behaviours, and reminding us that what works for one student might not work for another.

In discouraging efforts to characterize individuals or groups as exhibiting a certain, preconceived profile of intelligences, Gardner (1993, xxvii) writes that "while at any given moment a person or group might exhibit certain intelligences, this picture is fluid and changing". MI theory is, according to Gardner (1993), non-evaluative: it does not posit a hierarchy of intelligences, and it is sensitive to the fact that cultural values may differ across cultures and across time.

It is important to note that, although an intelligence consists of a core set of operations that can be isolated, our various cognitive faculties intersect and overlap, moment by moment. In a single instant a theatre actor may display verbal-linguistic, musical, spatial, interpersonal, and intra-personal intelligences in the performance of a role. According to Gardner (1993,

334) in any one teachable moment, "individuals may learn through the exploitation of linguistic codes, of kinaesthetic or spatial demonstrations, or of interpersonal bonds".

Implications for Education

Gardner's (1983) MI theory lays the groundwork for developmentally appropriate curricula and pedagogical methods that take into account the significant differences found among learners. According to Gardner (2011), the two main educational implications of his 1983 MI theory are:

Individuation/Personalization: the teacher recognises that children differ from one another and should be taught in ways that are conducive to their learning.

Pluralization: an object of learning (e.g. poetry) should be taught in various ways, and children should have the opportunity to show what they have learnt, using various forms of expression.

The basic premise is that more students will be reached if the content and methods of teaching are differentiated and pluralized. These implications can be considered utilitarian in that they aim for the greatest good (learning and understanding) for the greatest number of students.

Objections to MI

Waterhouse (2006) claims that, despite the popularity of Gardner's (1983) theory, it lacks empirical verification. Gardner (1993, xxiv) acknowledges that "many individuals balk at the use of the word intelligence", and prefer to talk about aptitude, ability, or talent: what in educational vernacular is commonly called the *strengths* of the learner. Although these criticisms warrant serious consideration, there is little doubt that Gardner's (1983) MI theory broadens notions of intelligence, while its application has made learning curriculums more egalitarian and holistic.

3.3   Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence

For Gardner (1993), the verbal-linguistic intelligence includes sensitivity to the meaning of words (semantics), the order and arrangement of words and sentences (syntax), the sound, rhythms, and meter of words (phonology), and inflections (morphology). This is what we call grammar. Language performs rhetorical functions (to persuade), explanatory functions (to instruct), and mnemonic functions (to help us remember things, e.g. lists). We express through language our intentions and desires, and we elicit reactions from others. This is communication.

Cole and Cole (1996) summarise the major approaches to language acquisition, ranging from *learning theories* (based on conditioning and imitation) to Chomsky's (1975) *nativist theory* which posits that language is innate, employing the brain as a language acquisition device (LAD), hardwired to understand universal aspects of grammar. A middle way is suggested in the *interactionist* explanations of theorists such as Bruner (1982,15), who approaches the nature versus nurture debate by suggesting that language acquisition is a "subtle process by which adults artificially arrange the world so that the child can succeed culturally by doing what comes naturally".

Second Language Acquisition

It has been suggested that children's ability to learn complex grammar is evidence of a critical period during which the brain is especially receptive to language learning. This partly explains the increasing role of English-language ECEC in Finland. Doughty and Long (2003) remind us that the 300–400 million people whose mother tongue is English are outnumbered by the 1-2 billion people for whom English is a second or third language.

In language immersion and bilingual classrooms the teacher does in fact artificially arrange the environment so that children can succeed by building on natural capacities. At the same time, everyday situations and daily routines are also seen as teachable moments, involving turn-taking, imitation, and conversation as patterned interaction. By the age of five or six, second-language learners who have been in language immersion for two or three years can already tell and narrate stories, sing songs, and perform drama. Structured English-language phonics education teaches the alphabetic code in which sounds are represented by letters, and how to blend phonemes in order to read words. Emergent literacy involves learning to write, through trial and error. As Browne (2008,105) notes:

> "children want to and can write before they have control of the writing system and adults should encourage them to do so. As they become more aware of writing and receive guidance about writing, their transcription skills will develop."

3.4   Poetry in the development of verbal-linguistic skills

The main areas of children's linguistic development, according to the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018, 44), are: "interaction skills, language comprehension skills, speech production skills, language use competences, linguistic memory and vocabulary, [and] language awareness". What can poetry do for these skills and competences?

Interaction skills

When children are guided to make collaborative poems they experience being heard and eliciting responses. They take turns speaking and listening, entertaining and responding. The teacher who is enthusiastic, receptive and sensitive to children's input, using verbal and non-verbal messages, and who facilitates this process in a flexible and fluid manner, is a model of interaction in creative pursuits.

Language comprehension skills

Reading poetry aloud to children reinforces the rhythms of language, forging grammatical and semantic connections. Poetry that engages children in rapt attention, introducing and reinforcing vocabulary through repetition, incorporating gestures and tonal variation, helps children understand words and the world they describe.

Developing comprehension requires input in the form of linguistic modelling from ECEC personnel. Exposure to developmentally appropriate material is required, including varied children's literature, including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and early readers. A physical environment that supports literacy includes a reading area, a book corner or library, and a well-resourced writing station with alphabetic aids.

Speech production skills

As Gardner (1991, 100) writes, some children "qualify as miniature performers, able to seize the interest of an audience". In poetry, the thoughts, feelings, and ideas expressed have the capacity to encapsulate different points of view. Poems are ideal texts to be read or performed together, with children taking turns to read lines or sections of text.

Koch (1970) writes that children often need assistance to feel free and engage their imagination about a certain theme. In spoken poetry exercises repetition can be used, with each line beginning with a recurring turn of phrase, such as 'I wish . . . ', or 'I had a dream . . .' This kind of improvisation can be transcribed or recorded, and if the children are satisfied with their lines, they can be rehearsed and performed in different settings, where they can practice varying vocal tones and other performative effects.

Language use competences

Poetic language can be persuasive, entertaining, and humorous. When practicing poetry together with a teacher, children develop their understanding of what constitutes acceptable humour and what transgresses the limits of good manners. Children's poetry expresses empathy towards others (human and non-human), as well as one's hopes and wishes arising

from a developing sense of self. Poetic texts can vary in length from a few words to longer narratives. Poetry can be simple or complex, sincere and profoundly moving, or jesting and nonsensical. As a form of expression it is adaptable to different temperaments and abilities. As children vocalise poems they realise the differences between written and spoken language. They also notice that spoken language can be written, and vice versa.

Linguistic memory and vocabulary

Early childhood teachers often use mnemonic rhymes to instruct and to reinforce sequences of desirable behaviour, such as handwriting technique: '1,2,3,4 / Are my feet flat on the floor / 5,6,7,8 / Is my back nice and straight . . . ' The National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018) points to the importance of nursery rhymes and singing games in the development of linguistic memory, as well the need to play with language, name things, discuss, and to read and tell stories in an unhurried way.

In writing about poetry's developmental importance for children, in particular the role played by memory, McCormack (2020 22) writes:

> "Knowing poems by heart allows their meaning to take root as an emotional, physical and linguistic resource, and for the power of words to become embodied in the real world as things of significance and importance beyond the quiet books left in the library corner."

This points to poetry as separable from the physical object of the book, and capable of being embodied in the child through the interplay of speech and memory.

Language awareness

According to the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018, 45), "children are encouraged to make up their own stories", and "children's nursery rhymes and verbal messages are documented". Language awareness involves noticing the various languages and environmental text in the classroom. Poetry is a form of pedagogical documentation of children's thinking and learning, exposure to which, in the form of posters, hand-made books, and video or audio recordings, gives children a sense of ownership over their artwork *and* their environment. One outcome of language awareness is children's appreciation of the value of preserving their poetry, whether spoken or written, because they can reflect on it with their teachers, peers, and families, eliciting responses and inspiring future poems.

3.5   Poetry and non-linguistic intelligences

While acknowledging the primacy of linguistic skills in poetry learning, we can look to the other intelligences in order to differentiate and pluralize teaching methods. We can use

poetry and movement and music simultaneously to engage the musical and bodily-kinaesthetic intelligences. To draw attention to poetic elements such as lineation, we might count the number of lines in a poem, or the number of beats or syllables in a line (logical-mathematical). Concrete poetry, sometimes called visual poetry, involves typographical experimentation in which text forms images (visual-spatial). Through poetry we explore our relationship to the natural world (naturalistic) and to ourselves (intra-personal), as well as our bonds with others (interpersonal). FINEEC (2018, 14) urges ECEC staff to "make use of children's wondering attitude towards nature . . ." In line with The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), education shall encourage respect for the natural environment, as well as peace, equality, tolerance, and friendship. As this cursory overview demonstrates, poetry is a rich learning content for engaging all of the intelligences and desirable competencies, and therefore capable of reaching individuals with unique learning profiles.

3.6   Poetry in the development of transversal competences

What follows is a list of desirable transversal competences from the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018), and an explanation of poetry's role in developing each competence.

Thinking and learning

As Browne (2008) reminds us, "Composition is not just about writing, it is about thinking": what thoughts and words to include, and what to omit. The National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018, 25) states that "acquiring and structuring information and creating something new require[s] creative and critical thinking". Indeed, 'Make It New' has been the quintessential imperative of modern poetry since propounded by Ezra Pound (1934), imploring the artist to generate works that are uniquely original. This requires learning about past and present traditions. Ideally, you learn the rules before you break them, posing new questions and generating new products. Poetry can be a form critical thinking, at the level of form, as well as personally, socially, and politically.

According to The National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018, 25) the activities and experiences of ECEC should encourage and support children's ability to "analyse, name, and describe elements in their surroundings", "ask questions and to question", "direct and maintain their attentiveness". As the poet Donald Revell (2007, 11) writes, "In the poetry of attention, the poet comes to his senses."

The central role of play in developing children's thinking is acknowledged by curriculums and contemporary theories of child development. When children are encouraged to use wordplay they develop their capacity for metalinguistic awareness. Like other forms of play that children delight in, wordplay occurs naturally, and can be harnessed to strengthen linguistic

development. In making room for wordplay we align an important inclination of poetic language with a key aim of early childhood pedagogy: to synchronize play and learning.

Cultural competence, interaction and self-expression

The so-called 'mature poet' is an archetypal model of self-expression who is deemed competent in a cultural domain. But competence in self-expression does not equal competence in interaction, as many a poet's biography attests. Luckily, children get to practice almost constant interaction in early childhood education settings. The interaction that occurs while making poems collaboratively is a competence of language art. Self expression involves creating something new out of the everyday material of words. Everyone's voice is heard, and children practice listening to their peers, who each have unique family and cultural backgrounds. A poetic classroom can be a microcosm of a diverse and respectful society.

Taking care of oneself and managing daily life

Aspects of self-care and personal responsibility relate to our discussion of poetry. The National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018, 26) calls for ECEC activities to "support children's positive attitude towards the future". What kind of world we hope for or anticipate is one of the timeless themes addressed by poets of all epochs. One of the poetry ideas planned in this functional thesis has lines that alternate, 'Last year . . . / This year . . ./ Next year', enabling reflection on growth and increasing independence. Emotions find expression in poetry, and this can assist self-regulation.

When poetry activities are challenging for children, they are provided with opportunities to ask for help and receive assistance: two of the most important skills in managing daily life.

Multiliteracy and competence in information and communication technology

While the present project was done largely with voice, pencil, and paper, there is the potential for poetry activities to utilize information and communication technology (ICT). With guidance, children can record poetry as voice memos and videos. Some preschool age children may wish to type lines of scribed poetry on a computer.

When poetry is taught with various methods and through various mediums, the combination of oral, visual, musical and other literacies that we call *multiliteracy*, develops in ways it would not otherwise develop.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990, 9) enshrines children's right to "participate freely in cultural life and the arts", as well as the "provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity". To this end, the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018, 27), states that, "encountering children appreciatively, hearing their viewpoints and responding to their initiatives strengthen children's ability to participate and be involved". In encompassing children's self-expression with very few limitations, poetry encourages participation in cultural life and the arts. Engaging in spoken poetry while in the stages of emergent visual literacy can motivate children to develop written literacy: an example of art's functional, instrumental value. At the same time, participation and involvement in cultural and artistic life can be seen as *ends in themselves.*

3.7   Guided discovery learning

In guided discovery learning (GDL) the student discovers knowledge with the teacher's guidance. In models of learning, guided discovery sits in the middle of a continuum, between direct instruction and pure discovery. Pure discovery teaching methods involve no direct assistance from the teacher. Guided discovery teaching methods involve restrained, moderate teacher aid. Direct instruction relies on the teacher transmitting knowledge to the passive student.

In discovery learning students are encouraged to explore situations, tasks and questions that allow them to *discover* for themselves the intended concepts or materials. Smitha (2012, 27) writes that, "Discovery learning is based on the premise that education is a process, not a set of facts." An exploration phase is followed by a discovery phase.

According to Van Joollingen (1999, 386) "learners construct their own knowledge by experimenting with a domain, and inferring rules from the results of these experiments". Greater understanding is thought to emerge because learners are active participants, rather than passive receptables of the teacher's exposition. The teacher is guiding, as opposed to instructing. Enough guidance is given in order for children to establish a knowledge base from which they can discover. This is where guided discovery has advantages over pure discovery, which can leave the child without the base knowledge required to proceed with discovery. The child cannot discover the knowledge if they do not know where to look, or if they are not pointed in the right direction by the questions, prompts, and situations created by the teacher in guided discovery. Van Joolingen (1999) explains that learners need more than just access to the domain in order to learn about it. Apart from access to the domain of poetry, children need someone to introduce the inclinations of poetry.

According to Watkins, Carnell and Lodge (2007) pedagogy seeks to find the right balance between the three classic models of learning: reception/transmission, construction/pure discovery, and co-construction/guided discovery. Mayer (2004) argues for a model of guided discovery based on instructional guidance rather than pure discovery, and curricular focus rather than unstructured exploration. In practice, guidance is required for children to discover knowledge about poetry. This is not new knowledge per se, but it is new for them. Sachs (2020) explains what happens in guided discovery: in re-creating knowledge which already exists but is heretofore unknown to them, children learn how to create new knowledge. In other words, they are learning how to learn, how to scaffold their own learning, while experiencing a sense of mastery and emerging expertise.

Guided discovery teaching methods

Guiding children's discovery requires subtle situational awareness on behalf of the teacher. The mindful teacher gauges each moment and modulates her level of guidance, depending on the children's understanding and enthusiasm.

In reading poetry that uses repetition, the teacher encourages children to read along and *fill in the gaps*. In transcribing children's spoken poetry into written text, the teacher may first print the text, so that the child can then copy it out for themselves. The teacher provides appropriate and generative feedback that is geared towards developing literacy and promoting further effort and participation.

In poetry activities the teacher guides children's attention to the inclinations of poetic language, such as comparison, metaphor, rhyme, and alliteration. Pramling Samuelson, Asplund Carlsson, Olsson, Pramling and Wallerstedt (2009) make a distinction between the *content* of learning (poetry) and the *object* of learning (e.g. simile). The object of learning should be defined and specific. Guided discovery is dependant on the teacher asking the *right question at the right time*, so that children have the sense that they have discovered something for themselves. Often children's responses to teachers' questions suggest that the child is trying to read the teacher's mind for the single correct answer. This implies that the correct way of looking at the world is that of the teacher. Guided poetic discovery sidesteps this problem by offering the child a 'poetry idea', or 'prompt' - an imaginative springboard or launching pad - for the discovery and expression of their own viewpoint.

As a constructivist form of learning, guided discovery is based on the co-construction of knowledge with others. Collaborative poems are by their very nature exercises in co-construction, and children as young as five can be guided to build poems together.

Although children's development follows some generally assented-to patterns, children develop at different speeds, and it takes time for new learning to become incorporated in the

learner's mental schema. Therefore, guided discovery teaching requires an *unhurried atmosphere* in which themes can be explored open-endedly, and in different ways. Guided discovery requires the differentiation of learning, based on the child's level of development. This requires observation, documentation, and planning: the triad of professional teaching, as well as an ability to improvise and take appropriate detours to address confusion and gaps in understanding. The process is not always straightforward, and the teacher needs to be comfortable with uncertainty, possessing what Keats (2004, 79) called "Negative Capability": that is [. . .] capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."

It is possible to shroud almost any practices of ECEC in its professional vernacular of 'children's choice/ agency/participation/ and self-expression'. However, as FINEEC's (2019) evaluation has shown, not all current practices are satisfactory. In responding to current shortcomings in language arts education, FINEEC (2019, 14) advises ECEC centres to reflect upon how they "implement systematic and guided artistic expression". The following implementation tests whether guided discovery learning puts poetry in motion.

4   Implementation

4.1   Kenneth Koch's poetry pedagogy

Kenneth Koch (1925-2002) was an American poet and pedagogue who wrote about his experience of teaching poetry to children in the 1960's and 1970's. Koch was an influential member of the so-called New York school of poets, whose irreverent language experiments and interdisciplinary collaborations expanded the field of contemporary poetry and the arts. Koch's own poetry is characterised by wonderment and a childish and witty self-effacement. Here are a few apt lines from his 1962 poem, *Fresh Air*.

> Sun out! perhaps there is a reason for the lack of poetry
> In these ill-contented souls, perhaps they need air!
>
> Blue air, fresh air, come in, I welcome you, you are an art student,
> Take off your cap and gown and sit down on the chair.
> Together we shall paint the poets - but no, air! perhaps you should go to
> them quickly,
> Give them a little inspiration, they need it, perhaps they are out of breath,
> Give them a little inhuman company before they freeze the English language to death!
> (Koch, 2006, 123-124)

In his book, *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams: Teaching children to write poetry* (1970) Koch begins from a place appreciative respect for children's abilities. Koch (1970, 25) writes:

"Most important, I believe, is taking children seriously as poets. Children have a natural talent for writing poetry and anyone who teaches them should know that. Teaching is really not the right word for what takes place: it is more like permitting the children to *discover* something they already have".

Koch (1998) insists that learning the language of poetry involves getting a "poetry base." Although Koch (1998) applied this notion of a poetry base to somewhat older poets, in the present study I attempt to simplify the poetry base in order to apply it to children. Inspiration is important. It is not a magical gift one receives, but something the young poet practices, by hearing and reading the poems of others, and by being encouraged to look at the world in fresh and interesting ways. Koch's (1998) poetry base consists of the inclinations of poetic language, such as comparison, personification, repetition, and the musical and rhythmic qualities of verse. Depending on their age and ability, there are certain poetic forms that children can try. This requires exposure to examples followed by experimentation and practice. For children, developing a poetry base is a form of experiential learning best facilitated by a guide.

Koch (1970) guided this process of discovery by removing certain obstacles to children's poetry making. Because Koch (1970) believed that children can be quite musical when the obligation to rhyme is taken away, he told his students that lines did not have to rhyme or be in meter. Koch (1970,18) also encouraged children to be "free and even "crazy" in what they wrote", and found that they "wrote more freely" and enjoyed the process because they were producing vibrant things. Koch (1970) wasn't concerned about whether or not the children spelled every word correctly; he thought that this was a distraction that got in the way. Because poetry is exciting, Koch (1970) let the children make noise, so as not to put a lid on inspiration and the sharing of ideas.

In discovering certain repetitive forms that helped children compose poetry, Koch (1970) found that repetition, which comes naturally to children, gives them an easy and accessible way of dividing poetry into lines. This had the added advantage of making it like a game, a kind of play, with certain rules about what should be in every line, or how each line should begin. This, Koch (1970) writes, gives the finished poem unity and structure, and helps the child to find something of their own to say. Koch (1970, 8) writes, "with such a form, they could relax after every line and always be starting up afresh". These 'rules', Koch (1970, 4) referred to as "poetry ideas", and his criteria for a good poetry idea was that it should be easy for the children to understand, be immediately compelling from the child's point of view, and generate something new.

Koch's (1970) pedagogy relies on removing certain barriers and creating generative constraints. Arguably, the biggest barrier to participation and involvement is the idea that

poetry is difficult. Koch (1970, 27) reminds us that, "Poetry is a mystery, but it is a mystery children can participate in and master, and they shouldn't be kept away from it by hard words". Nor should ECEC personnel be kept away from poetry by its supposed obscurity. As examples of guided discovery learning, Koch's (1970) 'poetry ideas' and Koch's (1998) 'poetry base' aim to make poetry approachable and easy to implement. In describing the teacher's role, Koch (1970, 29) writes that he was there to " explain and to inspire [. . .] to act as reader, admirer, and furnisher of additional ideas [. . .] give certain examples [. . .] help make the idea clear [. . .] put children in the mood for writing." Koch's pedagogy is the basis and inspiration for what follows: a poetry project in a preschool classroom, and the publication of a poetry guidebook for teachers.

4.2   Action Plan

I approached the ICEC as a potential working life partner. They agreed to host the project during a work practice placement of ten weeks duration. Figure 2. illustrates the subsequent implementation process, wherein the planning, implementation, and reflection/evaluation were linked by double-ended arrows representing bi-directional flows, which fed into the publication of the thesis, in turn impacting the future development of poetry pedagogy.
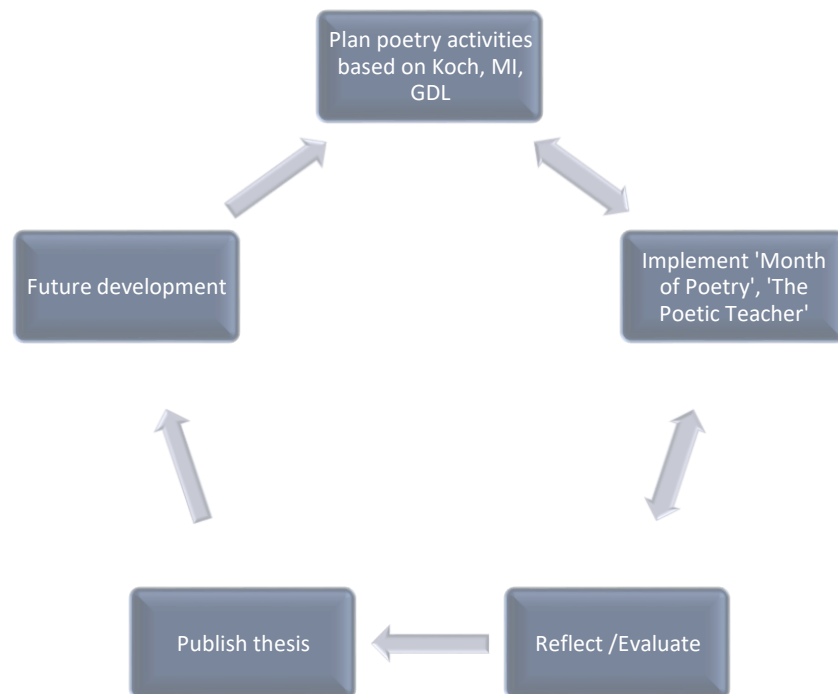

Figure 2: Process diagram

I began a preliminary draft of a poetry programme, 'A Month of Poetry', and began to see how Kenneth Koch's (1998) poetry base and Koch's (1970) poetry ideas corresponded to the curriculum objectives. For each object of learning I prepared a lesson plan incorporating methods of guided discovery learning (GDL).

The aim was to take the results and insights gleaned from this ten-week period, and then collate and compress the most interesting and promising activities and approaches in a guidebook, *The Poetic Teacher* (2021) for future project-based language arts activities, in particular, a month-long poetry unit, tentatively titled, *A Month of Poetry*.

Borrowing elements of Koch's 'poetry base' as objects of learning, I tabled (Table 1) a set of skills, knowledge, and poetry ideas that could constitute a poetry base for children.

DEVELOPING LINGUISTIC INTELLIGENCE AND IDENTITIES					
Interaction skills	Language comprehension skills	Speech production skills	Language use competences	Linguistic memory and vocabulary	Language awareness
Collaboration, participation (GD)	*Guided reading (GD)*	*Linguistic modelling (GD)*	*Situation awareness (GD)*	*Diverse literature (GD)*	*Scaffolded writing (GD)*
Wish-dream poems)	Poetic line - lineation.	Comparison (This is like that)	Catalogue (list poems)	Alliteration (tongue-twisters)	Syllables, metrics
Hello-goodbye poem	Personification (If I were snow)	Sound poetry: Improvisation	Rhymes (Yoga and poetry)	When I was a child of 1 . . 2 . . 3	In the forest
Cultural traditions (A Visit from Apollinaire)	Haiku	To confide (secrets and lies)	Performing poetry	5 senses	Shapes (concrete poetry)

DEVELOPING LINGUISTIC INTELLIGENCE AND IDENTITIES					
Reflecting, giving feedback	Found poems	Narrative poetry (story starters)	Revise/ be concise	Singing game ('Must Be Santa'/ Hello (in 9 languages)	Last year/ this year/ next year

Table 1: A hypothetical poetry base, objects of learning

Objects of learning were classified under headings which corresponded to the aims (desired competences) of the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018) learning area: Rich world of languages. Each linguistic skill had a corresponding guided discovery (GD) method that could be emphasised in the implementation.

Framing the project in this way - by triangulating competences, objects of learning, and teaching methods - offered a holistic, comprehensive structure for poetry teaching that could be expanded or revised as needed, depending on children's interests, time constraints, and other considerations.

In line with Gardner's (1988) Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), the planned lessons intersected with the range of intelligences, not only the linguistic competences. The objects of learning from Table 1. were configured to suit MI theory (Table 2).

INTELLIGENCE	POETRY ACTIVITY - OBJECT OF LEARNING		
Musical	Singing games	Tongue-twisters	Nursery rhymes
Logical- Mathematical	Syllables, metrics	List poems (categorising)	Comparison (this is like that)
Visual- Spatial	Shape- visual poems	Yoga	Poetic line- lineation
Bodily- Kinaesthetic	Yoga	5 senses	Performing poetry (action and gesture)
Personal	When I was a child. Last year/this year/ next year	Personification. Narration	Reflecting, giving feedback

INTELLIGENCE	POETRY ACTIVITY - OBJECT OF LEARNING		
Naturalistic	In the forest	Haiku	Hello-goodbye poem (our world and outer space)

Table 2: Multiple intelligences in poetry

This enabled two of the key implications of MI - individuation-personalization and pluralization - to become instantiated in the project.

There were aspects of children's language development that this study was not concerned with, such as correct spelling, perfect grammar, or continuity of logic. These are elements of emergent literacy that are addressed in regular structured phonics and language activities, distinct from this project. As Browne (2008, 105) states, "focussing too much on transcription deflects attention from composition and may damage children's enthusiasm for writing".

In order to make poetry part of everyday life at playschool, the daily poetry session was scheduled to last between ten and thirty minutes, and to consist of whole group and small group exercises, as well as one-on-one support. In discussions with the workplace supervisor, it was agreed that activities would be conducted during different times of the day, including morning circle, reading time, afternoon circle, phonics lessons, and drama lessons.

I planned to documented children's poetry with the following methods: taking dictation and transcribing with pen and pocket notebook, typing their lines and printing copies for them to illustrate, and taking photographs of their poems

Implementing

Because the project aimed to be as child-centred as possible, and based on children's choice, it was not possible to work to a strict timetable. The proposed order of the activities was adjustable, based on levels of participation and the children's interest, questions and needs. The planned activities supported the project goals, and other opportunities could be seized as they arose. The following table (Table 3) shows the activities and learning objects that were implemented, week by week.

WEEK	IDEAS AND ACTIVITIES		
Week 1	Guided reading	Nursery Rhymes	Tongue Twisters
Week 2	Guided Reading	Yoga and Poetry	Tongue Twisters
Week 3	I Wish . . .	If I Were Snow	Personification
Week 4	I Wish . . .	I had a dream	Comparison
Week 5	Singing games	Performing poems	Christmas concert
Week 6	Singing games	Performing poems	Christmas concert
Week 7	List Poems	- - -	- - -
Week 8	Hello - Goodbye	5 senses	- - -
Week 9	Visual Poetry	- - -	- - -
Week 10	Visual Poetry	A Visit from Apollinaire	- - -

Table 3: Timetable of poetry activities

Weeks 1-2

On my first day in the classroom I informed the children that if they were interested, over the next couple of months, I could help them make poems. Although I had some preliminary discussions with the children about what they know about poetry, and what kind of poems they like, the beginning of the project was mainly spent observing and getting to know the participants: observing them interact, learning their names, and establishing a presence and connection with each child, in order to build trust. I was aware that any project-based activity must take place alongside other learning areas and accommodate the wishes and needs of the children and personnel. During weeks one and two, I continued to plan the proposed activities, incorporating information about the children's strengths and interests.

Because inspiration is fundamental in building the poetry base, I began by exposing children to poetry. Using linguistic modelling and guided reading, we first explored nursery rhymes. The designated time and place for this activity was the reading circle. We used a large illustrated book, *My Best Book of Rhymes* (1981). Children took turns choosing which rhymes were read to them by selecting from from the poems' corresponding illustrations. This

generated participation and led to more active listening. When we read rhyming books together, such as Lynley Dodd's (1983) *Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy*, the children could anticipate the rhyme and use their memories and voices to fill in the gaps. Sometimes when we read poems we counted how many lines were in each poem.

During these sessions I recited 'tongue-twisters' that I had memorised: alliterative and assonant rhymes that are funny and musical, and difficult to pronounce correctly. For example: 'We surely shall see the sun shine soon'. The children played with saying the lines after me, gradually increasing the speed.

For a physical education activity, we undertook a session of yoga which incorporated rhymes alongside a sequence of actions (stretching and breathing). In a circle, guided by rhyme, we performed a 'sun salutation' (a longer sequence of stretches and actions) as well as animal poses. Children chose from a selection of animals, with each animal having a rhyme and a stretch. Nowadays, there are many publications on the subject of yoga for children, and many contain rhymes. The selection that we used was pieced together from a few different books and resources.

The main learning outcomes at this introductory stage included: exposure to the musical qualities of poetry; awareness that poetry can be spoken as well as written, and can accompany visual art and physical activity; developing linguistic memory and vocabulary.

Weeks 3-4

The small group spoken poetry activities were done in a quiet and comfortable room that was conducive to excited attention. When proposing the activity I would say to the class, "Who wants to come and make a poem with Nick?" The first spoken poetry that the children produced were wish poems, one of Koch's (1970) poetry ideas in which each line begins with 'I wish I had . . .' I had to differentiate the method, as Koch had performed this task with slightly older children who could already write fluently. I always began a poem-making activity by reading an example of a poem that I or another poet had made using whatever simple form we were exploring. I instructed them that each line should begin with, 'I wish I had . . . ' and that their wishes could be as real or as crazy as they liked. I always kept the instructions short and simple so as not to drain the children's attention. These small groups tended to be very energized and the children were eager to begin. I always asked if it was okay for me to write their lines in my notebook. When they agreed, I wrote them down, repeating their words back to them to ensure I was accurately transcribing, while directing their attention to the music and colour of what they had said. I referred to their speech as "lines" and as "poetry".

The same method was used in the 'I had a dream . . .' exercise, which the children tried in conjunction with 'Pyjama Day'. I instructed them that they could make up poems about real dreams or made-up dreams, and if it was okay with them, I could write down their dream poems. Some of these dream poems consisted of a single sentence or line, others turned into short monologues.

Because winter had arrived, we tried the poetry idea, 'If I were snow . . .' wherein children imagined what they would do if they were snow. This activity was very popular and produced original results. These poems were documented exercises in spoken poetry.

The comparison exercise (This is like that) was done during circle time. On the guitar I played the song, 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star', and then we spoke about how the star is described as being *like* a diamond. We then went around the circle and everyone said something that is *like* something else. I told the children that I would memorize everyone's comparison and at the end I would recite them all. The point of this activity was to practice a fundamental aspect of poetry, comparison as description.

I always had a pen and pocket notebook ready to document instances of children's spontaneous poetic expression as it occurred in everyday situations, not only within designated poetry lessons. This form of pedagogical documentation gave me examples of children's poetry that I could then relay back to the group, sparking further poetic efforts. One child commented that on his way to playschool he had noticed that "the moon looked like a skateboard without wheels". This example was presented to the group as an example of a simile in the above exercise, 'This is like that', and was also turned into an example of visual-shape poetry.

Objects of learning and desired learning outcomes: description by comparison, simile, self-expression, participation, interaction.

Weeks 5-6

The children selected their favourite lines from their wish poems and snow poems, to perform in the school Christmas concert. The poetry was woven into a story that the preschoolers narrated. Every day for two weeks the children rehearsed their lines. Due to Corona virus restrictions the performances were filmed and available for families to stream online. While rehearsing, the teachers referred to the children as poets: "wish poets", "snow poets" and so on. The children memorised their lines, which consisted of one or two sentences at a time. The poetry was typed and sent home with the children to practice as they wished, establishing a connection between the home and the classroom. At the time of filming, everyone knew their lines, and some had added physical actions, gestures, and vocal emphasis. This was a fun challenge for the children, and the teachers varied the level of

assistance. Some children needed prompting of the first few words of their line, while others insisted that they did not need any help.

In keeping with the theme of wishing, the children performed the song, 'I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas' for the video concert. I introduced this song for the same reason that Koch (1970) told his students that their wishes could be as real or far-fetched as they liked, in order to free their imaginations. The children also performed the song, 'Must Be Santa', a kind of singing game that involves call-and-response and a mnemonic refrain that increases in complexity.

Desired learning outcomes for this stage of the project included: awareness that poetry can be performed, combined with music, dance, and the visual arts; speech production skills; language awareness; practice at memorising poetic lines and lyrics.

Weeks 7-8

The emphasis during weeks 7-8 was on guided writing, which required a stronger focus on one-on-one and small group guidance in the co-construction of written texts. I usually worked with small groups of one or two students at a time.

To begin the list poem exercise, I read Douglas Florian's (1990, 44) poem, *What I Want for My Birthday:* "A teddy bear/ An antelope/ A ninety-four-inch telescope/ A clarinet/ A kettledrum/ Ten thousand sticks of bubble gum . . ."

Koch (1973) explains that poems that use lists are simple for children to imitate, a form in which they can incorporate their own interests. I asked the children what they wanted to make a list of. They suggested, among other things, lists of car models and animals (Figure 3). The children wrote their lists on large sheets of paper, and often chose to work on them during play time. The children were familiar with the alphabetic code and had the phonemic awareness to produce legible lists. Although I did not emphasise correct spelling, the children often did, and at times they preferred the teacher to write the word on a separate paper so that they could copy the correct spelling onto their text.

All of the lists were co-constructed, with children working on their own lists as well as helping one another. Sometimes a curious child would pass by and contribute an item or two to someone's list. Any friend could be a potential collaborator. As the lists got bigger, the children wanted to hear their lists read to them in a voice that emphasised the musical qualities of the words. Saying the poem fast, and adding deliberate pauses - "Toyota-Skoda-Honda/ Mercedes-Mitsubishi . . ." seemed to entertain the children and spur them on. One child said of the list work: 'It sounds better when it's bigger!'
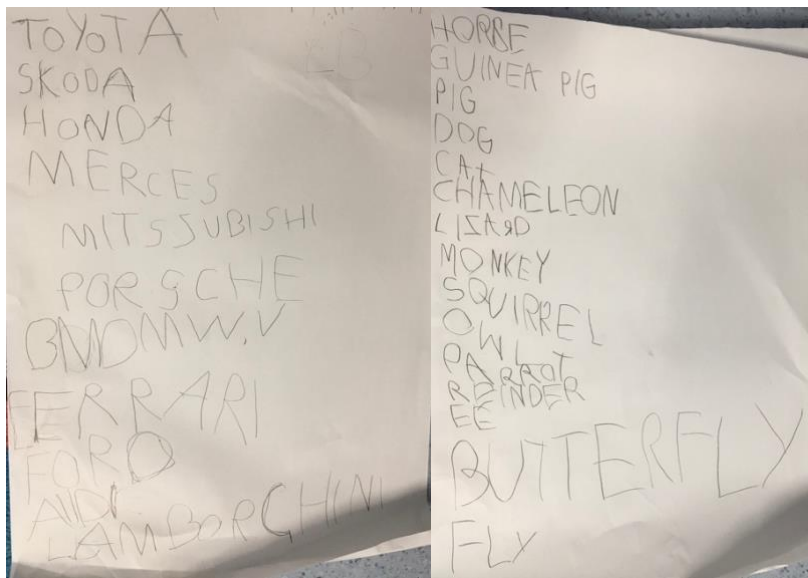
Figure 3: list poems

The collaborative class poem, Mr Sun (Figure 4) was composed as part of a thematic project on space. I prepared the the outline of the poster beforehand, so as to scribe the children's adjectives immediately onto the poster. During the afternoon relaxation circle we brainstormed a list of adjectives to describe the sun. Then we used the 'five senses' idea to co-construct the poem. I asked the children to finish this line: The sun looks like _____. Then I asked them to finish this line: The sun sounds like _____. And so on until we had covered all five senses. The final work is a five senses poem, a list poem, and a shape poem, all in one. It contains elements of comparison and sound poetry. Looking at this poem we see these elements of the poetry base starting to manifest in the children's poetry. First they listed adjectives: Bright, burning, big, rays, solar, yellow (minion), round, star, hot, light, fire, sunset (down), sunrise, sunny, behind a cloud, brightest, gigantic, fire ball. Then we used the five senses:

Mr. Sun - (by preschool poets)

The sun looks like a bright ball, round like a rock.
It sounds like burning, *"shshshshsh"*.
The sun smells like fire, the burning smoke of a burning banana.
It tastes like very very very hot chocolate, like a burning oven.
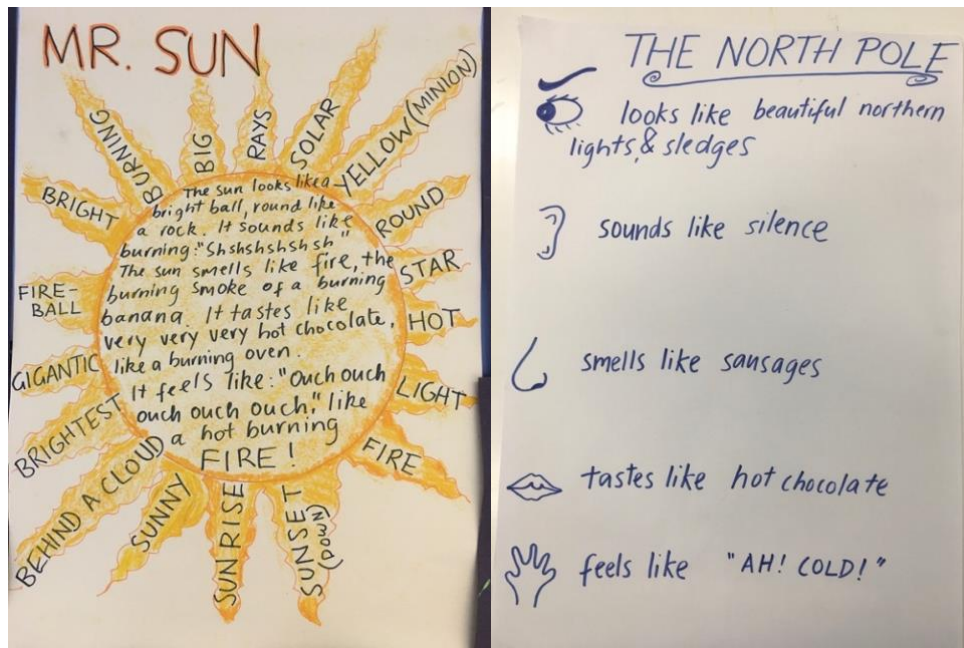*It feels like, "ouch ouch ouch ouch ouch!", like a hot burning FIRE!*

Figure 4: Five senses poems by preschool poets

In building the poetry base, we added one block (one learning object) at a time. As new poems were composed, we noticed the current learning object (sensory input) as well as evidence of previous learning objects (comparison, lists). Mr. Sun also served as an example of visual poetry.

In the collaborative poem 'Hello-Goodbye', we imagined we were rocketing into space, and leaving planet earth behind. The 'hello' lines referenced something in outer space, while the 'Goodbye' lines referenced the earth, our home.

> *Hello-Goodbye Space Poem, by preschool poets*
>
> *We are blasting into space, the earth is getting small.*
> *Goodbye earthlings, mum and dad and baby.*
> *Hello (maybe) aliens. Good morning, moon.*
> *Goodbye chickens, zebras, all the animals.*
> *Hello Mars, Saturn, Sun, Jupiter.*
> *Goodbye Mother Nature.*
> *Hello new planets and moons.*
> *Goodbye to where we live. Hello other worlds.*
> *Ahh! black hole!*
> *Goodbye to my little sister [. . .] and all my family.*
> *Hello . . . is it nothing? No!*
> *Hello ice-and-rock rings of Saturn.*

Learning outcomes for this phase: description, spatial qualities, language of the senses, sound poetry, lists, interaction and collaboration.

Visual poetry, sometimes called concrete poetry or shape poetry, has connections to graphic art and typographical experimentation that plays with spatial arrangement. Hollander (1981, 31) defines concrete poetry as "unique drawn, printed, or assembled representations of patterned inscription, punning rebus etc". Because the visual properties take precedence over the musical, syntactic, and semantic aspects, a concrete poem can not always be read aloud the way a more conventional poem can be. However, we found that by combining concrete poetry with poetic techniques such as rhyme, it was possible to generate visual poetry that was also pleasing to the ear, such as the poem, 'Instead of making smashed potato, make a smashed tomato' (Figure 5).
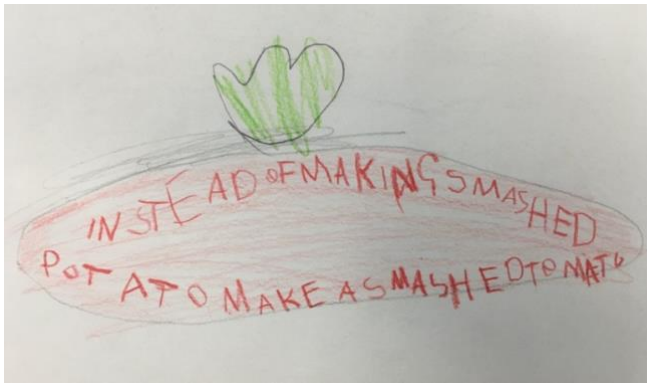

Figure 5: Visual poem: Instead of making smashed potato, make a smashed tomato.

The children were invited to draw a large shape or outline of an object that they could then make up a poem about. Some drew a diamond, a heart, a rainbow, mountains, a tomato. This time the children were not constrained by any rule governing how the lines should begin. The only constraint was that the shape or object was the topic. In retrospect, I realised that insufficient guidance was given, and that more children would have benefited from extra structure in this exercise.

Towards the end of the project, I surprised the children by dressing up as the French poet, Guillaume Apollinaire, and indulging in some role play. While in character, we talked about some of their poetry that was displayed on the wall, and the children presented their group book reports. Apollinaire was a flamboyant guest whose presence caused great excitement. When I later returned to the classroom as myself, the children recounted to me their time with Apollinaire, and many of them continued to suspend their disbelief, while others maintained that the man with the French accent and painted moustache was, of course, Nick. Perhaps due to his hat and cape, others insisted Apollinaire was a pirate, not a poet. This led to a interesting discussion regarding the differences and similarities between the two vocations.

Desired learning outcomes: participation in visual poetry exercise, children are encouraged to playful writing and reading, participation and engagement with cultural traditions.

4.3   Results

The results were observed, documented, and analysed, with reference to:

- *levels of participation, collaboration, and interaction* in activities that introduced the inclinations of poetic language and range of poetic forms.
- the *products* of children's poetic endeavours.

Participation and the role of the teacher

Fifteen out of a planned twenty poetry ideas and concepts were covered. Every child in the group participated in each phase of the project, and every child produced poetry, individually and collaboratively. Naturally, some children were more active than others. Some showed a passing interest in certain poetry ideas, but were more excited by other ideas. This may have depended on the complexity of a given activity and the learner's interests, strengths, and personal preferences.

Whole-group collaborative exercises were undertaken as we sat together on the carpet, in a circle. This was the optimal formation in which to practice active listening and taking turns speaking. These group exercises generated keen interest, with many voices begging to be heard. We also used interactive turn-taking in the small group spoken poetry exercises. My experience was that, so long as the teacher was enthusiastic, had presented a clear and simple explanation including an example, then the children were rarely, if ever, stuck for something to say. In fact, I often felt as if I was directing traffic at a busy intersection of voices and ideas. Often one person's idea would spark someone else's imagination, as in the following example; each line is composed by a different child.

> *I wish I had wings, long as a rainbow, and that the stars were falling on me.*
> *I wish that angels were flying from the sky.*
> *I wish I was a superhero flying.*

As with any activity in ECEC based on children's choice, participation depends on inspiration. As Koch (1970) maintained, a poetry idea must be immediately interesting. But it wasn't just the idea, but the *way* it was presented and explained, including examples and reference to children's real life experience. A crucial ingredient in children's engagement was how enthusiastic I was as a guide. Many children had never tried poetry before. As their guide I had to gain their trust and confidence, in part by establishing a connection with them

throughout daily playschool life. I knew that if children were curious, enthusiastic, attentive, and thoughtful, they were more likely to enjoy poetry. I tried to model these attitudes.

Because poetry was framed as a fun and simple form of self-expression, the children maintained a high level of participation throughout the project. Varying the methods (small group/whole group, spoken/written) kept it fresh and fluid. This pluralization was noticeably helpful, as some children preferred spoken poetry, while others were more active in activities that involved writing. Every child in the group participated in the small group and whole group poem making. They could choose when they wanted to contribute, and thus they were inspired, rather than forced, to do so. Often, one child being motivated led to another becoming interested.

I anticipated that some children might be unmotivated or disruptive. Therefore, at the beginning of each activity I communicated my expectations for mutual respect, taking turns, self-regulation, and listening. On the rare occasions that a child was restless or distracting others, I judged whether it was in the best interests of the child and the group for me to offer a friendly reminder to stay on task, or whether it was better to ignore the behaviour.

It was important to accept whatever the children came up with, and not to change their words, especially while transcribing their spoken poetry. I would repeat their lines to them as I transcribed, to check it was correct, and give them an opportunity to rephrase or refigure the line in question. A few times the children corrected a mistaken ordering of words. My intuition was that by asking, "Did I hear it right?", I was drawing attention to syntax as an aspect of poetic craft. Coleridge (1836, 248) may have described poetry as "the most proper words in their proper places", but what constituted the right words and the right order was determined by the children, not Coleridge. The only exception to the rule of accepting whatever the children composed occurred when a child spoke about death in a way that made other children uncomfortable. In this case, the child was asked if he would like to make up a poem that didn't scare his friends, and he happily obliged.

The children had input into which poems they would like to present to their peers, parents, and other teachers. In the case of the Christmas concert poems, this was negotiated with the teachers, in order for the final product to have thematic coherence.

Products of children's poetry

The poems that children produced can be considered in light of the project aim, for children to craft, voice, and write poems, individually and collaboratively.

As Gardner (1990, x) notes, the poetic work that children produce may be of a technically indifferent quality, although some will stand out for its imaginative originality. Subjectively

speaking, I found this to be the case. As Koch (1970) insisted, children are very capable of making up poems. Children's poems may vary in their verbal complexity and imaginative originality, but as expressions of the child's perspective, ideas, and sense of self, they are always valuable.

Some poems expressed fears or longings.

> *I had a nightmare. I was in a desert, alone./ I saw 15 scorpions bigger than me./ I was as small as an ant./ Then everything changed.*
> *I wish my little sister was not so mean, scratching me.*
> *I had a dream there was a spider./ It had one thousand five hundred and ninety-nine legs./ It had very sharp teeth and it took me.*

Some poems displayed unpredictable, uncanny effects.

> *I wish that one of my Mummy's socks had a hole in it / So I could make a dress for my doll.*
> *I wish I had a new baby and my own big bouncy ball./ I wish I had my own magic deer, like Santa has.*
> *If I were snow I'd explode and be snowdrops falling from the sky.*

Others spoke with an articulate facility for words:

> *If I were snow I would float down from the sky/ Then I would lightly fall on the ground/ and be happy being frozen.*

Note the adverb, 'lightly' before 'fall' at the mid-point of this two-line poem, a simple and satisfying whole with a beginning, middle, and end.

As I transcribed the spoken poetry I arranged it in lines. When I typed or printed the poems the children were introduced to the concept of lineation: that poems can have a structure that includes lines, couplets, stanzas, and so on. One activity (Figure 6) involved printing out the participant's lines and having them copy it out and add an illustration.
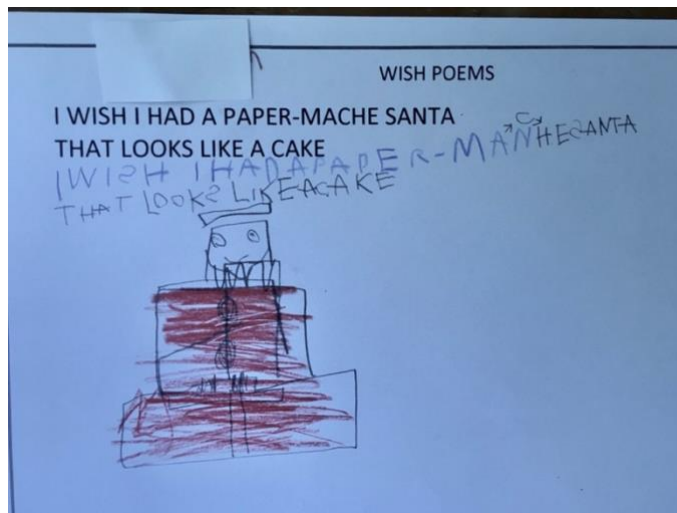
Figure 6: Guided writing

The activities were differentiated so that everyone could succeed. This involved adjusting the level of complexity, so that each child could work at the threshold of their developing ability. If a task was overly difficult, the level of complexity and teacher support was adjusted to suit the individual. One case in point was the exercise on visual poetry. While sixteen children began the exercise, only four children completed a shape poem. The poem, Mountains (Figure 7) began with a drawing, was followed by a child's verbal poem as seen here transcribed by the teacher. The child began to write the poem down, but decided to have a break. The poem remained unfinished.
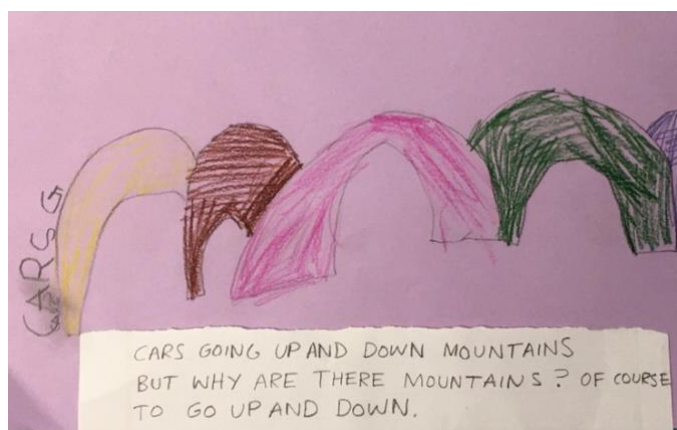

Figure 7: Mountains, unfinished shape poem

It became increasingly obvious that the various elements and inclinations of poetic language were operating in simultaneous and subtle ways. For example, sound poetry was found inside shape poetry, as well as in the five senses poems; lists were also found inside shape poetry; comparison and simile were found in almost every poetic attempt. This last observation

points to the role of comparison and simile as a fundamental and easily graspable aspect of poetry that children can employ.

One project aim was for children to reflect upon their own poetry and the poetry of others. The results of this aim resist quantification because they were the ephemeral conversations and interactions that occurred in the act of composition. Poetry elicits responses: it can move us emotionally, it can make it think, make us laugh, and look at the world differently. These are forms of reflection that find expression in verbal and non-verbal forms. Reflection also took the form of influence and inspiration, with children responding to one poem by making another. As I reflected on my appreciation of the poetry being produced, it served as a model for the reception of others' artworks.

When one of the children commented about the list poems, "It sounds better when it's bigger!", he had discovered two of the keys to a good list poem: that it shouldn't be too short, and that the musical quality of the words is more noticeable as more words are added.

I made it a habit to read their poetry to them, in small groups and in the whole group, during circle time and 'relaxation'— routine times of the day when the group sits together to discuss, collaborate, relax, or energize. Some questions that I asked to promote reflection among the children included: What do you like about this poem? How does this poem want you to feel? What's your favourite line, and why? Using de Bono's (1986) Six Thinking Hats as a framework for questions made the poetry activities different from what children were used to, because they were guided to reflect on and interact with the text on different levels.

Although I recorded some insightful reflections in the research diary, this was usually done at the end of each lesson evaluation, and not in real time. In the future, I would attempt to record these encounters in full, so that the depth and breadth of children's responses could be better investigated.

Spoken poetry and speech production skills

Speech production skills were practiced throughout the project, both informally, and in performance. In trying to pronounce tongue-twisters, the children were challenged with vocalising clustered syllables and vowels. Saying tongue-twisters is one of the few instances where stumbling over words can be fun, an exercise in which there is a clearly defined goal (pronounce it correctly) and immediate feedback on your progress. The comparison activity (weeks 3-4) was also an informal exercise using spoken poetry.

The multi-media resources of the working life partner (ICEC) made it possible to film and edit the children performing their poems. This was not part of the original plan, but it led to outcomes consistent with the National Core Curriculum for ICEC (2018, 48), such as media

education, in which "children are familiarised with different media and producing media content is experimented with playfully in safe environments". This was one of the main adjustments made in order to seize an opportunity and add something to the project. Other adjustments involved simplifying and differentiating content and teaching methods.

Ongoing evaluation and adjustments

Early in the project it was apparent that it would be difficult to cover every learning object, due to the fact that some activities could not be covered in a single session, but required a number of days. There were also other ongoing classroom projects and curriculum activities. The teachers provided flexibility and as many opportunities as possible for me to undertake poetry activities, but still, there were time constraints. It was difficult to predict how much time to allow for each poetry idea. After an idea was introduced, the children usually had about a week to participate in small group or one-on-one guidance to compose poems. I would say something along the lines of, "I'll be at this table if anyone wants to work on their shape poem". Poetry was always one choice among many. Therefore, the main adjustment was to limit the number of learning objects to what I considered to be the core building blocks of the poetry base as seen in the timetable of poetry activities (Table 3).

When it was time to move onto a new learning object, I was keenly aware of any missed opportunities. When our work on list poems was finished, I regretted not having suggested to a certain child that she make a poem that contained the name of a capital city in each line. She had memorised many of the world's capital cities, and I thought, in retrospect, that she could have made a list poem by drawing on this knowledge.

More often than not, when composing stories or other texts, children produce short works. A poem is especially suited to being a short text marked by concision. Whereas a story generally has a beginning, middle, and end, poetry is suited to the fragment, the epiphany, the fanciful, and has no obligation to narrative. Therefore, one result of the project was that whatever the children produced - a single line of poetry, a stanza, a short monologue - could be considered *a whole in itself*.

I observed that the responses that children's poetry elicited from the teachers was of great importance to the children. Treating the children's poetry as valuable, appreciating and praising their efforts at every step, inspired the children, and they began to see themselves as potential poets in a community of practice.

Negotiating Uncertainty

The project was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, which created challenges for the project and daycare operations as a whole. As with any learning project in ECEC, poetry had

to make allowances for more urgent needs related to children's interests and wellbeing. In addition to looking after the immediate needs of the children, the practicing teacher's work involves maintaining the work space, as well as planning and delivering lessons and activities across all curriculum areas. It was found that the multiform responsibilities of the learner teacher diminished the potential effectiveness of the development task. Although there was enough time for whole group activities, there was insufficient time for small group and one-on-one support. As noted, most of the learning objects were covered, but due to time constraints, not all. Following from this insight, a case could be made for specialist art pedagogues using poetry in daycares.

There are, of course, language barriers in the ongoing task of meaning-making in a language immersion classroom. With the exception of a single bilingual child (English-Finnish) all the children have a mother tongue other than English. Participants included children with Indian (Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Kannada), Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Malay and Finnish parentage. With this in mind, the literature used had to contain a suitable mix of familiar and unfamiliar vocabulary.

A Guidebook: The Poetic Teacher

The lesson plans were refined and collected in a guidebook, *The Poetic Teacher: A guide to making poems in the early years* (Powell, 2021). A PDF version has been sent to the working life partner to distribute to its teachers. Continued efforts are underway to edit and improve this guidebook, before uploading it to the internet and self-publishing physical copies to distribute to other daycare providers in Finland and abroad. A sample lesson overview (Appendix 2) shows the general structure of each suggested activity, and includes a short description, learning object, game/strategy/device, ways to 'make it heard' and 'make it visible', illustrative examples, and pictograms that indicate whether it is a spoken or a written poetry activity, or both.

4.4   Ethical Review

General Ethical Considerations

Research ethics, according to Grønmo (2020, 66), refer to the "researcher's rights and duties in relation to individuals, groups, and society at large". The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) oversees the responsible conduct of research. TENK (2012) outlines the ethical requirements of the responsible conduct of research, including integrity, honesty, meticulousness, and accuracy.

An ethical review is an advance evaluation of a research plan, with reference to ethical practices of the particular field. The ethical review is concerned with preventing any harm

that the project or its results might cause to participants. It was necessary to undertake an ethical review, in order to ensure that the methods and practices used were of a rigorous ethical standard, based on guidelines of research ethics, and principles of high-quality early childhood research.

It was necessary to obtain permission from the playschool unit manager for the project to go ahead. After I presented my thesis plan, a Laurea Thesis Agreement was signed together with the manager of the working life organisation (Appendix 1), outlining the aims and methods of the project.

Because the thesis draws on previous research and theoretical writings, it utilizes correct academic referencing techniques in order to meet the ethical requirement of *honesty* and never plagiarizing. In defining the ethical norm of originality, Grønmo (2020) cites the "duty of contributing to new and innovative knowledge, insights and understanding". This thesis aims to expand the field of children's poetry pedagogy, while at the same acknowledging my limitations by refraining from excess speculation.

This project aimed to be well designed and transparent. The actions taken are justified with reference to theoretical and ethical considerations. The implementation section outlines the chronological steps required to duplicate the project. The research is purposeful because it addresses a developmental need, specified by the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre.

Protecting the rights of personnel

The personnel who took part in the project were informed about the purpose and design of the project, and their involvement in it. This included two managers, two teachers, and one teaching assistant. In regular conversations with my workplace supervisors I updated them on the progress of the project and the purpose of individual lessons and activities.

When I requested personnel's participation in a final evaluation questionnaire, they were informed of the purpose of the questionnaire: evaluation of the project as a means of further development. Respondents were informed that their feedback would be anonymous, and that they would not be identified by name in the thesis or any related publication. The purpose of the questionnaire was linked to a further ethical consideration: striving to promote social good through further development.

Protecting the rights of children

Because I undertook this project in my capacity as a student, I was never alone with the children. Every activity occurred with the supervision of a qualified workplace employee.

I acquainted myself with the principles linked with the handling of personal information and data protection and the instructions from the university. Storage and usage rights of the materials for my thesis have been agreed upon in a manner accepted by all parties. Via email, I sought permission from the parents to reproduce text and images of children's poetry, informing them that any work included would remain anonymous. These permissions were processed by my workplace supervisor and subsequently brought to my attention. I sought children's permission before making any written documentation of their spoken poetry, asking: "Is it okay if I write down your poem?"

In the publication of the final thesis, there was a tension between respect for children's unpublished intellectual property, and the need for anonymity. It was agreed with the organisation to respect the anonymity of the participants. Therefore, in the thesis and connected publication, authorship is not attributed. However, the original artworks and poetry remain the property of the children. Whenever possible, children retained physical possession of their artwork throughout the project, and were free to store and transport it as they wished. At the conclusion of the project, all artworks and poetic products were returned to the children.

I respected children's participatory rights by consulting them at every step, listening to their views, and respecting their wishes. Participation was always optional, and no one was obliged to begin or continue an activity if he or she preferred not to.

5   Evaluation

The implementation of the project is considered on several levels. The success of the project is evaluated relative to standards of quality and the specific project aims, and based on feedback from the children who participated, the working life partner (ICEC teachers and managers), and my own self-evaluation of the project and of my professional learning. In line with Roberts-Holmes' (2018) description of reliable analysis and evaluation, certain themes and issues are induced from the data (grounded approach) while other topics are deduced from the literature and brought to bear on the feedback. Themes of the evaluation have been generated through data reduction, and then displayed and discussed.

Feedback from children

A Mosaic approach (Clark, 2017) was employed to facilitate children's feedback opportunities, including group discussions and encounters with individual students, as well as feedback in the form of children's drawings and photographs of their poems.

The interview process is described by Kyrönlampi and Määttä (2013) as an adult-centred process. Therefore the feedback was gathered during group circle times, during poetry activities, and in reflection during one-on-one guided discovery. Children's feedback and reflections were documented in a notebook, and later stored and catalogued on computer.

I framed feedback opportunities with questions adapted from the Highland Literacy (no date) online resource: *Using the Six Hats to Respond to Literature*, which is based on de Bono's (1985) *Six Thinking Hats*. In addition to talking about the poems themselves, we explored the *process* of making them, with questions such as:

- What was the difference between how we made this poem, and how we made that poem? How are these poems different from the other poems we have made? (white hat: information)
- How did you feel while making these poems? What did you like/dislike about making these poems? (red hat: feelings)
- What worked well in the way we did this? Who wants to say something that really worked well when we made poems in this way? (yellow hat: good points)
- What problems did we have doing it this way? Was it too hard/too easy? If so, why? (black hat: problems)
- What could have been better? (green hat: new ideas)

When asked to respond at the level of feelings, the children responded that it was "fun", "exciting", and the majority indicated they would like to make more poems in the future. One participant expressed that he didn't enjoy practicing his poem so much for the Christmas concert, that he found the rehearsals "boring". From these remarks we can conclude that the *process* of preparing any playschool production should not involve excess tedium for the child.

As the project progressed, children demonstrated greater familiarity with the language of poetry. Some children were able to compare and contrast the various poems they had made. Some could identify techniques of description, such as comparison, metaphor, and simile.

Because the activities were optional, the children's participation and interaction can be considered an indirect source of feedback. The children expressed interest in the activities and participated of their own volition.

The best feedback came when children, unbidden, would approach me to help them make up poems. On a number of occasions, this subsequently inspired their friends to do the same. This indicates the benefits of optional participation and teacher availability.

When individual children found an activity quite challenging, they responded by either: asking for help from a teacher or a friend, or else indicating that they would prefer not to continue,

and would rather go and play. Children expressed that it was the tasks that involved writing that were the most exhausting.

When asked to draw a picture of something they enjoyed about the project, six children drew guitars. My experience is that poetry and music are symbiotic arts and this is something I tried to instantiate in our activities. From the point of view of the children, the project has succeeded in bringing the arts together in a satisfying way. One drawing (Figure 8) featured the group poem, Mr. Sun. Another featured many of the colours, shapes, and sounds that we explored through poetry.

Figure 8: drawn reflections on poetry project

At the end of the project children had greater familiarity with the linguistic skills and inclinations of the poetry language than they had beforehand. We know this because we have documented what they can now do. They demonstrated that they can make comparisons, rhymes; they can use personification, they can utilize the musicality of words, and so on.

Through exposure and practice, they are more likely to recognise poetry when they hear it and read it, and are therefore more likely to incorporate the characteristics of the the poetic language in their own poems.

The children didn't ask a lot of questions about *how* poetry works, and they were not asked to elucidate any metalinguistic theories of what is going on when they make poems. They learnt by doing it, and by having it read to them: an example of exploration followed by discovery. As evidenced by their participation and enthusiasm, the children embraced the project.

The project was a success from the children's point of view because it tapped into their lived, subjective experience, and it took their ideas and abilities seriously. They took ownership of their poems. When a collaborative poem was read out to them, they remembered who had composed individual lines. And when asked, 'Who came up with that line/image? they always

remembered. At such times the children expressed a palpable sense of pride and accomplishment in their work.

Feedback from working life partner

Informal feedback throughout the project enabled me to finetune the methods and activities. Verbal feedback from the ICEC teachers and managers was positive throughout, and they encouraged and trusted me to implement the project with the methods and practices that were agreed upon beforehand. Because there were other learning projects going on at the same time, and I had responsibilities other than poetry, one of the teachers' main points of feedback to me was: make sure I ask for enough time in which to implement the activities.

To ascertain the relative success of the project, and to discover what the supervising teachers learned, I asked them to evaluate the activity. I sent a questionnaire via Google Forms to the staff members who had helped at various stages of the project. I received two responses. When asked - Did the project expand your ideas and assumptions about children's poetic art? If so, how? - the teachers responded:

> *Definitely, I consider that the project was very innovative, educational and fun, the activities teach all of us that making poetry does not have to be difficult, but on the contrary, it is fun and a simple activity.*
>
> *I came to see that poetry can be used as another creative medium that I have under-utilised in the past. It is particularly useful in developing language awareness and comprehension. It also encourages opportunities to express own work directly in front of others.*

Here are two responses to the question, 'How would you describe the teaching methods used?':

"[. . .] teaching methods were appropriate and efficient. It was according to the needs of the students, he was able to identify the interests of the children and from that [. . .] planned and carried out fun and original activities."

"Teaching methods were fun, consistent, clear and engaging."

Table 4 records the responses to sixteen statements. Respondents indicated on a linear scale whether the project had succeeded in meeting standards of quality outlined by the Act on ECEC (2018) and the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018).

Statement for evaluation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The project "promote(d) the holistic growth, development, health and wellbeing of every child according to the child's age and development" (Act on ECEC, 2018, 2).					2
2. The project "support(ed) the conditions for the child's learning and promoted lifelong learning and the implementation of equality in education" (Act on ECEC, 2018, 2).					2
3. The project consisted of "versatile pedagogical activities based on the child's play, arts and cultural heritage, and enabled positive learning experiences" (Act on ECEC, 2018, 2).					2
4. The project "help(ed) children develop their capacity to understand and respect the general cultural heritage and each other's linguistic and cultural background" (Act on ECEC, 2018, 2).				1	1
5. The project "recognise(d) the child's need for individual support and provided the child with appropriate support" (Act on ECEC, 2018, 2).					2
6. The project "develop(ed) the child's interpersonal and interaction skills, and promoted the child's ability to act in a peer group" (Act on ECEC, 2018, 2).					2
7. Children "participate(d) in and influenced matters concerning them" (Act on ECEC, 2018, 2).					2
8. Interaction skills were practiced.					2
9. Language comprehension skills were practiced.					2
10. Speech production skills were practiced.					2

Statement for evaluation	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
11. Language use skills were practiced.					2
12. Activities developed linguistic memory and vocabulary.					2
13. Activities developed language awareness.					2
14. Children crafted, voiced, and wrote poems, individually and collaboratively.					2
15. Children reflected upon their own poetry and the poetry of others.					2
16. Children were introduced to the inclinations of poetic language and a range of poetic forms.					2

Table 4: Questionnaire responses

Statements 1-7 (Table 4) are aims taken from the Act on ECEC (2018). Respondents strongly agreed that this functional thesis achieved these aims related to children's development and support.

Statements 8-13 (Table 4) refer to the aims of the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018) learning area, 'Rich world of languages'. Both respondents strongly agreed that the project provided opportunities to practice and develop these skills that also comprise Gardner's (1983) conception of the linguistic intelligence.

While one respondent agreed that the project 'helped children develop their capacity to understand and respect the general cultural heritage and each other's linguistic and cultural background', they indicated there may have been room for improvement.

In evaluating statements 14-16 (Table 4), which refer to the specific aims of the project, both respondents strongly agreed that: children crafted, voiced, and wrote poems, individually and collaboratively; children reflected upon their own poetry and the poetry of others; and that, children were introduced to the inclinations of poetic language and a range of poetic forms.

According to the following graph (Figure 9), the project has inspired these early childhood educators to teach the art of poetry, and thus aid the development of the linguistic intelligence of young children.

Has the project inspired you to use poetry in the future?
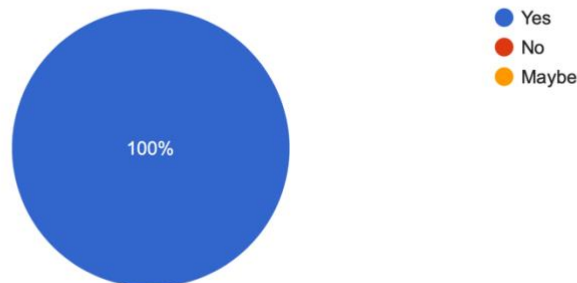
2 responses

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

100%

Figure 9: Responses on inspiration

In addition to the questionnaire responses, a written evaluation of the development project was written by one of the supervising teachers. This evaluation was co-signed by the daycare manager. The following quotes are from that evaluation.

> Nick planned to hold a project-based poetry club with the Year 1 (Pre-Primary) Group of children aged 6yrs. He used small group activities, utilized story, circle time and sessions to introduce and implement his plans. His ideas were based on the children's interests and in keeping with the topic of the week. The children were delighted to use their poems created with Nick in their Christmas concert. The poetry activities clearly sparked an interest in the children, it encouraged their writing and literacy skills and language development, for example some children started writing lists and others using descriptive language. Nick spoke about famous poets, he used music, books, props and dress up to keep his sessions fun and engaging.
>
> Nick developed and implemented lessons to promote and support the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development of the children daily. He used a wide range of materials, mediums, activities, and sessions. He demonstrated good knowledge of Children's development and needs and could make adaptions to suit the ability of a child or group.

Self-evaluation of the project

Although the start date was delayed one week due to Covid protocols, the project was completed within the designated time frame, between November 2020 and January 2021. The project was economical to implement, and conducted in my capacity as an unpaid intern on a work practice placement. The project was done in conjunction with normal daycare operations and required no additional expenditure from the working life partner, other than pencils and paper.

My impression is that, at the end of the project, the children could recognise poetry when they heard, read, or were making it. Their ability to do so had increased, along with their notion of what poetry could be.

Child-centeredness required flexibility. Poetry was enjoyable for the children because they could choose *when* to do it. In individual and small group work, this was a way for the children to set the agenda. The *timing* of whole group work was usually not negotiable because of daily routines. However, the *contents* of group activities were negotiated together with the children.

The poetry flowed better when I didn't have to do a lot a behaviour management. Communicating clear expectations for positive and responsible learning was a good idea, especially when delivered in a positive, succinct tone, so that we could quickly get on with the business of making art. Sometimes this involved ignoring low-level interruptions. On the whole, it appeared that the children were expressing a lot of joy, wonder, and humour during the activities, and this indicated to me that the general approach was working. Having to 'sit still' all the time would have been a barrier to learning and making poetry.

These proactive measures led to high levels of motivation and participation. Combining clear expectations for a positive learning environment, while at the same time recognising the child's need to move and be expressive, made this project different from the traditional teacher-centred model.

By facilitating and encouraging wordplay (especially in the list poem activity) we found a way for learners to help one another. They brainstormed and worked together as they would in any other kind of play. Working in small groups also provided a context for participants to inspire one another.

The area of the development project - poetry pedagogy in ECEC - has changed in comparison with the starting point because an overlooked and under-appreciated language art has been shown to combine pedagogical aims with children's desire to express themselves.

The activities and the results have been analysed in relation to earlier research and professional discussion. The results can be utilised and disseminated. The thesis is a public document that may be consulted by teachers or researchers in Finland or abroad. Publication of a teacher's guidebook, *The Poetic Teacher* (Powell, 2021), aims to provide a pedagogical tool for ECEC personnel. Although this is still a work in progress, it has the potential to be expanded and submitted to educational publishers.

The objectives of the project have been achieved. Versatile poetry activities have made a broad contribution toward meeting the objectives of the different learning areas, and thus accomplishing many of the aims of the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018).

Problems in implementation and suggested measures

For the most part it was possible to find viable, practical solutions to problems that were either anticipated or observed. Excerpts and insights from my research diary and individual lesson evaluations illuminate some of these issues.

> *Some activities are taking a lot longer than I thought, requiring more one-on-one support.*

> *One teacher is not always enough. Remember to delegate or ask for help from the other teachers when necessary . . . make clear to the other teachers what you hope the kids learn, and what kind of support they can give. Don't try to do it all on your own.*

> *To record children's reflections in real time, and in a more systematic way, would require the involvement of another teacher.*

One theme that can be induced from the feedback is the potential for the project to better guide children to understand and respect each other's linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Measures could be taken, such as selecting a more culturally and linguistically diverse range of poetry to read to the children and adapted into new poetry ideas. Children might enjoy composing bilingual poems which express their unique linguistic identities.

Another of the project aims could have been explored more thoroughly: 'Poetry will be used to explore a sense of self and community, and to explore and interact with our environment'. The lessons related to this goal were not implemented in the project, however the lesson plans are included in the guidebook.

Self-evaluation of professional learning

The thesis and project have contributed to my professional development. I have reflected on the following evaluation from the working life partner:

> Nick demonstrated excellent communications skills. He was able to clearly communicate his ideas and thoughts in team meetings and planning sessions. He interacted well with colleagues and children alike. His guided activities were interesting and clearly explained. He demonstrated good group control and behaviour management skills, the children responded well and were engaged throughout their activities.

In conducting a functional thesis I have engaged in ongoing reflection of my teaching practice. This systematic observation and reflection on the effectiveness of methods used enabled me to make necessary adjustments.

Although the Mosaic approach (Clark, 2017) to gathering children's feedback made this project different from a traditional, adult-centred one, there were some missed opportunities that would have made the project even more inclusive and child-directed.

This project has given me a chance to develop interpersonal skills and precious inner resources. Teaching is sometimes called a 'helping profession' that nowadays comprises part of the 'essential workforce'. Patience, resilience, good physical and mental health are necessary to a sustaining one's work in ECEC. I believe that partaking in arts education is conducive not only to children's development, but also to the enjoyment of the teacher's vocation.

This project has been an integration of my work as a teacher and as a poet. It has not always been seamless, but it has enriched both practices.

6   Discussion

Poetry is a fringe art. As such, it is not surprising that it's possibilities have been overlooked by educators. And yet, we are creatures of language and languages. In my experience, children who can already speak more than one language can also speak the language of poetry. The pedagogy explored within *The Poetry of Early Childhood* can be borrowed and adapted to help children expand their poetry making skills. Poetry may continue to have a reputation as obscure, but this project has demonstrated that making poetry with children does not have to be difficult. It does, however, require guidance, the right pedagogical approach, as well as time and effort. Kenneth Koch's ideas are still highly relevant and applicable to making linguistic art with children, and when differentiated appropriately, can be applied to ESL early years settings, especially with preschool age children who have been in language immersion daycare for a few years already, and who are making their first forays into written texts.

FINEEC (2019, 14) wants ECEC centres to "pay attention to the use of the entire staff's competences in artistic activities". The autonomy granted to teachers by the flexibility of the curriculum needs to be accompanied by regular professional development opportunities. The possibilities for children's art and multiliteracy education are manifold, but they are contingent on professional development.

The future of children's art practices - whether linguistic or visual - requires a shift from schematic art (in which all products are derived from a template and look basically the same) toward more open-ended forms that express children's unique profile of intelligences and identities.

There are many international daycare centres in Finland, and many provide compulsory pre-primary education for 6-year-olds. For these organisations, this thesis is an example of how to develop language arts pedagogy.

Further efforts can be made to take aspects of contemporary poetry into early years education, such as eco-poetics in exploring issues of sustainability and environmental ethics. The semantic and syntactic experiments of the so-called L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, as well as the surrealists, can be adapted in children's playful writing.

When we think of the limits of children's poetry, we can compare the making of poems to the practice of drawing. In both instances, further development requires extending the complexity of the activities. Many children stop drawing altogether because they feel they have reached the uppermost limit of their talents. But art does not depend on talent alone. It requires what Ericsson (2016,17) has called "purposeful practice". If children are only ever exposed to nursery rhymes, they will have a limited idea of the possibilities of poetry, and they are unlikely to progress very far, and at some point they will simply lose interest. This is unfortunate because, in the words of Wallace Stevens (1957, 157): "To give a sense of the freshness or vividness of life is a valid purpose for poetry".

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8   Figures

9   Tables

10   Appendices

Appendix 1: Thesis Agreement

*Concrete campus-specific instructions related to the thesis agreement are added
at the beginning of this agreement.*

Student(s): Nicholas Powell	

Project this thesis is part of:
'A Month of Poetry': poetry programme for pre-school aged children.
'The Poetic Teacher': Poetry teaching pedagogy guidebook for educators

Topic and purpose of thesis:

Poetry in support the developing linguistic intelligence.

The thesis aims to inspire early childhood educators to teach the art of poetry.

Connection between thesis and project goals:
The project aims to introduce children to the inclinations of poetic language, and a range of poetic forms. The project aims for children to craft, voice, and write poems, individually and collaboratively; as well as to reflect upon their own poetry and the poetry of others.

Key concepts and preliminary frame of reference of thesis:
Poetry in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).
Linguistic development. Poetry pedagogy of Kenneth Koch. Guided discovery learning.

Central sources:
Finnish Act on ECEC (2018), National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2018). Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) (1983).

Methods used in thesis:
Practitioner Action Research. Guided discovery teaching methods. Documented observation. Evaluation questionaire.

Preliminary title of thesis: The Poetry of Early Childhood

Role of working life partner in thesis (enables the implementation of the thesis e.g. photocopies, mailing, facilities and other material issues):
Supervision in the implementation phase of the project. Allocates time and resources for project activities.

Publication and dissemination of results in working life:
Published thesis will be a public document.
The student will fund and organise the publication and disemmination of the accompanying guidebook for teachers.
Participants (children and personnel) shall remain anonymous.

Appendices 1: Thesis Agreement

LAUREA | Yhdessä enemmän

Thesis agreement in the field of
Social Services, Health and Sports

2 (2)

**Student's declaration that he/she
agrees to comply with the principles of research ethics in the thesis:**

*I am aware that the obligation to secrecy is applied to theses completed by students of Social
Services and Health, as provided in e.g. the Act on the Status and Rights of Social Welfare Clients
(Laki sosiaalihuollon asiakkaan asemasta ja oikeuksista 812/2000, Section 15) and the Act on
Health Care Professionals (Laki terveydenhuollon ammattihenkilöistä 559/1994, Section 17). I may
not reveal to a third party any information about a private person or family that I have learned
on the basis of the thesis. I agree to keep confidential any information about individual persons
that I have learned in connection with information acquisition. The obligation to maintain secrecy
shall continue after the studies have ended.*

*I shall observe confidentiality and truthfulness in acquiring information and handling material. I
shall pay special attention to ensure that the thesis will not cause any harm to persons who
participate in it. I shall comply with Laurea's guidelines for research ethics in my activities.*

Agreements on supervision:

Signatures

	Date	Place	Signature
Student(s):			Nicholas Powell
	09.11.2020	Espoo	Nicholas Powell
Supervisor(s):			
	maria.normann@laurea.fi		riikka.kanervo@laurea.fi
Workplace representative(s):			
	09.11.2020	Espoo	Marja Kempainen

One copy of this agreement will be given to each party (student, supervisor, workplace representative) and one
copy will be stored in the project's work space in Optima.
Concrete campus-specific information can be added according to the thesis process.

Appendix 2: 'Poetic Teacher' lesson plan

7. Lists

One way children practice writing is by making lists. We began making list poems in our classroom quite spontaneously. One boy suggested that we write something about cars, and he began to list as many car makes as he could. His list sounded musical, especially when read a bit faster, and when certain words were moved around in order to rhyme or contrast with others.

A list poem can have have a short introduction and conclusion, or it can have a title followed by a straight list. Alternatively, each line could reference one item from a list, e.g. the name of a country, a cartoon character, the name of a tree. The way the words are ordered, and hence the relationships between them, is what gives these poems depth, and even humour.

Learning object: Extrapolation, dilation, word order, phonics, handwriting, humor.

Game/strategy/device: What do you want to make a list of? Be patient and make a big list. Work in pairs or small groups.

Make it visible: Write it large and put it on the wall or in the window.

Make it heard: At circle time, compose an impromptu list poem. Choose one child to select the topic. Go around the circle, or raise hands when you have a word. Record or transcribe the results. Do this often.
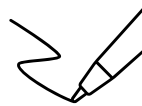
*Illustrative example*s:

from *Into the Dusk-Charged Air*, by John Ashbery: a river list poem.

The Mississippi

Is one of the world's oldest rivers, like the Amazon.

It has the Missouri for a tributory.

The Harlem flows amid factories

And buildings. The Nelson is in Canada,

Flowing.

§

From *Cars I Know*, by a preschool poet:
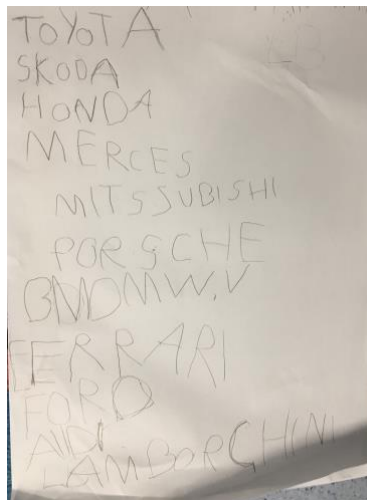

Toyota, Skoda, Honda

Mercedes, Mitsubishi

BMW, VW

Ferrari, Ford

Audi, Lamborghini

Figure 1: Cars I Know, a list poem