

Utah State University

DigitalCommons@USU

All Graduate Theses and Dissertations

Graduate Studies

5-1968

A Study of the Amount and Quality of Poetry Read on the Primary Grade Level in Selected Utah School Districts

Betty Farnsworth Spencer
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Spencer, Betty Farnsworth, "A Study of the Amount and Quality of Poetry Read on the Primary Grade Level in Selected Utah School Districts" (1968). *All Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. 2964.

<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/2964>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.



A STUDY OF THE AMOUNT AND QUALITY OF POETRY READ
ON THE PRIMARY GRADE LEVEL IN SELECTED
UTAH SCHOOL DISTRICTS

by

Betty Farnsworth Spencer

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Speech

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

1968

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge, with sincere appreciation, the hours spent by the members of my committee in the guidance given in the preparation of this thesis. To Miss Thornley, chairman, until her unexpected death, I owe a debt of gratitude I shall never be able to repay. To Professor Farrell Black, who later assumed the chairmanship and has been so understanding and helpful with wise counsel and encouragement throughout all the phases of this study, I am most grateful. To Dr. Eldon Drake and Assistant Professor Ron Ross, I express my thanks for their encouragement and cooperation.

Betty Farnsworth Spencer

DEDICATION

To my mother who through all her life taught me, by example, the value of children's poetry in the lives of children.

and

To Miss Gwendella Thornley whose love, consideration, and unlimited reservoir of knowledge were so helpful and inspired me to pursue further education in this field of children's poetry that we both loved and shared.

and

To my children Jay, Bob, and Carol and their families who were my constant inspiration and challenge.

THE POETRY OF LIFE

Children are the poetry of life, the lyric expression of God's love. Like a poem they are conceived in the rhythm of all beginnings--the rhythm of life.

They are His song. His creative blessing given to us to enjoy, to guide and to love. Like a poem each is complete in itself and each must be seen, heard, and understood to be appreciated.

A poem grows and unfolds according to the understanding of its audience. A child's hidden beauty is ours to discover, to guide into channels designated by inborn qualities.

In children we find the essence of joy, delight and wonder. A child's smile holds all these things and more. It is like a caress from the loving hand of God. (Herriges, 1966, p. 9)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
DEDICATION	iii
THE POETRY OF LIFE	iv
ABSTRACT	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
The Problem	1
Significance of the Problem	1
Hypothesis and Plan of Procedure	2
What is Poetry?	2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE	5
Significance of Poetry in the Grade School Curriculum	5
The Teacher's Educational Responsibility in Relation to Oral Reading of Good Poetry to Children	13
METHODS OF PROCEDURE, RESULTS, AND DISCUSSION	22
CONCLUSION	30
Subjects or Topics for Further Study	31
LITERATURE CITED	32
APPENDIX	35
VITA	39

ABSTRACT

A Study of the Amount and Quality of Poetry Read
On the Primary Grade Level in Selected
Utah School Districts

by

Betty F. Spencer, Master of Science

Utah State University, 1968

Major Professor: Professor Farrell J. Black

Department: Speech

The primary grade teachers of the Cache, Logan, and Box Elder School Districts were used in this study. A questionnaire was developed that would be an effective measurement of the information needed to evaluate or substantiate the hypothesis which was: It is believed that less than 50 percent of the primary grade children have poetry read to them daily as part of the curriculum. Furthermore, it is believed that much of the poetry read does not meet the standards of "good poetry for children," as measured by experts in this field of learning.

The study revealed that only 11 percent of the children were read to daily. However, the majority of teachers were reading from approved literature for children.

(45 pages)

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

The general purpose of this study is to determine whether or not poetry is being read to children on the primary grade level, in Logan, Cache, and Box Elder School Districts of Utah, if so, the amount of time given to this aspect of the curriculum, and the quality of the poetry that is being read.

Significance of the Problem

In this fast moving age in the world's history when scientific development and knowledge seem to have surpassed man's ability to cope with his social environment, the resultant milieu of unhappiness, sordidness, and ugliness is bound to touch and influence the lives of our children. Many educators have felt that the influence of the teacher in exposing young children to the oral reading of poetry helped them to develop more acceptable behavior patterns, attitudes, concepts, standards, appreciations, and ideals; consequently this study was conceived.

The writer felt that if through this investigation some good could be accomplished in combating some of the dehumanizing influences it would be most worth while.

Hypothesis and Plan of Procedure

It is believed that less than 50 percent of the primary grade children have poetry read to them daily as part of the curriculum. Furthermore, it is believed that much of the poetry read does not meet the standards of "good poetry for children," as measured by experts in this field of learning.

A test of the hypothesis was conducted by a questionnaire which was sent to each of the teachers in the districts: Cache, Logan, and Box Elder. After the data were received from the districts, they were analyzed, summarized, and recommendations made.

What is Poetry?

These definitions are important to this study because they form the basis for most of the information gathered by the questionnaires sent to the districts.

Defining exactly what poetry is presents a nearly impossible task because it means different things to different people, but good poetry, as defined by experts in the field, contains many of the same elements and has been defined thusly.

1. "Poetry is the music of thought conveyed to us in the music of language" (Chatfield, 1963, p. 487).

2. "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds" (Shelley, 1963, p. 489).

3. "Poetry is something to make us wiser and better, by continually revealing those types of beauty and truth which God has set in all men's souls" (Bailey, 1963, p. 490).

4. "An uncomplicated record of experiences and, therefore should be readily and completely understandable" (Arnstein, 1963, p. 197; Brown, 1963, p. 193).

5. "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility" (Brown, 1963, p. 193).

6. "A complete poem is where emotion has found its thought and the thought has found the words" (Frost, 1963, p. 193).

7. "A poet is a man who sees unusual things and then describes them very accurately" (Read, 1956, p. 137).

8. "Poetry is the music of the soul; and above all, of great and feeling souls" (Brown, 1963, p. 193).

9. "Absolute poetry is the concrete and artistic expression of the human mind in emotional and rhythmical language" (Brown, 1963, p. 193).

10. "True poetry is more precious than gold. It makes us good and happy and hopeful, and the words sound like music. . . . Poetry is expression made perfect, the best thought in the best words" (Mills, 1945, p. 118).

Arbuthnot (1961) suggests that the criteria which makes for good quality are variety, musical quality, action, story interest, and humor.

Thornley (1962) sums up the recurring ideas presented in the definitions very well as follows:

The words of good poetry are singing words. They are warm, rich, melodious, delicate, strong and definite. They sing and dance. They make us see pictures, hear sounds, taste, smell, and feel. They create movement and action. They do things to our senses and our muscles as well as to our hearts and minds. It is this wonderful power of words, and the way in which poets put them together that makes good poetry. (Thornley, 1962, p. 1)

The following ideas seem to keep recurring over and over again:

Poetry makes you feel intensely, it surprises, delights and sings like music; it frequently contains a story element, contains sensory content, and in beautiful language gives you an arresting thought in rhythmic words.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Significance of Poetry in the Grade School Curriculum

In the paragraph concerning the significance of the problem proposed in this study it was stated that many educators and psychologists felt the importance of oral reading of poetry to be of significance in the curriculum of primary grade children. Let us consider the merits of some of their quotations.

I believe that poetry in childhood is essential to maturity. That is my theme sensory images, music magic, stillness and humor. Blakes' Songs of Innocence introduced me to poetry in kindergarten and made it forever clear to me how an adult can lead a child toward the most important discovery any one can make in his whole life: what he really is. What they look at, they see. What they imagine, they also see as the imagined, and each enriches the other. (Behn, 1966, p. 164)

In a deep sense poetry is a key to the understanding of life, and a means of adapting ourselves to the world. It helps us to understand the present in turns of what has gone before and to interpret modern ideas in the light of the unchanging truths of human behavior.

It lifts children out of the realms of the sordid, the ugly and places them in the environment of the good, the true, the beautiful. It gives them expression for their hopes and aspirations, joys and sorrows.

Too often the young student is not exposed to the pictures which the poet paints, or hear the songs that he sings or feel the emotions that his words convey.

If there is ever a time when these feelings can be felt and the love of poetry can be cultivated, it is during these impressionable years when the child's chief characteristic is the tremendous increase in both the scope and intensity of his emotional responses. It is, therefore, most important that at this time he should be introduced in a significant way to all that is good in poetry.

The fact that all students need increased power of self expression and the ability to get more from their own personal experiences and vicarious experiences through literature is reason enough to make poetry a living thing in their school experience. (Arbuthnot, 1964, pp. 210-213)

The above thoughts from Arbuthnot (1964), who has been recognized as a leader in the field of children's literature, suggests the importance of training the child in his most impressionable years to the values in good poetry.

It is a splendid thing to say something the world will never forget. . . . The liking for it should be as quick as the liking for sweet sounds and scents, the color of sunsets, or the thrill of splendid deeds. Poetry, better than all other means, expresses these delights. It can record them for us and bring them back to us as fresh as ever, and with the added magic of haunting words with a beauty of their own. Life has no greater enrichment than the love of poetry. (Mills, 1945, p. 67)

Wilder (1953) in speaking of the benefit derived from listening to her elders read aloud to her suggests, that because of the love and security that enveloped her as a result of listening, that was lasting in its influence, she was able to write in such a way that other children today could share those same emotions.

Francis (1960) writing on the subject, "Poetry as Disciplined Play," says:

There are rules in poetry to be learned and obeyed just as there are in sports. The man in the bleachers is, by empathy or sympathy pitching with the pitcher, batting with the batter and running with the runner. The reader of poetry, if he is fairly alive and awake is writing the poem with the poet. (Francis, 1960, pp. 42-43)

Observations of the foregoing quotations based on their content

lead one to once again conclude the significance of poetry in the grade school curriculum.

This conclusion is further emphasized by Herzberg in his book Adventures in Poetry when he reiterates the items so many poets and educators have stated which are: in good children's poetry we find it contains emotional appeal, uses the five senses, employs imagery, is rhythmical, suggests power of words, and conveys truth and beauty.

Poetry is after all a personal thing; its meaning to each human being is private. It invades the innermost thoughts; it clings to and bolsters the inner life. It is not something to be rationalized or explained. (Livingston, 1966, pp. 456-457)

In his article, "Poetry for Children" Behn says,

Some of the most poetic things I remember are classified these days under science when they should not be. For example, the way tadpoles in a mason jar change into frogs. It is fine for them to go on questioning and measuring and adding to our great treasure of knowledge, but stupid to think the only way of using the mind is in tracing out to nowhere each cobweb of cause and effect. All things, all persons too, slip away when grasped-- but held tenderly, lightly by love everything is still its own self and free but still ours forever. This is only a poetic intuition, not provable, not even a belief, but something I believe we all know if we do not think too hard about it. That life is not an equation, but is protean paradoxical, fluid a process, an adventure and wonderful as it is to children. What has the ubiquitous computer commanding us to think to do with the call of a dove, a litter of fragrant kittens born in a mint bed, with home, family, laughter, garden, music, mountains, work you enjoy? These are our own, not by deed or title, but because we love them. Reality is poetry transposed into words, or left in its native matrix of silence. Children taught me this, and so it is so. (Behn, 1966, pp. 163-175)

In an article entitled, "Where are We Going With Children's Poetry," Groff (1966) tells us that poetry should be introduced to children in an entirely incidental way since at present this high literary form

apparently holds the lowest priority of utility in the language program. A drastic reversal of direction in the use of poetry is called for. He suggests two things that might help facilitate a change. First, we should emphasize the few "new" poets who have pushed the art forward since Rachel Field and Walter de la Mare. The new poetry is found in the social realism of Gwendolyn Brooks, the unpretentious warmth of Eve Merriam, the exhaustive imagery of Mary O'Neil, the gentle persuasion of Harry Behn, and in the urbane versatility of James Reeves. Second, we should renew the teaching of poetry as such, so that an understanding of it can be used as the basis upon which to build trust and appreciation of poetry as children grow older. Finally, we need to encourage publishers to look for children's poetry where it naturally emerges.

Strong in "An Introduction to Child Study" says,

Children see things from a different point of view. They have purposes of their own. If an adult is to understand them, he must enter their world and see it through their curious eyes. Much of the adults' success in guiding children toward approved behavior depends on their making suggestions from the child's point of view. (Strong, 1961, pp. 174-184)

Many wonderful children's poets have seemingly been able to see life's experiences through a child's eyes and have expressed these feelings and experiences in a manner that appeals to children, thus encouraging children to identify themselves with or better understand many great truths that have been significant in affecting their lives for good and rising above the sordid and ugly in developing their potential and becoming worthwhile citizens.

Allen (1967) in a recent book entitled Adventures in Reading tells how a child experiencing a story or poem near to his feelings helps him to dare to reach out from the known to the adventurous unknown expressed thusly

When a child experiences a story (poem) near to his feelings, he discovers within himself different reactions to the same situation. He lives them out alone and then shares his very personal responses with his special friends, real or imaginary. The voices he hears within himself quicken his imagination, and literature becomes an engagement with life now and with life as it may become. It is this engagement that helps educate the sixth sense--imagination--and also prompts the child to exercise his personal creative power over his very existence. He dares to reach out beyond the comfortably known to the adventuresome unknown without some of the former fears and bewilderment that haunted him when he was unable to release himself from his preconceived existence. (Allen, 1967, pp. 733-734)

Arnstein (1962) corroborates this same learning situation with the following statement.

A good teacher is primarily concerned with the full flowering of personality. He knows the "ingredients" necessary for personality development: a climate which fosters freedom to explore, discover, and dream; opportunities to share emotions, thoughts, and ideas; skills which conserve rather than squander the creative powers of children. (Arnstein, 1962, p. 124)

Arbuthnot (1964) suggests an approach to children in exposing them to poetry, and again Arnstein (1962) tells us how to make poetry meaningful to children.

How can we help children grow up in poetry as successfully as music teachers help them grow up in music? . . . we should start where the children are . . . find for the child at each age level those rich treasures of authentic poetry that suit his emotional range, cultivate his ear for the more subtle music of verse, and give him fresh ideas that are the essence of an experience. (Arbuthnot, 1964, p. 164)

A good teacher believes that poetry encompasses the "ingredients" necessary for the fruition of personality. He not only believes this; he communicates it to children in many ways:

. . . Through awareness of the beauty and power of words. Rich and frequent experience with poetry will stimulate word collectors to greater effort.

. . . Through recognizing that feelings are as potent as facts: that feelings are facts. And in no aspect of the curriculum is there as rich a source of "feelings" as in poetry.

. . . Through stimulating children to find in the commonplace a spur to the imagination. Only a teacher who is alert to the magic in the first snowfall of the season or the eeriness of thick fog will find the opportunities to make the world of reality and the world of the imagination one world for the child.

One of the earmarks of authentic poetic expression is genuineness and a certain uniqueness: a child is speaking from himself from his own feeling and observation.

. . . Poetry can be meaningful to children. They have shown that there exists a natural affinity between them and poetry. If this is true, then it remains for us as teachers to provide the setting in which such an affinity may be discovered and enjoyed by the children. It rests with us to throw open the doors to provide the welcome and to play the gracious hosts offering to share the bounty of poetry with our willing guests. Let us never be the ones to erect barriers to poetry enjoyment. Let us never be among those who strip children of their wings, who give justification for the sorry question posed by one frustrated child:

The Canyon

Deep in the canyon all gray and green,
With a soft blue tint to the tops of the redwoods,
I would like so much to spread my wings,
And fly over you and listen to the roaring of the water.
Who took away my wings? (Arnstein, 1962, p. 124)

Enjoyment, exploration, and deeper understanding must all be part of childrens' experience with poetry if we are to build poetry-minded children.

Because poetry is an aural art like music, children should listen to it before they encounter it on the printed page. Poetry began as a spoken art; people listened to it, enjoyed it, and remembered it because rhyme and meter make it easier to recall than prose. So it should begin for children. Adults should read or speak it aloud and encourage the children to join in until, without even realizing it, they have memorized effortlessly dozens of poems which they can speak naturally and gaily. Saying or reading

poetry to children should continue all through their first twelve years. By the time they are eleven and twelve years old and competent readers they will explore poetry for themselves. (Arbuthnot, 1964, pp. 198-199)

If Arbuthnot's approach to poetry succeeds, children will enter high school with trained ears, good diction, and the ability to interpret and enjoy the major poets to whom they will be exposed.

Thornley (1962) in an article entitled "Reading Poetry to Children" tells us again the qualities that children love in poetry and suggests a sequence of materials to guide the young child to an appreciation of good literature up to and including the intermediate grades.

This material is pertinent to the study because it was significant in deciding the questions sent to the teachers in the school districts selected.

When one reads poetry to children, these lines from one of Sara Teasdale's poems comes to mind:

And children's faces looking up
Holding wonder like a cup.

This beautiful image is a reality. For the child whose innate love of poetry has not been spoiled does look to the reader with wonder in his face, and not only wonder but delight as well.

The words of poetry are singing words. They are warm, rich, melodious, delicate, strong, definite. They are not mere dictionary words, each with a specific definition duty. They have reached beyond the dictionary. They sing and dance. They make us see pictures, hear sounds, taste, smell, and feel. They create movement and action. They do things to our senses and our muscles as well as to our hearts and minds. It is this wonderful power of words, and the way in which poets put them together that makes poetry.

A good poet does not write down to children, and teachers make a mistake when they tell a child not to read this or that because he cannot understand it.

One of the most rewarding habits a family or a classroom can develop is to recall poems or lines of poetry when a child sees something unusual or interesting or common place in daily living.

Beginning with the smallest children we would want to start with the old and well loved Mother Goose. Soon we would add Christina Rossetti's poems from her Sing-Song, a perfect book for children. Next we would look for many poems for young listeners found in such anthologies as Sung Under the Silver Umbrella, Time for Poetry, or Silver Pennies. Probably now we would add a few poems by William Blake like "Little Lamb Who Made Thee" and "Piping Down the Valley" from his Songs of Innocence. Next we would be wanting some of Edward Lear's Nonsense Verse, and then Robert Louis Stevenson's A Child's Garden of Verses. Along the way somewhere we would be ready for Christopher Robin and A. A. Milne's When We Were Very Young and Now We Are Six, and Walter de la Mare's Rhymes and Verses, and Rose Fyleman's Fairies.

A little later comes many of Shakespeare's songs, Elizabeth Coatsworth and Hilda Conkling. Next will come Sara Teasdale's Poems for Young People and Stars Tonight. Then we will be moving into some of Emily Dickinson, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Robert Frost. And the first thing we know our little boys and girls have grown into teen-agers and they are rediscovering Blake, Rossetti, Shakespeare, Teasdale, Millay, or Dickinson all over again for themselves. If this is the happy experience of our young people, we teachers cannot sit back and think what a fine job we have done in helping them keep their love of poetry bright and fresh and growing, but we can start all over again with a new group of first graders and Mother Goose. (Thornley, 1962, pp. 1-4)

It seems to me if poetry is to become a part of childrens' lives it should as Thornley (1962) has so beautifully stated in her article "Reading Poetry to Children," contain these qualities: clear and accurate reporting, words that trip along with lightness and have a singing quality, words that fall into the right place to create the image, and words that are not heavy, awkward, or clumsy. It has a lovely rhythm if it is authentic. The rhyme is true not forced. There is a happy relationship between subject and sound. Poetry has a strong appeal to the emotions and is rich in sensory and connotative meanings. Poetry calls up images of sight, touch, taste, sound, and movement, giving to life's experiences a richer fuller meaning.

The Teacher's Educational Responsibility in Relation
to Oral Reading of Good Poetry to Children

The writer suggests that poems should be read to children at the meaningful moments in their experiences, too often poetry is forced not shared, and it is felt the teacher should read in a pleasant voice in an environment conducive to enjoyment. For example, the small children have just come to school; they are shy but they love their pets at home and are eager to tell about them. Then the teacher says, "Have you seen a dog like this?" She holds up a picture and reads:

My dog's so furry I've not seen
 His face for years and years
 His eyes are buried out of sight
 I only guess his ears.

When people ask me for his breed,
 I do not know or care.
 He has the beauty of them all
 Hidden beneath his hair.

The Hairy Dog - Asquith

"A Kitten," by Eleanor Farjean or "Tom's Little Dog" by Walter de la Mare could be used in a similar manner. This type of stimulation helps the child to get involved and excited about what he is learning. A child's eyes glow with happiness as you let him sing with you

Mix a pancake
 Stir a pancake
 Pop it in the pan
 Fry the pancake
 Toss the pancake
 Catch it if you can

- Rosetti

Now the snow has covered the earth with a blanket of white. The children are at recess, some of them are holding her hands and she says,

Let us walk in the quiet snow
 In a soundless space;
 With footsteps quiet and slow,
 At a tranquil pace,
 Under veils of white lace.

Velvet Shoes - Eleanor Wylie

and then she points out how the fence posts at a nearby home are wearing "Marshmellow Hats."

Perhaps some of the children are clamouring to be pushed in the swings on the playground; what a delightful opportunity to accept the challenge and say,

How do you like to go up in a swing,
 Up in the air so blue?
 Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing,
 Ever a child can do!

- Robert Lewis Stevenson

A science lesson on how caterpillars turn into butterflies is being taught, and she reads,

Fuzzy wuzzy, creepy crawly
 Caterpillar funny,
 You will be a butterfly
 When the days are sunny.

- Lillian S. Vanoda

Slishy sloshy galoshes, things brown and furry, mice with pointed heads and long tails, little new born calves, ice that says, "Crickle, crackle, crickle 'crrreet, 'crrreet, 'crrreet," are all things that belong to a child's world and are therefore very meaningful to them. The words are so descriptive, children cannot resist a chuckle.

Children love to bring bird's nests to share. This is the time to ask

How do robins build their nests?
 Robin Redbreast told me--
 First a wisp of yellow hay
 In a pretty round they lay;

Then some shreds of downy floss,
 Feathers, too, and bits of moss,
 Woven with a sweet, sweet song,
 This way, that way, and across;
 That's what Robin told me.

- George Cooper

No child who has ever sung with Christina Rossetti "Who has seen the wind? Neither I nor you; But when the leaves hang trembling, The wind is passing through" will ever forget the sight and sound of the yellow and red leaves hanging trembling on the trees as the wind is passing through in the fall of the year.

These are some of the meaningful moments in their experiences and have quite a different effect on the children than when a teacher says, "Now sit right quiet, it's time for us to listen to some poetry." Children love to hear, see and do things that are in the realms of their experiences and answer some of their many questions. And all this relates to the study because again the questions on the questionnaire were formulated to find out the type of poetry being read to children on the primary grade level, and how the teacher uses this tool of learning.

This study was concerned about the teacher's responsibility in the oral reading of good poetry to children because she is in such a valuable

position to influence the child in his early school experiences, and this is the foundation for the rest of his life.

Wagner (1968) in his article, "What Schools Are Doing," says

Properly chosen literature will help children develop such desirable personality traits as kindness, courtesy, good sportsmanship and what Albert Schweitzer has termed "a reverence for life." If these values of literature are tenable, literature surely must be given a substantial and honored place in the curriculum of our schools. . . . Because the teacher is the most important element in fostering a favorable classroom environment, be human, friendly, cheerful, approachable. Foster interest by well-planned oral reading. This oral reading, especially in the early primary grades, will be done largely by the teacher. It cannot be over-emphasized that "the elementary school curriculum which does not provide children with literature for enjoyment and for exploration is an impoverished education environment. Where children have little or no opportunity to extend their horizons through poems and stories at school, there exists an educational deficiency that cannot be met by any substitute." (Wagner, 1968, pp. 282-283)

Many children grow up disliking poetry intensely because of the manner in which it was first introduced to them, but as Wagner pointed out "Where children have little or no opportunity to extend their horizons through poems and stories at school, there exists an educational deficiency that cannot be met by any substitute."

Dunning (1966) further substantiates this idea when he tells us that teachers of English have failed as teachers of poetry because even the superior students dislike verse. He recommends that early in the school experience it should be a part of their curriculum. He continues by pointing out reasons for teaching it. He suggests that poems offer the unique opportunity of bringing complete works of art into focus, that

poetry tends to be richer linguistically than any other genre and that poems encourage consideration of life's realities

Thus far we have seen an emphasis placed on poetry as an aid in the understanding of life, how it gives expression to children for their hopes, aspirations, joys and sorrows, that it teaches them best at an impressionable age; that it expresses the delights of all the senses to children, develops their taste for good literature and enriches their lives. Additionally, Boothe has said

Poetry is as fundamental to the world and to mankind as chemistry and is most immediately concerned with relationships between image and idea. (Boothe, 1966, p. 98)

In the following statement by Crow (1966), a child psychologist, she explains how creative expression in one form or another may satisfy some of a child's basic needs, and these are important considerations in teaching.

For the child as well as for the adult creative expression in one form or another may satisfy one or both of two needs.

1. To serve as a release for pent up emotion.
2. To reorganize existing knowledge or things in such a way that something new is developed which is more attractive or useful than what has previously existed. (Crow, 1966, p. 107)

The emergent ideas from Dunning (1966) in his chapter on "Aims in Teaching Poetry" are: the teaching of poetry should provoke pleasure, sharpen students' sense of observation, improve children's taste in poetry, and increase the student's skill in approaching poetry.

It would be well to keep in mind that the desired outcome of education is to have what takes place in school make a significant difference

If then we accept these ideas surely poetry should be used as a tool of learning.

If poetry is approached as Dunning (1966) has suggested, it could make a significant difference in the life patterns of learners, and this is one of the desired outcomes of education as pointed out by Taylor.

The key question in planning then becomes, "What should they know in order to do it?" This is quite a departure from the traditional planning approach where the primary concern is, "How much of the material can I cover in the time that is available?" (Taylor, 1968, p. 10)

Each of the following thoughts by educators represent the fulfillment of needs of children in the primary grades who are constantly being referred to in this study.

To thwart the desire of a child to explore his world is a dangerous suppression, affecting his entire mental outlook. . . . A child grows through wonder and curiosity and adventure and new experiences with nature, animals and human beings. It is the duty and privilege of all family, teachers and friends to encourage this expansion of life, physical, mental and spiritual. (Buck, 1960, p. 5)

Primary children need experiences with poetry as well as with prose. Sensitivity in the interpretation of poetry does not develop through isolated contacts with the poems in basal readers. These activities need to be supported by many experiences of listening to poems read by the teacher, of reciting favorite rhymes, of writing poems and listening to the creative efforts of others. (McKim, 1957, pp. 200-201)

Today as perhaps never before, our young people need the inspiration and the courage that fine literature can give them. Young people are the future, and the hopes for humanity lie in them and their attitude towards the world in which they live. The literature of the ages must be their heritage. If teachers can help them gain this heritage, they have fulfilled their opportunity and responsibility. He who has helped a boy or girl attain that love of literature has given a precious gift, a gift beyond the reach of time and fortune. (Hollister, 1947, p. 52)

The child who becomes increasingly able to understand a broad vocabulary and use it effectively is one who has meaningful contacts with words--hearing them spoken within the context of actual experiences and using them repeatedly as he reacts to his environment.

Intellectual skills are important, but they can be used at optimum level only when an individual has also acquired the physical, social, and emotional skills which enable him to respond to his environment. Intellectual achievement is only one aspect of early learning. Any program which overemphasizes a single facet of development shortchanges the children who participate in that program. (Bruner, 1968, p. 45)

Levine (1968, p. 260), a most successful first grade teacher, makes this comment: "Whenever possible, appeal to the children through their auditory senses. This type of appeal tends to relax nervous tension and lengthen the span of attention. It sharpens the sense of sound and creates a receptive mood for the intake of knowledge."

In summarizing the values of poetry in children's lives we see that it helps the child to explore his world, to grow through wonder, curiosity, adventure, and new experiences with nature, animals, and human beings. It gives young people the inspiration and courage that fine literature can give them. It broadens his vocabulary and helps him to respond to his environment.

Arbuthnot (1964) suggests that any event in the child's experience can be made more meaningful with the use of poetry. While any unexpected event may be made more significant by saying the right poem at the right time, it is also obvious that there are many predictable uses of poetry for which verses can be collected--with school subjects; nature interests; the change of seasons; the weather, birds, flowers, and stars;

all science interests and social studies. In short correlate school subjects with poetry when you can legitimately do so with authentic poetry, and when you cannot use poetry for contrast and enjoy the change. With festivals, seasons, Thanksgiving and Christmas there is so much beautiful meaningful poetry that its values should not be ignored.

Again the writer suggests this need is fulfilled as suggested use of poetry in "Using Poetry With Children" in the book Children and Books by Arbuthnot (1964), wherein she suggests the use of poetry in appealing to children through their auditory senses.

Finally, one of the most impressive statements concerning the "Significance of Poetry in the Grade School Curriculum" and "The Teacher's Responsibility in Relation to Oral Reading of Good Poetry to Children" is given to us by Braymer (1963) when she says:

In working with children there is always the moment when you wish to illustrate a point or to express a certain mood in a way that will make your meaning vivid and clear. Frequently a teacher cannot summon words of her own that will convey this meaning, and so she finds herself quoting a few lines of poetry which expresses perfectly what she wishes to say. Poetry like music has the power to linger in one's mind long after one has heard it and children are influenced for deep rooted good in their educational experience. A poet works with language to express thoughts concisely as he creates scenes and captures moods. Because he observes intently and also because he draws freely upon imagination, the language will be natural but never ordinary. The idea of a poem may be simple but never commonplace. Therefore, childrens' lives are considerably enriched if they are exposed to poetry in the primary grades. It helps them to understand themselves and the world about them for they can say, "This is something I know. I've felt this, or seen it and it means something to me." If the poem has no rhyme it usually has a "plan" which the hearer can sense: a free flow rather like the irregular break of waves on the shore.

Poetry can capture almost every imaginable mood and can transport a child instantly anywhere in the world--or out of it--by whatsoever means fancy dictates. Poetry can surprise us into seeing commonplace objects in a new light. The treasures of poetry are varied and contrasting, the pleasures of sampling them quite limitless. (Braymer, 1963, pp. 368-369)

According to the above authorities poetry should be read in the elementary classroom. Now is it?

METHODS OF PROCEDURE, RESULTS, AND DISCUSSION

The method used for gaining the information needed for this study was as follows:

A questionnaire was developed that would be an effective measurement of the information needed to evaluate or substantiate the hypothesis which was:

It is believed that less than 50 percent of the primary grade children have poetry read to them daily as part of the curriculum. Furthermore, it is believed that much of the poetry read does not meet the standards of "good poetry for children," as measured by experts in this field of learning.

From the review of the literature and the suggestions of Professors Black and Thornley the questions were formulated which would in the opinion of the writer most adequately secure the information needed to evaluate the problem involved. A letter of explanation accompanied each of the 165 questionnaires sent to all the primary grade teachers in Box Elder, Logan, and Cache County School Districts (see Appendix).

The substantial 80 percent response represented a valid sampling of opinion for the area covered. The results are evaluated as follows:

1. Do you read poetry to your class? Check one.

	<u>Percent response</u>		<u>Percent response</u>
a. daily	11%	c. occasionally	41%
b. weekly	48%	d. never	0%

It appears in the light of the evidence revealed that from the four choices given the teachers, 89 percent of the children in the primary grades are not being read to daily, as part of the curriculum. However, it appears that most of the poetry being read (see question 7) does meet the standards of "good poetry" as measured by experts in the field. The percent response indicated that 48 percent of the teachers read weekly, 41 percent read occasionally, 11 percent read daily, and there were no teachers in the zero percent category.

This finding is significant because it indicates only 11 percent of the teachers are using this tool daily.

2. What seems to be the children's overall reaction to your reading aloud to them?

1	2	3		4	5	6	7		8	9	10
Extremely favorable			(circle one number)						Extremely unfavorable		
			Neutral								
			<u>Percent response</u>								
28%	20%	25%		10%	9%	2%	2%		4%	0%	0%

The rating scale indicated that in the "Extremely favorable" range the percentages from highest to lowest were: (1) 28 percent, (2) 20 percent, (3) 25 percent, (4) 10 percent. Therefore to the neutral area which was 6 on the rating scale, 73 percent of the children's overall reactions to the teacher's reading were extremely favorable. Since the reactions of the children were so favorable, one would wonder why more time is not given to this facet of learning in the curriculum. The negative reactions ranged thusly: (6) 20 percent, (7) 2 percent, (8) 4 percent, and (9) 10 percent.

3. Which type of poem do most of your children seem to enjoy?

Check one.

	<u>Percent response</u>
a. Poems that tell a story	37%
b. Poems that create a picture in your mind	30%
c. Poems that rhyme	25%
d. Poems with a marked rhythm	18%

The response to question 3 was unusual in that among the types of poems that children enjoy, the listed "poems that create a picture" received an almost equal rating with "poems that tell a story" and "poems that rhyme" was also close with a 25 percent rating.

4. Do you buy a book of poems for yourself? Check one.

	<u>Percent response</u>		<u>Percent response</u>
a. frequently	12%	c. seldom	28%
b. occasionally	52%	d. never	8%

It is an interesting observation to note in question 4 that the teachers who never bought a book of poems for themselves were among those whose children were least interested in being read to (see question 2).

5. Do you borrow for yourself books of poems from the library?

Check one.

	<u>Percent response</u>		<u>Percent response</u>
a. frequently	25%	c. seldom	19%
b. occasionally	48%	d. never	8%

In question 5 though the percentage reaction was positive, it was disturbing to note that there seemed to be a tie in with the negative reaction and the children from their schools not enjoying having poetry read to them (see question 2).

6. Do you select your poetry from any of the following anthologies?

	<u>Percent response</u>
Yes	75%
No	25%

The anthologies of children's poetry referred to in this question were chosen by Professor Gwendella Thornley, an authority in the field of children's literature. They are listed in random order, and the list includes both favorable and less favorable anthologies (see question 7).

7. If you use any of the anthologies check the ones you use most frequently.

	No. of responses per anthologies used most frequently
Time for Poetry	68
Silver Pennies	42
More Silver Pennies	0
Sung Under the Silver Umbrella	50
Read Me a Poem	0
This Way Delight	0
The Oxford Book of Poetry for Children	6
The White Land, Rhymes Old and New	0

	No. of responses per anthologies used most frequently
Drums and Trumpets: Poetry for the Youngest	0
What's Good for a Six Year Old	0
In a Spring Garden	0
Poems to Read Aloud to Children and by Children	17
Wings from the Wind	0
A Child's Calendar	0
Under the Tent of the Sky	0
Bridled with Rainbows	0
Gailey We Parade	0
Poems of Early Childhood	30
Story Poems	0
Humorous Poetry for Children	0
A Small Child's Book of Verse	16
Welcome Christmas	0
My Caravan	0
Poems for Red Letter Days	0
The Listening Child	0
Rainbow Gold	1
My Poetry Book	7
This Singing World	0
Rainbow in the Sky	0
Poetry	14

The anthologies which proved to be most popular with the teachers fortunately were among those rated of highest quality by experts in the field.

8. List any other books of poetry you use.

The following are among the choices listed.

- a. Hailstones and Halibut Bones
- b. Prayers from the Ark
- c. Personal Collections
- d. Child Craft

Question 8 revealed that among the other books of poetry used there were a few personal collections and others. However, there was such a wide variance in the choices it would be unfeasible to list them all, though the group responding was so small it was felt it had little significance.

9. Do you usually keep books of poetry on your classroom reading table?

	<u>Percent response</u>
Yes	71%
No	29%

The reaction to question 9 was favorable because it indicated that nearly three-fourths of the teachers made books of poetry available to the students.

10. If yes, usually how many?

One hundred thirty two teachers of the 165 involved kept one or two poetry books on the reading table.

11. Have you found your children to check out poetry books of their own free will from the library?

	<u>Percent response</u>
Yes	60%
No	40%

The negative response of 40 percent to this question seemed extremely high and was disturbing to the writer. It would seem that nearly half of the children were not motivated to check out poetry books of their own free will.

12. Do you enjoy reading poetry orally to the children? Circle one number.

<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>
Very much				Neutral				Not at all	
				<u>Percent response</u>					
41%	15%	15.3%	10%	.7%	7%	7%	2%	2%	0%

The percent response to this question revealed that of the 41 percent of the teachers who enjoyed very much reading to their children, these same groups of children enjoyed listening, and their reaction was extremely favorable. This was revealed by the responses on the questionnaires and would suggest that there is a definite correlation between teachers who enjoy reading to their children and children who enjoy listening.

13. On the two rating scales below check the attitude, which seems to come closest to your attitude regarding reading poetry in the elementary school. Circle one number.

A.									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Feelings of inadequate background				Neutral			A good background		
<u>Percent response</u>									
2%	2%	7%	4%	15%	8%	19%	22%	9%	12%

B.									
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Inability to read poetry aloud yourself						Find pleasure in reading poetry aloud			
<u>Percent response</u>									
2%	0%	0%	0%	11%	2%	11%	30%	15%	29%

It was interesting to the writer that the total percentage on the scale up to 5, which was neutral area, representing "Feelings of inadequate background," was only 15 percent of the teachers, while those teachers that had a good background was 70 percent leaving only 15 percent on the neutral area.

On the B scale only 2 percent of the teachers felt an inability to read poetry aloud, 11 percent were neutral, and 87 percent found pleasure in reading poetry aloud.

The significance of these findings seems to reflect the background and training of teachers to be adequate.

CONCLUSION

As background for the study it was necessary to show the significance of good poetry in the grade school curriculum, not as one class or one session a day of reading poetry to children but as applied to the whole curriculum in stimulating motivation in all subjects. Defining what constitutes good poetry, how it should be read to children, what children enjoy about poetry, and its significance in the total learning process resultant in gaining knowledge, developing behavior patterns, attitudes, concepts, principles, standards, ideals, and appreciation were all shown as important considerations in the study.

As a result of this study, it was found that according to experts in the field, the oral reading of poetry had many advantages to offer in helping the young child in overcoming the tension and anxiety that exists, in replacing that which is sordid and ugly with concepts that are uplifting and beautiful, and in helping him to learn more acceptable behavior patterns and good attitudes, in fact helping each child to develop socially, emotionally, and physically into a worthwhile member of society. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the writer that teachers in the primary grades give careful and serious attention to the indicated advantages to be found in giving more time to reading good poetry to children in their classes. This study indicates that students going into the teaching profession should be made aware of the value and worth of oral reading of

poetry as a tool of learning in the lives of their students.

The study, therefore, seems to show: the children in the primary grades are too often missing worthwhile experiences in poetry that could affect the patterns of their lives; that there is an abundance of good children's literature available; that most teachers thoroughly enjoy reading orally to their students and in turn the majority of children find a great deal of joy in listening but often are being denied the privilege.

Subjects or Topics for Further Study

1. It would be interesting to try to find out why only 11 percent of the teachers in the selected school districts read daily to their classes when 87 percent found extreme pleasure in reading poetry orally to children.

2. On what criteria did the teachers judge themselves as having a good background for reading aloud to children?

3. If 87 percent of the children's overall reactions were extremely favorable, why are teachers not using this tool more?

4. Which type of poetry do children enjoy most, lyric or narrative?

LITERATURE CITED

- Allen, Arthur T. 1968. Literature for children: An engagement with life, pp. 733-734. In Bertha M. Mahoney (Ed.). The horn book. The Horn Book Inc., Boston, Massachusetts.
- Arbuthnot, May Hill. 1961. Time for poetry. Scott, Foresman and Co., Chicago, Illinois.
- Arbuthnot, May Hill. 1964. Children and books. Scott, Foresman and Co., Chicago, Illinois.
- Arnstein, Flora J. 1951. Adventures into poetry. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California.
- Arnstein, Flora J. 1962. Poetry in the elementary classroom. Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York.
- Behn, Harry. 1966. Poetry for children, pp. 163-175. In Bertha M. Mahoney (Ed.). The horn book. The Horn Book Inc., Boston, Massachusetts.
- Boothe, Phillips. 1966. Image and idea. Academy of American Poets, New York.
- Braymer, Marjorie and Evan Lodge. 1963. Adventures in reading. Harcourt, Bruce & World, New York.
- Brown, Ralph Emerson. 1963. The new dictionary of thoughts. Standard Book Company, New York.
- Buck, Pearl S. 1960. The joy of children. White House Conference on Children and Youth. John Day Company, New York.
- Buckles, Mary E. 1967. An approach to teaching poetry. Elementary English 44:64-65.
- Brunner, Catherine. 1968. Motivation and learning. National Education Association 57(2):33-48.
- Crow, Lester Alice. 1966. Child psychology. Barnes and Noble Inc., New York.
- Dunning, Stephen. 1966. Teaching literature to adolescents. Scott, Foresmen and Company, Chicago, Illinois.

- Edwards, Tyron, Jonathan Edwards, and Ralph Emerson Browns. 1963. The new dictionary of thoughts. Standard Book Company, New York.
- Francis, Robert. 1960. An engagement with life. National Education Association 29:42-44.
- Frost, Robert. 1959. Favorite poems for young readers. Henry Holt and Company, New York.
- Gould, F. E. 1967. Creative expression through poetry. Elementary English 42:26.
- Groff, Patrick J. 1966. Poetry for children, p. 178. In Bertha M. Mahoney (Ed.). The horn book. The Horn Book Inc., Boston, Massachusetts.
- Harbage, M. 1949. Using poetry with young children. Elementary English 26:385-390.
- Herriges, Rose. 1966. Children's issue. Ideals 23:9.
- Herzberg, Max J. 1933. Adventures in poetry. American Book Company, New York.
- Huck, Charlotte S. and Doris Young. 1961. Children's literature in the elementary school. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, New York.
- Levine, Shirley. 1968. Teaching readiness in reading. Education 88: 260.
- Livingston, Myra Cohn. 1966. Definition of poetry, pp. 456-457. In Bertha M. Mahoney (Ed.). The horn book. The Horn Book Inc., Boston, Massachusetts.
- McKim, Margaret. 1957. Guiding growth in reading. Macmillan Company, New York.
- Mills, M. Perry. 1964. New research in education. Washington Center for Applied Research in Education, Washington, D.C.
- Ogilvie, Mardel. 1954. Speech in the elementary school. McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York.
- Read, Herbert. 1956. This way delight. Pantheon Publishers, New York.
- Taylor, Janyce. 1965. The teacher: A dictionary of learning. Utah Educational Association 6(4):10.

Thornley, Gwendella. 1962. Reading poetry to children. *Elementary English* 39:1-4.

Trauger, Wilma K. 1963. *Language arts in the elementary schools*. McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York.

Wagner, Guy. 1968. New trends in education. *Education* 88:282-283.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you read poetry to your class? Check one.

- a. daily c. occasionally
b. weekly d. never

2. What seems to be the children's overall reaction to your reading aloud to them?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
(circle one number)									
Extremely favorable				Neutral		Extremely unfavorable			

3. Which type of poem do most of your children seem to enjoy? Check one.

- a. Poems that tell a story.
b. Poems that create a picture in your mind.
c. Poems that rhyme.
d. Poems with a marked rhythm.

4. Do you buy a book of poems for yourself? Check one.

- a. frequently c. seldom
b. occasionally d. never

5. Do you borrow for yourself books of poems from the library? Check one.

- a. frequently c. seldom
b. occasionally d. never

6. Do you select your poetry from any of the following anthologies? Yes _____ No _____

7. If you use any of the anthologies check the ones you use most frequently.

- Time for Poetry* – May Hill Arbuthnot (ed.)
Silver Pennies – Blanche Jennings Thompson (ed.)
More Silver Pennies – Blanche Jennings Thompson (ed.)
Sung Under the Silver Umbrella – Association Education (ed.)
Read Me a Poem – Ellen Lewis Buell (ed.)
This Way Delight – Herbert Read (ed.)
The Oxford Book of Poetry for Children – Edward Blisshew (ed.) Illustrated by Brian Wildsmith
The White Land, Rhymes Old and New – Raymond Briggs (ed.)
Drums and Trumpets: Poetry for the Youngest – Leonard Clark (ed.)
What's Good for a Six Year Old – William Cole (ed.)
In a Spring Garden – Richard Lewis: A Collection of Japanese Haiku (ed.)
Poems to Read Aloud to Children and by Children – Ann McFerran (ed.)

Wings from the Wind – Tasha Tudor (ed.)
A Child's Calendar – John Updike (ed.)
Under the Tent of the Sky – John E. Brewton (ed.)
Bridled with Rainbows – John E. and Sara Brewton (ed.)
Gailey We Parade – John E. and Sara Brewton (ed.)
Poems of Early Childhood – Child Craft
Story Poems – William Cole (ed.)
Humorous Poetry for Children – William Cole (ed.)
A Small Child's Book of Verse – Pelagie Doane
Welcome Christmas – Anne Thaxter Eaton (ed.)
My Caravan – Gulie Osgood Grover (ed.)
Poems for Red Letter Days – Elizabeth H. Christ (ed.)
The Listening Child – Lucy W. Thatcher (ed.)
Rainbow Gold – Sara Teasdale (ed.)
My Poetry Book – Helen Ferris (ed.)
This Singing World – Louis Untermeyer (ed.)
Rainbow in the Sky – Louis Untermeyer (ed.)
Poetry – Louis Untermeyer (ed.)

8. List any other books of poetry you use.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

9. Do you usually keep books of poetry on your classroom reading table? Yes _____ No _____

10. If yes, usually how many?

11. Have you found your children to check out poetry books of their own free will from the Library? Yes ___ No ___

12. Do you enjoy reading poetry orally to the children? Circle one number

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Very much

Neutral

Not at all

13. On the two rating scales below check the attitude, which seems to come closest to your attitude regarding reading poetry in the elementary school. Circle one number

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Feelings of inadequate
background

Neutral

A good background

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Inability to read poetry
aloud yourself

Neutral

Find pleasure in reading
poetry aloud

Logan, Utah
January 22, 1968

Dear Fellow Teacher,

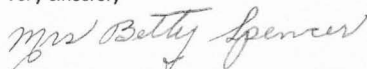
The attached questionnaire, concerned with the "quality of" and "time given" to reading poetry to children in the primary grades, is part of a "Study" I need in order to write a thesis for my master's degree in speech. It will in no way reflect anything for or against you as a teacher but will help me immeasurably in completing my study.

I am particularly desirous of obtaining your response because your experience will contribute significantly to the value of this study, and because other phases of this research cannot be carried out until I can complete the analysis of the questionnaire data.

Please help me. It will be so much appreciated if you would return the completed questionnaire in the enclosed, stamped envelope.

Thanks in advance for your prompt consideration of this request.

Very sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mrs. Betty Spencer". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Mrs. Betty Spencer

VITA

Betty Farnsworth Spencer

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: A Study of the Amount and Quality of Poetry Read on the Primary
Grade Level in Selected Utah School Districts

Major Field: Speech

Biographical Information:

Personal Data: Born at Colonia Dublan, Chihuahua, Mexico,
June 20, 1912, daughter of Wilford M. and Eleanor Romney
Farnsworth; married Farrell J. Spencer June 17, 1935, three
children--Jay, Robert, and Carol Jean.

Education: Attended elementary school in Colonia Dublan,
Chihuahua, Mexico; graduated from the Juarez Stake Academy,
Colonia Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico in 1929; graduated from
Gila Junior College, 1932; received the Bachelor of Science
degree from Utah State University, with a double major in
elementary education and language arts, 1958; completed re-
quirements for the Master of Science degree, specializing in
speech, at Utah State University in 1968.

Professional Experience: 1958 to 1968 teacher in the Logan City
Schools.