Assessing student poetry: Balancing the demands of two masters

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ABSTRACT: The practice of assessing student poetry is neither widespread nor widely theorised. In fact, its absence in the literature is itself worthy of comment and conjecture. This article begins with an account of a writing workshop for pre-service teachers, which highlighted the way participants found themselves tongue-tied when asked to engage in the constructive critique of others' poems. It then moves to a broad consideration of what constitutes assessment in the educational context before considering some problematics in respect of the assessment of poetry. It problematises the assessment of poetry in the classroom context by use of the trope of the figure of Truffaldino, Goldini's servant of two masters. In this case, Truffaldino is viewed as serving two discursive masters: literary criticism and high-stakes educational assessment discourse. After a selective literature review which looks at how this dual allegiance is played out in the literature of poetry assessment, it reports on a small, case study in a New Zealand school, where the drama of dual allegiance was played out with certain effects. The article concludes with some overall reflections on the issues raised.

KEYWORDS: Poetry, assessment, development, formative assessment.

This article raises questions about and shares some practices around the assessment of student poetry. I begin with a narrative of sorts, recounting a number of aspects of a five-day writing workshop I led, with the help of Ruie Pritchard from North Carolina State University, in January 2013. I do this for the purpose of establishing a particular writing context and identifying a range of activities that characterised a particular writing community. I then move to some considerations of assessment in general, but relate these considerations to the specifics of poetry as a form of writing. I then draw on these considerations to reflect on the way poetry assessment is treated in a small range of articles from the literature on assessing poetry (which is itself small). I then move to a retrospective, where I reflect on a case study undertaken in 2010 with my colleague, Helen Kato, at a rural school south of Auckland, where students wrote poetry and were subsequently assessed against criteria that were part of New Zealand's high-stakes qualifications regime for secondary students – the National Certificate for Educational Achievement (NCEA) (Locke & Kato, 2012). I will then bring the whole piece to a conclusion with some final comments.

THE WRITING WORKSHOP AS CONTEXT FOR WRITING

The workshop I discuss here was part of an optional course entitled "The Teacher as Writer", and was very much run along "Writing Workshop" principles (Lieberman & Wood, 2003; Locke, Whitehead, Dix, & Cawkwell, 2011). It was integral to a "Level 3" optional course that could be taken either by students in their third and last year of primary teacher training or by students undertaking a university major in Writing Studies. I begin with an account of some of the activities that occurred in this context,

because I believe that, at its best, the poetry classroom functions as both workshop and community of writing practice.

As is customary in such workshops, the course began with a focus on the expressive and personal and shifted along a continuum towards the communicative, impersonal and transactional. The 17 students in this workshop, having engaged in activities enabling them to explore their own writing apprehension, wrote a bio-collage poem, then a personal narrative, then a poem encapsulating their attitude to a person of their own choosing, and finally a position statement. Even prior to the pre-writing stage of the "person poem", these students had begun developing a *composing vocabulary* (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2007), developed their use of concrete imagery, explored the pros and cons of figurative language and its role in establishing tone, and enjoyed a poem called "My Teacher", written by a 10-year-old girl and published in Chris Searle's anthology of children's writing, *Firewords* (1972).

The brief for their "person poem" was as follows:

> Reflect inwardly on a person you know and that you have a feeling for (attitude to). Describe that person concretely, using a mix of literal and figurative language to communicate your feelings about this person. Write your text in such a way that none of your lines arrives at the right-hand margin.

During the composition process, students were encouraged to visualise their person in particular places performing particular actions. They were introduced to a range of notational devices available to writers of non-metrical verse. After sharing their drafts in response groups, they were given a range of revision prompts:

1. *Content:* Are there telling details about the chosen person that you have overlooked? Try imagining them engaged in a typical activity? What do they typically wear? Are there certain objects you associate with them? Or colours?
2. *Rhetorical strategy:* Do you have a particular reader in mind as you write? What difference would it make to your poem if you did?
3. *Structure:* Is there a logic in the way your poem is sequenced? Do you want to rethink the sequence?
4. *Layout:* Are your lines too long? Would certain details stand out more if you had shorter lines or line-breaks at particular points.
5. *Syntax and punctuation:* Are you being too fussy about correct syntax? Could you omit words that are not really adding to your poem? (Watch out for the word "very".)
6. *Diction:* Are your words as particular as they could be? For instance, "amble", "strut", "stride" are more particular than "walk". Could you replace an abstract expression with words that help your read see, hear, smell, touch and taste? Are you over-focusing on the visual at the expense of other senses?

Response group protocols were typical of Writing Workshop practice (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2007). Students read their poem to the group without "apology or introduction". Initial responses were expected to be positive or neutral, while later ones could be "pointed" or "offer suggestions" (p. 36). During the feedback process, the owner of the poem remained silent, perhaps jotting notes on their text. In practice, the giving and receiving of feedback was not confined to the response groups.

Students were free to seek feedback during "writing time" and frequently did so, from one another, or from Ruie and myself.

There were three assignments in the course, with the first two of these being pertinent to this article. The first (40% of the course) was a writer's journal, where students kept a record of such things as their reflections on their own writing process (including comments on various drafts) and any aspect of writing covered in the course. The second (also 40%) was a writing folio containing a "polished" sample of three pieces selected from the writing they had done during the course with a commentary and self-evaluation. For the self-evaluation, they were asked to find or develop a rubric and assess themselves against it. While they were not required to submit a poem as part of their portfolio, most did.

My subsequent reading of the students' writer's journals provided me with the privilege of revisiting the workshop and viewing aspects of it through these student's eyes. Something that jumped out at me was how students experienced the response groups when they were sharing the drafts of their poems. I sought permission from two students to share the following journal entries[1]:

> Poetry as a genre has generally been a mystery to me. Like others in the class I wasn't sure how I could possibly critique the often abstract ideas and figurative language let alone the overall structure of a poem. (Marie)

> What I did notice today was that, not for lack of trying, no one in my peer response group including myself felt particularly confident in giving specific feedback, positive or constructive, for our poems. There was a lot of uncertainty around what merited a strength/weakness and what indicators can be identified for a good poem. Everyone just kind of mumbled, "good work, yep that was good" or "Oh yeah, I really liked that poem." (Karen)

I cite these comments for two reasons. Firstly, they are typical. Secondly, they highlight what I imagine to be a widespread state of affairs, namely that many teachers are crippled with uncertainty in relation to *what* features of poetry warrant comment and *how* the presence, absence or use of various features might be evaluated. In relation to the former, it is interesting to note Anthony Wilson's claim that teachers in the UK context suffer from the absence of an "agreed vocabulary for discussing poetry by children" (2005, p. 228) and hence find it difficult to describe student progress.

CONSTITUTING ASSESSMENT

In this section, I share a discourse of assessment in the educational context that I broadly subscribe to. I will be drawing on Harlen's (2006) account of the relationship between assessment for formative and summative purposes – an account that is so beautifully lucid that it cries out to be problematized. Harlen begins her discussion by stating two distinct purposes of assessment: "to help learning and to summarize what has been learned" (p. 103). What we have here is the distinction between formative and summative assessment that has become, I think, a commonplace in a particular

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[1] Names are pseudonyms.

type of educational discourse (more on this below). What I want to focus on for a little, however, is a sentence that provides a wider picture of the assessment process, because it points to conditions that need to be in place *before* decisions are made in respect of *how* "evidence" is to be used and by *whom*. Here is the sentence:

> It is generally agreed that assessment in the context of education involves deciding, collecting and making judgements about evidence relating to the goals of the learning being assessed. (2006, p. 103)

To problematise this statement, let me schematise it as a logical series of steps, which may or may not be enacted in actual classrooms and programme contexts.

1. Learning goals are established and agreed upon.
2. A student engages in tasks or activities, which are goal-oriented, that is, which are oriented to the goals determined in 1.
3. A decision is made in respect of *what* kind of information/data ("evidence") will allow for a determination of how well the student has attained the goals determined in 1.
4. This information ("evidence") is collected, often via a process of analysis, which involves the scrutiny of aspects of a document or object or behaviour that the student has produced in relation to a task or activity.
5. This information may or may not be quantified for the purposes of measurement.
6. There is resort to criteria, either implicit or explicit, as a basis for ascribing value to some aspect of the evidence collected as indicating that certain goals have been attained or in part attained.
7. On the basis of these criteria, one or more judgments are made (either for formative or summative purposes).
8. Depending on the use to be made of these judgments, they are communicated in some way to the student or other stakeholders in the assessment process.

This articulation of the assessment process is, of course, highly abstract. That is, it is not remotely particularised to a particular school subject or domain of knowledge.

What we can observe, however, is that in Foucautian terms, this articulation is the instantiation of a specific discourse around assessment in the school setting, that has its own genealogy and sociocultural situatedness. Throughout this article, I use the word discourse, drawing on Fairclough (1992), to denote "a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning" (p. 64). Like any discourse, this one around assessment has its own "markers" or "traces" – words such as "goal", "evidence", "judgement", "formative", "summative", "feed-back" and so on. The contributors to the book Harlen's chapter is drawn from have backgrounds and expertise in assessment in educational contexts. They are not literary critics! Moreover, these contributors and others can be seen as belonging to or associated with a particular discourse community – the Assessment Reform Group (ARG) – which has been in existence in Britain since 1988. The group has its own agreed-upon description of "assessment of learning", namely:

> the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers, to identify where the learners are in their learning, where they need to do and how best to get there. (ARG, 2002a, cited in Gardner, 2006, p. 2)

Like any discourse, the one this definition "marks" meaningfully signifies the world by telling a particular story about assessment as a kind of process with certain means and ends in relation to both teachers and students. As indicated previously, it is a discourse I have some personal sympathy with, but it is not the only assessment discourse out there in the current social context having an impact on what happens in classrooms.

Assessing poetry: Gestures towards problematisation

If the above steps are particularised for poetry as a form of written text to be encouraged in English/literacy classrooms, then a consideration of some of the decision-making involved in relation to these steps begins to highlight areas of contention.

For instance, in relation to Step 1, there are no learning goals to be found written in stone for a teacher about to embark on a poetry unit with her students. Does she focus on extrinsic goals (gaining marks in some form of high-stakes assessment) or intrinsic goals (the development of a personal voice) or both? Is the goal of participating in a poetry competition intrinsic or extrinsic (see Locke, in press)? How important are attitudinal goals such as students developing writing motivation as a result of exploring topics of personal relevance? Or are goals best identified on the basis of a view of the skills deemed to be prerequisite for successfully writing a poem? What we *can* say is that the identification of goals, whether determined by the teacher or initiated by the teacher as part of a process of negotiation with students, will reflect particular discourses associated with poetry as a form to be engaged with as worthy of inclusion in the school curriculum. Putting it another way, there are a number of stories out there about what poetry is, how it should be read and written, and how it should be taught (for example, Soter, 1999; Locke, 2003, 2009). Complicating the picture, as shall see, are discourses around the place and conduct of assessment in the classroom.

Not all teachers of poetry believe in being remorselessly goal-oriented; many prefer (to use Eisner's [2002] terms) to see goals in *problem-solving* and *expressive* terms rather than as behavioural. However, in a teaching situation which *is* goal-oriented, issues around what constitutes relevant information (Step 3) for analytical purposes (Step 4) is subject to the same potential for discursive contestation as Step 1. A teacher influenced by New Critical discourse is likely to agree with Brooks and Warren (1976), who describe a poem as "a kind of drama that embodies a human situation, [that] implies an attitudes toward that situation…" (p. 267). Presented with a poem, following New Critical practice, their inclination would be to look for clear indicators of tone in the form of images, the presence of irony, certain rhythmic effects and so on. They will be predisposed to expect of poetry the adoption of a particular stance in relation to a dramatic situation involving occasion, characters, events and motivation. However, not all poems provide this kind of information for analytical purposes. Different discourses of critical reading point readers to different aspects of a text. There is no absolute account of *what* information needs to be sought from a poem for analysis and evaluation. (The problem faced by the readers in the responses groups mentioned previously, of course, is that they appeared to lack *any*

discourse of poetic reading to direct their attention towards particular textual features.)

The relativity that I have been drawing attention to so far also characterises Step 6. Differing ways of constructing in discourse the act of writing poetry will lead inevitably to differing criteria of evaluation. However, what is likely to complicate the picture at this step is the ubiquitousness of criteria for assessing "writing in general", that have their origins in top-down assessment regimes that are not specifically tailored to poetry as a written form. These criteria are likely to be instantiations of *recontextualised* versions of educational discourses rather than literary ones (to use Bernstein's [2000] term). Indeed, if poetry is marginalised as an option for writing in the educational system, the likelihood of standardised assessment criteria for writing accommodating it as a writing opinion in the enacted curriculum is remote. In addition, if these "top-down", policy-driven, standardised writing criteria have become high-stakes, even when used for formative purposes, then the further likelihood is that they will have become hegemonic and led to a marginalising of assessment criteria that have their discursive origins in literary study or in the personal writing experiences of teachers. The critical questions that need to be addressed to these criteria relate to construct validity (If used to assess poetry, what version of poetry do these criteria construct?) and power relations (Whose interests are served by these criteria being used to assess poetry and what are the contingent power effects?).

ASSESSING POETRY IN PRACTICE

In 1978, I received a letter from the Senior Script Editor (Drama) of Radio New Zealand who wrote:

> Thank you for OPEN AND SHUT which has been read with interest, but which I am sorry to have to reject herewith. The problem with the whole play is that it is skeletal – there is no depth in either the play or the characters....I think you have fallen into the trap of making your characters serve as mouthpieces for you as a writer, too often.

The writer was kind enough to go on to elaborate on these generally dismissive comments. Though the writer was evaluating my radio script-writing rather than my poetry, the letter is a reminder of how evaluation occurs in the world outside of the school setting. The discourse the letter-writer is operating out of is, broadly, *arts criticism*. Regardless of the discipline, arts criticism operates on the basis of assumed standards of excellence, which are sometimes covert and sometimes overt, and which are often hotly debated. I could not complain that the letter-writer did not declare his hand. He informed me in no uncertain terms that plays need characters with "depth" and that they shouldn't be a playwright's "mouthpieces".

The closest we get to observing arts critical discourse in action in the educational setting is in the writings of Elliot Eisner, particularly in *The Educational Imagination* (2002), where he develops his concept of "educational criticism" and "educational connoisseurship". For Eisner, connoisseurship in the arts is the "act of knowledgeable perception". Where "connoisseurship is the art of appreciation, criticism is the art of disclosure" (p. 215). A few pages later, he defines criticism as "the art of disclosing

the qualities of events or objects that connoisseurship perceives. Criticism is the public side of connoisseurship" (p. 219). There has never been a significant uptake of educational criticism as a research method and Eisner himself has conceded that it has been overtaken by narrative research (see Locke with Riley, 2009). Where it has been utilised, the object of criticism has tended to be classroom lessons and learning programmes – certainly *not* poems written by students.

Literary criticism is the branch of arts criticism with responsibility for assessing/evaluating poetry. If Tony Eagleton is right in asserting that many literature teachers don't practise literary criticism since they were never taught to do so" (2007, p. 1), then it *may* be that such criticism itself may be an art in decline. For Eagleton, a consequence of such a decline has been a classroom focus on content rather than form, with a corresponding insensitivity to textual meanings that are form-dependent. If the core business of English in universities has shifted from literary criticism to, say, cultural studies and its attendant discourses, then that is one possible reason for the decline. Such a shift is bound to have an impact on the "skillset" of pre-service English teachers. However, the number of poetry awards and competitions, and the practice of literary review does *not* appear to be in decline, raising the interesting question whether future English teachers might be better served apprenticed to poetry reviewers than attending lectures expounding on anti-semitism in Shakespeare's plays.[2]

Servants of two masters

The title of this section draws, of course, on the title of Carlo Goldini's 1753 play, whose main character Truffaldino is forced to go to extraordinary and side-splittingly funny lengths to maintain the illusion of serving one master when he is in fact serving two. In the current educational climate, this kind of predicament has become a feature of teachers' worklives and is likely to be just as troubling. We are all Truffaldinos.

Let me put a Bernsteinian spin on this issue of dual/multiple allegiance or subscription. Bernstein (2000) believed that the constitution of professional knowledge in discourse as a dimension of pedagogic practice, while apparently haphazard, was in fact the product of a set of "regulatory principles" controlled by what he called the "pedagogic device [which] acts as a symbolic regulator of consciousness" (p. 37). There is nothing neutral about pedagogic discourse. The hegemonic or dominant position of a *particular* pedagogic discourse is inevitably the result of a particular set of power relations (See Figure 1). In Bernstein's scheme, the top-level "distributive rules mark and distribute who may transmit what to whom and under what conditions, and they attempt to set the outer limits of legitimate discourse" (2000, p. 31). At the time he was writing, Bernstein saw these rules are increasingly controlled by the state apparatus.

In the case of a school subject like English or literacy, the prevailing discursive mix (in Bernstein's terms, the "specific pedagogic discourse") determines *what* can be said about a particular topic and *how* it can be said – hence the relationship to

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[2] For my own version of the art of reviewing with English teachers as audience see
http://www.hyperpoetics.ac.nz/Genres/LockeReviews/Index.html

metalanguage, that is, the language a subject uses to explain itself to itself.[3] As Bernstein further points out, a specific pedagogic discourse can be thought of as a principle "by which other discourses are appropriated and brought into a special relationship with each other, for the purpose of their selective transmission and acquisition" (p. 32) via a process he calls "recontextualisation" from a range of "primary" discourses that have their origins beyond the confines of the school.
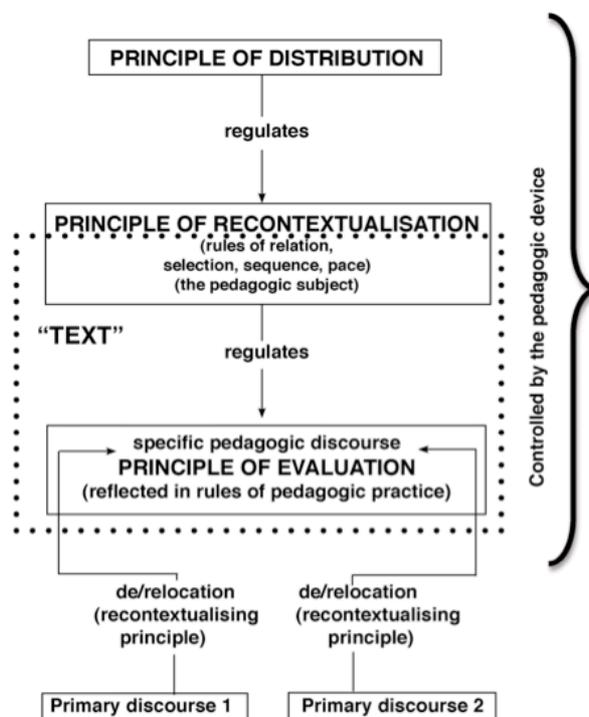

Figure 1. Bernstein's view of the pedagogic device

Bernstein (2000) used as an example the school subject, physics, and its relationship with physics as a primary discourse, produced through the work of physicists in the field. What of English and specifically poetry as a pedagogic discourse? In Bernstein's terms, school English has always been weakly classified, that is, its boundaries have tended to be permeable to a range of primary discourses (Locke, 2010). At the present time, there is potential for English to be subject to discursive input from applied linguistics, cultural studies, screen and media studies, theatre studies, literary criticism, rhetoric and semiotics, each with its own specialist language. As I have argued elsewhere (Locke, 2009, 2010), the constitution and balance of these inputs has changed markedly since 1990, with applied linguistics, semiotics, cultural studies and rhetoric having a stronger presence that literary criticism (hence Eagleton's [2007] complaint). All of these potentially contributory disciplines and their attendant discourses operate outside the education system and are only tangentially related to "education" as a discipline.

However, as I have been arguing, the *specific pedagogic discourse* related to English in general and the teaching of poetry in particular is also being reconstructed by means of the recontextualising of educational discourses related to assessment. These

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[3] Bernstein uses the term "unthinkable" to encapsulate those things which a hegemonic discourse disallows one saying about a particular topic.

also have a role to play in *what* can be said about poetry and its assessment and *how* it might be said. In situations where even formative assessment has become high-stakes, such discourses may well have become hegemonic and begun shaping teachers' constructions of poetry as a form of writing. As I have discussed elsewhere, not all of these assessment discourses are as relatively benign as assessment for learning (see Locke, 2010).

The battleground here, if I might use such an extreme metaphor, is the teacher's professional knowledge, categorised long ago by Shulman (1986) as comprising *content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge* and *curricular knowledge.* In terms of professional development for teachers, the recent emphasis has been on pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Content knowledge has become neglected, especially as teacher education has succumbed to instrumentalist pressures. Without content knowledge (of poetry, for example), a teacher is not in a position to contest the construct validity of a set of criteria for assessing poetry. And without critical savvy (Locke, 2004) – the dimension of professional knowledge missing from Shulman's scheme – they will not know *why* they lack the knowledge to contest such instruments as assessment guides.

Are these tensions borne out in the literature on assessing poetry?

In her book on *Drafting and Assessing Poetry*, poet and teacher Sue Dymoke (2003) devotes an entire chapter to "Assessing Poetry". Firmly anchored in the context of England and primarily oriented to secondary teachers, it begins by offering an overview of teachers' attitudes to assessing their students' poetry. Views range from a reluctance to mark something so personal, and anxieties around a lack of adequate terminology, to a confidence that high levels of achievement in poetry writing can be both demonstrated and evaluated. However, Dymoke is under no illusions about the extent to which poetry is marginalised as a writing option in relation to the National Curriculum for English, where "assessment of prose takes priority over other genres" (p. 150) and "within the assessment framework at GCSE" (p. 151). In short, policy-driven assessment discourse appears to discourage teachers from taking the risk of having their students submit poetry for summative assessment purposes and to be tailored to written forms *other than poetry.* At this point in the chapter, Truffaldino is firmly in thrall to an assessment discourse that is divorced from poetry writing as an aspect of literary studies.

In the next section of the chapter, "Models of poetry-writing assessment", Dymoke begins by noting the "lack of assessment models...which map progression in poetry writing" (p. 155). Her espoused ideal is the classroom as writing community, where formative assessment in the form of "ongoing dialogue (p. 155) is the norm. However, the problem remains of accommodating poetry to a school system "which ultimately measures a pupil's success in summative grades and levels at the end of a Key Stage" (p. 156). Truffaldino's dilemma is not so much resolved as shelved. Here is the key quotation:

> If a regular formative assessment dialogue occurs, arguably it should make summative judgements (for example, for teacher assessment levels at the end of Key Stage 3) less onerous and perhaps less significant in the overall context of a student's development. (p. 156).

There is no direct statement here that the assessment discourse underpinning high-stakes summative discourse is incommensurate with an assessment discourse derived from literary studies. The latter discourse has only a shadowy presence in this chapter. Rather a process-oriented assessment discourse is adopted as a sequential precursor to the obligatory option of a product-oriented summative assessment discourse. The former is viewed as facilitating the latter. Somewhat ambiguously, the latter is described as *perhaps* [my italics] "less significant in the overall context of a student's development". There is just a suggestion that in the overall scheme of things, it is the work done via process-oriented formative assessment practice that is likely to have a long-term and substantial impact on student learning.

As a reader, I am positioned by this chapter to comply with curriculum-based assessment dictates, as is evidenced by Dymoke's unpacking of the various curriculum levels in terms of poetry writing (building on the work of Dennis Carter, [1998]). In her section offering "Advice on poetry assessment", she again affirms the value of "regular assessment dialogue" as a means of guiding students in their progress in writing, but adds the proviso that such assessment be "linked to a clear conception of the curriculum and its learning goals" (p. 161). The chapter concludes with a number of annotated exemplars of student work, each with response comments where traces of a literary studies discourse lurk but where assessment comments are clearly linked to curriculum levels and the language of their performance indicators.

Also a practising poet, Anthony Wilson, makes the case that "it is not only possible but fruitful to assess children's poetry writing at KS2" (2005, p. 228), though not summatively. Wilson's claim is in part founded on an 18-month study, where he taught a class of children aged 10 to 11 in a large school in Exeter, though not as part of the regular "literacy hour" programme. His case posits the desirability of mapping progression in children's poetry writing. However, in order for this to happen, suitable criteria need to be developed, which "looked at together, give teachers a picture of signs of progress in a piece of poetry writing" (p. 28). (One could see Wilson as responding to the lack of such criteria Dymoke identified in her book.)

Like Dymoke's, Wilson's case is made in the context of the realities of the National Literacy Strategy and the National Curriculum in England. In particular, he raises issues around the formulation of statements at Levels 3, 4 and 5 of the Attainment Targets (ATs) for writing, suggesting a lack of logical, qualitative difference between them and a privileging of form. "As with the NLS, they do not add to teachers' understanding of what 'good writing' is; and offer very little in the way of understanding what progress in poetry writing might look like" (p. 232). In relation to the argument I have been making in this article, the discourse of assessment of this "master" is found wanting.

Table 1 below, with its dual focus on the use of language and the use of form, sets out the criteria Wilson developed as a formative assessment tool. "There is no intrinsic value per se in any of the features used below", he argues, "other than in how they contribute to the communicative power of the poem, or its 'aliveness'" (p. 233). Because "risk-taking" and "experimentation" are viewed as signs of progress, words like "ambitious" and "inventive" are used as an indicator that the child is "playing with language and pushing the boundaries of his or her writing" (pp. 233-234).

Use of language	Use of form
• Vocabulary choices (commonplace; • effective; ambitious) • Similes (commonplace; effective; inventive) • Metaphors (commonplace; effective; inventive) • Alliteration • Onomatopoeia • Assonance • Rhyme • Half rhyme • Metre	• Layout: as prose or as a poem • Line breaks: (at sentence/page end; to structure or segment ideas; mid sentence; using line breaks as punctuation) • Variety in line lengths • Use of stanzas • Use of graphic forms or features (words being played with – letter/font size; layout features)

Table 1. **Wilson's criteria of evaluation**

It is clear that Wilson's greater allegiance is to the discourse of literary studies. It is this "master" that provides the language that he draws on for his criteria. References to poets such as Harold Rosen, W. H. Auden, Seamus Heaney, T. S. Eliot and Kenneth Koch are sprinkled throughout his writing. Although he claims to reject the tools of practical criticism (2009, p. 392) as unsuited for use with children's poetry writing, his analyses of various poems by children aimed at indicating progress are arguably examples of literary criticism with teachers as audience. As Truffaldino, Wilson's solution, as I read it, is a pragmatic one: as much as possible conduct formative assessment in terms of a meaningful literary discourse and accommodate the vagaries of policy-driven assessment discourses around writing only at the point of obligation.

Right now in the US, debates around classroom assessment are being dominated by the introduction of the Common Core Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), which most states have signed up to. As in England, poetry may well be under pressure to maintain its legitimacy as a text-type with status, especially as the standards and their grade-level, achievement indicators privilege "opinion pieces", "informative/explanatory texts" and "narratives". The literature discussed below is pre-Common Core.

For around six years, teacher-poet Korina Jocson (2009) has researched the impact on (mostly) African American students of their involvement with the Poets in the Schools organisation and engagement with June Jordan's Poetry for the People poetry programme, based at the University of California, Berkeley, which has been in existence for almost twenty years. The twofold aim of this programme is 1. "to create a safe medium for artistic and political empowerment", and 2. "to democratise the medium of poetry and include...populations who have been historically denied equal access and representation" (p. 274). Since 2003, the June Jordan Poetry Prize has invited teachers of 9th and 10th-grade students to submit poems for a competition; teachers have the opportunity to build the contest into their classroom programmes.

What kind of Truffaldino is Jocson? One discursive master is clearly literary studies but, in this case, the literary tradition referenced is constituted by works of established

but minoritised writers of colour, mainly from the US. At first glance, Jocson *appears* to serve a master linked to the discourse of high-stakes assessment in education. The evaluation process related to the Poetry Prize is described as "consistent with the current national focus on testing, standards, and accountability" (2009, p. 279) and can be related to various IRA/NCTE English language arts Standards (1996). However, this reference to educational discourses around assessment occupies around half a paragraph in total. Moreover, the Standards referred to never had the teeth the Common Core will have.

Jocson's second master is actually the discourse of culturally responsive pedagogy, an educational discourse that is generally at odds with current, hegemonic versions of standards-based assessment (see, for example, Sleeter, 2011). As she explains it, "a culturally responsive pedagogy at the very least means expanding definitions of reading and writing to account for multiple differences situated in particular sociocultural contexts" (p. 271). Among other things, this critically savvy, transformative agenda involves a reshaping of the *how* of poetry assessment.

Poems submitted for the June Jordon Poetry Prize are graded in reference to a rubric with a 10-point scale for four criterial categories:

1. "**Purpose:** *There is a purpose to this poem. The poem is driven by ideas. Every line and stanza serves the same, governing purpose of the poem.*
2. "**Is it a poem?** *The words speak some truth. The poem is dense and writer uses a minimal number of words to achieve maximal impact.*
3. "**Subject:** *Each line and stanza follows logically from the one before it. The poem is a complete dramatic event. It has a beginning, middle, and end. The poem creates and/or discovers connections among otherwise apparently unrelated phenomena.*
4. "**June Jordan's Craft Checklist:**
   - *Strong descriptive verbs used*
   - *Adjective use is limited*
   - *Singularity and vividness of diction*
   - *Clarity of each stanza, and overall*
   - *Specific details*
   - *Visual imagery*
   - *Defensible line breaks*
   - *Abstractions and generalities avoided*
   - *The poem makes music*
   - *The poem fits into a tradition of poetry*
   - *The poem is not predictable or cliché*
   - *Limited use of punctuation.*"

The language of this rubric is remote from the Common Core Standards. Genealogically, we can make links back to the New Criticism and even Ezra Pound's advice to writers (Pound, 1913). But the second master served here is the emancipatory discourse of culturally responsive pedagogy. We see it in the insistence on the primacy of ideas and the emphasis on "speaking one's truth".

Two more articles from the US context will be discussed more briefly. Morrow and Hermsen (2008) report on a study where undergraduate, creative-writing majors from Otterbein College spent two, five-day periods engaging middle-school pupils from two classes in the writing of poetry. The artist-in-residence aspect of this little study bears some comparison with Wilson's (2009) study discussed earlier. Like Wilson, these authors were interested in measuring development in poetry writing and for this purpose developed a four-point rubric with three dimensions: 1. "Playful Thought: Metaphors & Surprise"; 2. "Language Use: Sentence, Lines & Details"; "Point of View: Reading a Scene from the 'Inside'" (p. 33).[4] As the analysis of various poems shows, there is only one master here, and that is the discourse of literary study.

Andrea Griswold (2006) is the one writer in this selective review who is a teacher. Like Morrow and Hermsen, she also serves one master, but in her case, it is the educational discourse of assessment frameworks. Committed to the assessment of poetry and desirous of articulating to students "some standards of effective poetry", Griswold began with the English language framework currently in use in Massachusetts, on the basis of which she "compiled a list of the elements of poetry that students needed to learn" (p. 71). Something else that distinguishes Griswold is her rejection of rubrics and her commitment to assessment lists tailored to the specifics of various poetic writing tasks. The focus is solidly on assessment as formative.

ASSESSING STUDENT POETRY IN A HIGH-STAKES ENVIRONMENT

In 2010, Helen Kato, the HOD English at a rural school in New Zealand, decided to implement a unit on poetry writing with a disaffected Year 12 English class (described in detail in Locke & Kato, 2012). Her primary motive was to engage these students in learning and to attempt to do this via the medium of poetry, something she had never done before. Her secondary motive was to create an opportunity for these students to gain credits in New Zealand's high-stakes, senior secondary, qualifications system – the NCEA (National Certificate for Educational Achievement).[5]

In this section, I use the Truffaldino trope to reflect on the way assessment decisions were made by Helen, often in consultation with me. The poetry unit was related to an Achievement Standard, English 2.1: "Produce crafted and developed creative writing", an "internal" standard with an allocation of three credits. Like other teachers alluded to in this article, Helen was nervous about having her students produce poetry that would be subject to a summative assessment regime with criteria that we not specifically tailored to poetry as a form. (See Appendix 4 for the NCEA grading criteria related to this standard.) However, after some discussion with the regional subject advisor she decided to take the plunge.

Right from the start then, Helen's obligation to the high-stakes assessment discourse – a discourse of separate standard-based assessment (Locke, 2007) – was confirmed. This master was to be served. However, at this point, at the start of her unit, her obligations to this master could be deferred. The students themselves had little

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[4] Three "aces" became four when the authors split the first criteria into two, metaphor *and* surprise.
[5] For a critical view of this system, see Locke, 2008.

commitment to obtaining qualifications and Helen was in a position where a decision on "entering them" for this internal standard could be taken at a later date.

However, Helen's research commitment to data collection demanded that she devise a way of addressing an issue discussed earlier in this article: how to "measure" student development as writers of poetry. To this end, I suggested we use the rubric which is appended as Appendix 1. After reaching a common understanding of what we meant by each "poetic device", we proceeded independently to "mark" a baseline poem (written prior to the start of the unit) and a piece of "best work" selected at the unit's completion. The rubric was not derived from an educational assessment discourse. Rather it drew on the discourse of literary study as filtered through approaches I had utilised in poetry writing workshops over many years. At this point then, it was a literary discursive master who was holding sway.

The scores Helen and I entered in the various columns (see Appendix 2) were not made available to the students; nor was the rubric itself. To be honest, we had mixed feelings about the rubric as a measurement device and especially about making it available to students. Although we saw its potential as a formative assessment tool, Helen's practice around formative assessment was very much based around the use of peer response groups, conferencing and the development of a writing community committed to the on-going co-construction of evaluative criteria in relation to poetry. The rubric invites the identification and scoring of a list of "poetic devices". But we both knew that the quality of a poem does not depend on the cumulative use of range of potential devices. Poems don't have to rhyme. And a great poem can be made out of a small range of words. And so on.

A statistical analysis of the data in Appendix 2 indicated a strong correspondence between Helen and me in the allocation of grades overall; the correlation was 0.81 (p<.01). However, unsurprisingly, correlations between us on individual items varied widely, with correlations between us reaching significance in relation to only "concrete, sensuous imagery", "metre", "figurative language" and "shaping into stanzas". Clearly, we needed to have further conversations about our understandings of other items!

The following comments are made with these caveats in mind. Firstly, while most students increased their cumulative scores totalled across the rubric's items, not all did. These students were reasonably able, but unmotivated. Secondly, where cumulative scores totalled for items did show an increase between pre- and post (for example, in "Concrete, sensuous imagery", "Figurative language", "Sound colouring", "Deliberate rhythmic effects", and "Attention to lineation"), these coincided with the pedagogical focus of Helen's teaching. Thirdly, if we compare the total scores for the entire class, we can say tentatively that the rubric scores mark an overall improved range of use of poetic devices in the cohort. (But as we insist, this does not, of itself, suggest that they were writing better poems.)

Once the students had completed their portfolio of poems, we recognised that the moment had come to meet our obligations to the summative assessment master waiting in the wings. We made a decision to utilise a rubric for assessing poetry (Appendix 4) developed as part of the English Study Design (ESD) project (Locke, 2007). Our reason for this decision was that we saw this rubric as more closely related

to literary discourse than the NCEA marking criteria set out in Appendix 3, which instantiated an educational discourse around assessment that neither of us was particular sympathetic to (in this respect, we were reluctant servants). Effectively, we used the ESD rubric as a mediating tool. That is, we had a panel of five secondary teachers (including Helen) involved in the "Teachers as writers" project (Locke & Kato, 2012) mark the portfolio poems of these students using the ESD rubric. Helen used these grades generated by her peers as a check on her own assessment.

Helen and I then devised a table of equivalence as a way of correlating her ESD rubric-based grades with the NCEA assessment criteria for Achievement Standard 2.1: Produce crafted and developed creative writing (Appendix 3). That is, using Helen's professional judgement, we made decisions on equivalences between performance indicators in the ESD rubric and level indicators in the NCEA achievement criteria. The results of all of this can be seen in Table 2. All 10 students achieved the standard with half the class doing better than "Achieved". Notwithstanding our earlier comments about the poetic devices rubric, the cumulative scores proved a good predictor of summative NCEA grades. Those who were awarded an "Achieved grade" had cumulative scores between 18 and 24. Those who received "Merit" scored between 25 and 29, while those who obtained "Excellence" scored 29.5 or above.

Student[6]	NCEA grade	Cumulative score on poetic devices rubric at end of intervention (raters' scores averaged)
Wanda	Merit	25
Stephen	Merit	29
Clare	Achieved	19.5
Jake	Achieved	23.5
Ruby	Excellence	30
Hone	Excellence	29.5
Mere	Achieved	20
Sandy	Achieved	21.5
Rebecca	Merit	25
Mandy	Achieved	18

Table 2: NCEA grades and poetic devices cumulative scores

CONCLUSION

What does all this mean? Firstly, it draws attention to an issue around the professional content knowledge of teachers. I think there is some truth in Eagleton's (2007) claim that many literature teachers have never been taught to do literary criticism. In part this reflects changes in the "core" content of the English degree major and the ascendency in many places of critical theory and cultural studies (see Barry, 2003). But there are other factors which may be exacerbating this lack of literary knowledge. Instrumentalist teacher education with a narrow focus on *pedagogical* content knowledge to the detriment of *disciplinary* (professional) content knowledge is one. Another may be the general *de-centring* of literature in the English/literacy

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[6] These are pseudonyms.

curriculum itself, which means that the imperative for in-service professional learning related to literary study is absent. That is true of the New Zealand context. The shrinkage of what used to be called "general studies" courses for pre-service primary teacher education, which often included courses on literary appreciation, is likely to be another factor in the general demise of literary knowledge among teachers.

It should be no surprise, then, that teachers participating in the course I described at the start of this article should find themselves tongue-tied when invited to comment on the draft of a poem. They lacked a literary discourse to provide them with tools for constructive critique, either of their own or of others' poems. And, of course, with this lack they were at the mercy of educational discourses around assessing writing that often *de*formed their professional knowledge and constrained their practice. They were servants of one rather unhelpful and frequently unsympathetic master.

A second point is that even *with* a literary discourse at his/her disposal, a teacher is subject to the demands of educational assessment discourses that are frequently incongruent with evaluative processes based in literary discourse. Such teachers, as I have suggested, are Truffaldinos, grappling with the demands of two masters. As policy-driven assessment regimes (around discrete standards) become increasingly high-stakes, the pressure grows. Maintaining any kind of allegiance at all to the literary master is a tricky balancing act.

One solution is to somehow insulate poetry from the demands of the high-stakes assessment master by including it as an activity in one's classroom programme that is *not* subject to high-stakes evaluation – where a gentle, formative assessment holds sway, perhaps based in one or other version of a literary discourse. Such a solution has its attractions. It means that the teaching of poetry is reliant on the development of intrinsic interest alone to engage students (Collins & Amabile, 1999). It also allows for the possibility for teacher professional literary learning being undertaken without the distraction of serving the high-stakes educational assessment master. Helen could easily have adopted this solution with her Year 12 English class. But she didn't.

Instead, she adopted a strategy I would describe as *deferral.* As much as possible and as long as possible, she subscribed, for formative assessment purposes, to discourses based in literary studies (developed in her degree study and in her Writing Workshop involvement). At what I've called the "point of obligation", she switched masters, using a rubric she was sympathetic to as a tool for making summative judgements; she then devised a means of converting these judgements into the form required by the high-stakes, qualifications master. As it happened, the resultant grades were remarkably congruent with changes in student development mapped via a poetic devices rubric that was never actually shared with the students.

Should it have been? I think it should have, if only as a talking point about what *some* people think poets try to consciously do to make their poems more pleasing/effective. It could have prompted some interesting discussion of poems by established writers, who manage to write great poems without recourse to a majority of the devices listed (for example, Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow"). It could have been offered to students for modification in accordance with the sort of poem *they* wanted to write. It could have been offered to them along with other rubrics mentioned in this article to

help them understand that there are at least thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird and the assessment of poetry.

Finally, what Helen *did* do was prove to her students that they could develop belief in themselves as writers, change their views about poetry (and themselves as writers of poetry) *and* achieve success in a high-stakes qualifications regime that is hardly encouraging the study of poetry in the New Zealand secondary context (O'Neill, 2006). In doing so, of course, she was also proving something to other teachers of English: as Truffaldinos we can manage to serve two masters, but only just and with a certain amount of sleight-of-hand.

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Appendix 1: Poetic devices grading rubric

Poetic Device	Extent of Use			
	Considerable (4)	Some (3)	Little (2)	None (1)
Concrete, sensuous imagery				
Figurative language (metaphor, simile, personification, etc)				
Sound colouring (excluding rhythm) such as alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, synaesthesia				
Rhyme (internal and end-of-line)				
Metre				
Deliberate rhythmic effects				
Attention to lineation				
Shaping into stanzas or verse paragraphs				
Deliberate shaping on the page				

Gloss

Concrete, sensuous imagery: Refers to the presence of vivid detail. "Considerable" would tend to suggest a range of senses appealed to.

Figurative language (metaphor, simile, personification, etc): As indicated.

Sound colouring (excluding rhythm) such as alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, synaesthesia. These things can be accidental. Look for signs that the writer has an interest in the sound qualities of words.

Rhyme (internal and end-of-line): Again, look for evidence that there is an interest in the repetition of sound groupings, rhyme and half rhyme. These don't have to appear at the ends of lines.

Metre: This refers to the existence of **regular** patterning, as happens in fairy tales, limericks. There can be the suggestion of iambic without it being **perfect** iambic, for example. But there needs to be an indication of deliberateness.

Deliberate rhythmic effects: Look for signs that the writer is savouring the rhythmic qualities of phrases and sentences as they roll of the tongue, **or** are you enjoying the rhythmic sense of the sentences. Look for evidence that the sentences have been worked at to avoid clumsiness and awkwardness. Does there appear to be deliberate variety in sentence length, repetition of structures (sometimes called parataxis), and so on.

Attention to lineation: Do decisions appear to have been made about length of line, where line breaks occur, where lines start and finish?

Shaping into stanzas or verse paragraphs: Are their structural units in the poem, which appear to mirror the sense or **internal structure** of the poem's ideas or argument?

Deliberate shaping on the page: This includes but goes beyond lineation, and relates to the overall look of the poem on the page and how it reflections what the poem is about. Concrete poems do this in a big way, but all poets in some ways need to think about the look on the page.

Appendix 2: Pre-intervention and end of intervention poetic devices scores (T = Terry, H = Helen).

Pre-intervention scores

Student	con	fig	sound	rhyme	metre	rhyth	line	stanz	shape	Tot (T)	con	fig	sound	rhyme	metre	rhyth	line	stanz	shape	Tot (H)
Wanda	3	4	3	1	1	4	3	4	4	27	4	4	1	1	1	2	4	4	4	25
Stephen	4	4	4	3	1	4	4	4	4	32	3	3	2	1	2	3	4	3	4	25
Clare	2	3	1	1	1	3	3	1	2	17	2	3	2	1	1	3	1	1	3	17
Jake	4	4	3	1	1	4	3	1	2	23	4	4	3	1	1	3	4	3	4	27
Ruby	4	4	2	1	1	3	4	4	4	27	4	4	4	2	1	1	4	4	4	28
Hone	4	4	3	1	1	3	4	3	3	26	4	4	3	1	1	2	4	4	4	27
Mere	4	4	3	2	1	2	3	1	3	23	4	4	3	1	1	2	3	1	4	23
Sandy	2	3	1	1	1	3	3	1	2	17	3	3	1	1	1	1	3	1	3	17
Rebecca	4	3	3	1	1	3	3	1	2	21	4	4	4	1	1	3	2	1	1	21
Mandy	4	2	3	1	1	3	3	1	2	20	3	2	2	1	1	2	3	2	3	19
	35	35	26	13	10	32	33	21	28	233	35	35	25	11	11	22	32	24	34	229

Scores for selected portfolio poem (end of intervention)

Student	con	fig	sound	rhyme	metre	rhyth	line	stanz	shape	Tot (T)	con	fig	sound	rhyme	metre	rhyth	line	stanz	shape	Tot (H)
Wanda	4	4	3	1	1	3	3	4	2	25	4	4	2	1	1	3	4	4	2	25
Stephen	4	4	3	2	2	4	4	4	3	30	4	4	2	4	2	3	3	3	3	28
Clare	3	4	3	1	1	2	3	1	2	20	2	3	3	1	1	2	3	1	3	19
Jake	4	4	3	1	1	4	3	1	3	24	4	4	3	1	1	3	3	1	3	23
Ruby	4	4	4	1	1	4	4	4	4	30	4	4	4	1	1	4	4	4	4	30
Hone	4	4	4	3	1	4	4	3	2	29	4	4	4	3	1	4	4	3	3	30
Mere	4	4	3	1	1	2	3	1	2	21	4	3	3	1	1	2	2	1	2	19
Sandy	3	3	2	1	1	4	3	1	2	20	3	4	2	1	1	3	4	2	3	23
Rebecca	4	3	4	1	1	4	4	1	2	24	4	4	4	1	1	4	4	1	3	26
Mandy	3	2	2	1	1	3	3	1	2	18	2	2	2	1	1	3	3	2	2	18
	37	36	31	13	11	34	34	21	24	241	35	36	29	15	11	31	34	22	28	241

Appendix 3: Assessment criteria for Achievement Standard 2.1:

Achievement	Achievement with Merit	Achievement with Excellence
• Develop and sustain idea(s) in a piece of creative writing.	• Develop and sustain idea(s) convincingly in a piece of creative writing.	• Develop, sustain and integrate idea(s) convincingly in a piece of creative writing.
• Craft writing to create effects that are appropriate to audience, purpose, and text type.	• Craft controlled writing to create effects that are appropriate to audience, purpose, and text type.	• Craft controlled writing to create effects that are appropriate to audience, purpose, and text type, and that commands attention.
• Structure material in a way that is appropriate to audience, purpose, and text type.	• Structure material clearly, in a way that is appropriate to audience, purpose, and text type.	• Structure material clearly and effectively, in a way that is appropriate to audience, purpose, and text type.
• Use writing conventions accurately.	• Use writing conventions accurately.	• Use writing conventions accurately.

Appendix 4: English Study Design Writing Poetry Rubric

WRITING: Poetry

	Content and Context: Generic Schedule	Level Indicators
E E+ [1-2]	Incorporates straightforward messages in the production of a text. Has a limited sense of the text's intended audience and purpose. Some evidence of a developing viewpoint.	• One or two sketchy **ideas** • A weak sense of **audience** and **purpose** • Some evidence of a **personal voice** or **stance**
D D+ [3-4]	Incorporates a number of linked ideas in the production of a text, especially at the paragraph level. Has a sense of the text's intended audience and purpose or purposes. Indicates a viewpoint.	• Some plausible linking of **ideas** • Has some sense of **audience** and **purpose** • Attempts to sustain a **personal voice** or **stance**
C C+ [5-6]	Incorporates and develops with some coherence a number of main and subordinated ideas in the production of a text. Shapes the purpose of the text to a sense of the intended audience. As part of a developed personal viewpoint, has some awareness of contextual factors affecting the impact on readers of the text produced.	• **Ideas** are convincingly linked with a developing coherence • Has an awareness of **audience** • Sustains a **personal voice** or **stance** or **style** • Has some awareness of **connotative meaning**
B B+ [7-8]	Incorporates and develops coherently and in a controlled and deliberate way a number of main and subordinated ideas in the production of a text. Consciously shapes the purpose of the text to a sense of its intended audience. As part of a clear personal viewpoint, has an awareness of contextual factors affecting the impact on readers of the text produced.	• A strong sense of unity can be seen in the presentation of **key ideas** • Has a real sense of where the **audience** is coming from • Sustains a **personal voice** or **stance** or **style** • **Word choice** shows a sensitivity to **connotation**
A A+ [9-10]	Incorporates and develops with flair, imagination and coherence, a number of main and subordinated ideas in the production of a text. Has a clear set of purposes and a perceptive knowledge of the intended audience which is used to position them in a deliberate way. Has a clearly articulated viewpoint and a critical awareness of contextual factors affecting the impact on readers of the text produced.	• The poem is **shaped** with creativity and expertise to reflect the **coherence** of its **central ideas** • Has a keen sense of how an **audience** might respond • Sustains a strikingly **personal voice** or **stance** or **style** • **Word choices** reflect a real awareness of the way in which meanings are affected by the **cultural context**

	Conventions of Language: Generic Schedule	Level Indicators
E E+ [1-2]	Can employ some language features (layout, structure, punctuation, diction and syntax) in a straightforward way. Has a limited sense of how these features function in terms of the chosen genre.	• Little attempt to shape the poem through **line** and **stanza** • Little awareness of **structural devices** (such as **point of view, motif, rhyme** and shifts in tone and plot) • **Vocabulary** is limited and use of **concepts** unsure • Unsure handling of **rhythmic devices** such as **metre** and **lineation**
D D+ [3-4]	Can employ a range of features (layout, structure, punctuation, diction and syntax) in ways that are appropriate to their function in the chosen genre.	• The poem has an identifiable **shape** • Some **structural devices** are beginning to be used appropriately • Word choices show some care and awareness of types of **diction** (for example, **concrete/abstract, literal/figurative**) • One or two **rhythmic devices** show some awareness of the rhythmic potential of English language
C C+ [5-6]	Can deliberately and in a controlled way employ a range of features (layout, structure, punctuation, diction and syntax) in ways that are clearly appropriate to their function in the chosen genre.	• The poem is clearly **shaped** • A number of **structural devices** unify the poem • Deliberately uses a good range of appropriate **diction** • Deliberate use of **rhythm** features shows an awareness of the way English language functions rhythmically
B B+ [7-8]	Confidently and competently employs a range of features (layout, structure, punctuation, diction and syntax) in ways that are both effective and clearly appropriate to their function in the chosen genre.	• The poem has a clearly defined **shape** • A range of **structural devices** are confidently used to unify the poem • Choice of words shows a confident understanding of types of **diction** and the effects of their usage • Confidently uses a range of **rhythmic devices** which show a clear understanding of the way English language functions rhythmically
A A+ [9-10]	Shows confidence, competence and flair in employing a range of features (layout, structure, punctuation, diction and syntax) in ways that are striking, innovative and clearly appropriate to their function in the chosen genre.	• The poem has a clearly defined **shape** • The poem is beautifully unified through a range of **structural devices** • Choice of words shows reflects an original, individual and appropriate use of a range of **diction** • Strikingly exploits the **rhythmic potential** of English through the use of a number of well controlled **devices**