Robert Pinsky was named poet laureate of the United States in 1997. Believing that poetry is vital to more people in the country than had been assumed, Pinsky initiated a one-year call to the general population for the submission of a favorite poem. In that period, 18,000 Americans spanning every state and age group responded to his call. These submissions led to the creation of the Favorite Poem Project for the purpose of “celebrating, documenting, and promoting poetry’s role in Americans’ lives” (Favorite Poem Project: Welcome, n.d.). Ultimately, the project yielded a website, four anthologies, a video series, a book based on Pinsky’s Tanner Lectures at Princeton University, and three summer institutes for teachers and administrators. The summer institutes and their effects on teachers, administrators, students, and their schools and communities are the focus of this chapter.

The Principles

The theoretical foundation of the Favorite Poem Project, as described by Pinsky in his writing and teaching, are the principles of autonomy and physicality. Autonomy can be described as granting the right of selection to the reader to assure ownership of the poem. If readers, young and older, are encouraged to choose the poems that resonate with their own lives, they will be better able to gain the benefits that the printed word affords—an understanding of other people, other times, and other places. In his message to teachers on the Favorite Poem Project website, Pinsky writes,

We need to communicate not only with our peers but our ancestors and descendants, and the arts of poetry, writing, print, digital media serve that communication. As the oldest of these arts, poetry in a deep-going way calls upon
the very nature of human society, our interdependence upon one another not only in space but in time. We need the comfort and stimulation that this vital part of us gets from this ancient art. (Favorite Poem Project: Revitalizing Poetry in the Classroom, n.d.)

The second principle, physicality, is based on the understanding that the poet writes for the human voice, and that meaning is derived not only from the words but also from the cadences and nuances that can only be gained by a vocal rendition of a poem. In his description of the principles of the Favorite Poem Project, Pinsky writes, “If a poem is written well, it was written with a poet’s voice and for a voice” (Favorite Poem Project: Giving Voice to the American Audience for Poetry, n.d.).

As we set out to review the research related to the instruction of poetry in general and the principles of autonomy and physicality in particular, we found no empirical studies. It is interesting to note that in the most recent edition of the Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts (Flood, Lapp, Squire, & Jensen, 2003), a remarkably comprehensive work, there is no chapter devoted to poetry and only a single entry on the topic in the index. However, despite the absence of scientific research, there is a strong theoretical foundation for grounding instruction in Pinsky’s principles. In the following sections, we will present the work of scholars in the field of literacy that is reflective of Pinsky’s guiding principles of autonomy and physicality.

The Literature

Autonomy

The principle of autonomy is resonant in the decades-long scholarly work of Louise Rosenblatt who, as early as 1938, introduced the process she named “transaction,” defined as the essential interaction between the individual reader and a text. In her seminal work, Literature as Exploration (1938), Rosenblatt writes,

There is no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work; there are only the potential millions of individual readers of the millions of individual literary works. A novel or poem or play remains merely inkblots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. (p. 25)

More than 60 years later, Rosenblatt (2004) again wrote of the centrality of the individual reader in the process of transaction: “The evocation of meaning in transaction with a text is indeed interpretation in the sense of performance, and the transactional theory merges with the idea of interpretation as individual construal” (p. 1378).

Consistent with the theme of this chapter, we recall that one of Rosenblatt’s most inspired works is The Reader, the Text, the Poem (1978), in which she suggests that the response of an individual reader to a chosen text is, itself, a poem.

“The poem” comes into being in the live circuit set up between the reader and “the text”. As with the elements of an electric circuit, each component of the reading process functions by virtue of the presence of the others. A specific reader and a specific text at a specific time and place; change any of these, and there occurs a different circuit, a different event—a different poem. (p. 14)
Indeed, the reasons readers give for selecting their favorite poems in the anthologies edited by Robert Pinsky and Maggie Dietz embody Rosenblatt’s concept of response as poem. In the most recent volume, *An Invitation to Poetry: A New Favorite Poem Project Anthology* (2004), Yina Liang, a 16-year old student from Atlanta, Georgia, offers her thoughts on Emily Dickinson’s poem “I’m Nobody! Who Are You?”

I discovered this poem in seventh grade when one of my English teachers showed it to me. And then eighth grade came and ninth grade, and every year as life gets busier the poem keeps on coming back to me...so much better every time, that I think in time it discovered me. (p. 59)

**Physicality**

The second principle, physicality, was a central theme in the work of Bill Martin Jr. who introduced the Sounds of Language series in 1972 with the expressed purpose of giving voice to the words children read from the earliest stage of reading development. Martin relied on the sounds of the language, particularly the language of the poem, to introduce young readers to the texture and the beauty of the printed word. Earlier, Martin wrote a pamphlet in the form of a poetic dialogue between teachers and administrators. Titled *The Human Connection: Language and Literature* (1967), this text offers numerous examples of the power of poetry on the individual child and concludes with a series of basic premises for teaching, including the following:

The goal of language instruction
is not to develop language skill in and of itself,
but to help children claim their humanity
through the use of language. (p. 39)

Glenna Davis Sloan (2003), an advocate for the use of quality literature to afford students opportunities for thoughtful response, writes of the child’s natural physicality and inclination to sound:

Primitive poetry is linked to movement, to the basic bodily rhythms involved in singing, dancing, marching. Children are kinesthetic creatures who delight in moving to rhythmic chants of words that take their fancy. Polysyllabic mouthfuls become rhythmic background for table-beating and pan-pounding. Children know how language and movement relate. They bounce balls and skip rope in time to chanted words; they tease in taunting rhythmic rhymes. They call on the magical powers of incantation. (p. 99)

In his summary of the research in reader response, James R. Squire affirms the wisdom of these teacher scholars. Squire (1994) cites as a critical conclusion of the research, “The sounds of words are often as important as their sense” (p. 645). He suggests that a neglected aspect of the literary experience for students is reading and hearing text read aloud. Poems, plays, and stories written for the human voice are particularly amenable to enhanced response when experienced orally.

We present, now, a description of the poetry institutes that were inspired by the Favorite Poem Project and informed by the principles of autonomy and physicality.
The Poetry Institutes

Following the completion of his unprecedented three-year term as poet laureate, Pinsky, a faculty member at Boston University, and his associate, Maggie Dietz, met with Roselmina Indrisano and Stephan Ellenwood, faculty members at the School of Education, to extend the focus of the Favorite Poem Project to educators and their students, schools, and communities. Together, they planned three summer institutes to be held in the following years for the purposes of introducing the participants to the principles and resources of the Favorite Poem Project, affording the participants opportunities to work with distinguished poets, and providing the participants opportunities to create lessons and plans for implementation in their classrooms, schools, and communities, guided by experienced teachers of poetry.

In 2001, the first Poetry Institute for Educators in New England was held, and the pattern for subsequent summers was set. Twenty-five teacher–administrator teams, a total of 50 participants from public and private schools in New England, attended the weeklong institute. The decision to recruit teacher–administrator teams was made to assure the maximum opportunity for implementation by educating the decision makers as well as the teachers.

On the first day, participants were given a notebook that included the poems to be discussed, a bibliography of poetry anthologies, and the outline for the lesson plans they would create during the week. Participants also received the video and one of the poetry anthologies that resulted from the Favorite Poem Project. A library of poetry anthologies was available to the participants as well.

Each day’s program followed the same schedule, a pattern that received such positive feedback from the participants of the first institute that it was repeated in subsequent years. In the morning, participants viewed the Favorite Poem Project videos and participated in seminars with visiting poets. The videos present a series of poetry readings by individuals selected from the original 18,000 submissions received by Pinsky in response to his call at the beginning of his first term as poet laureate. In addition to a reading of the poem, each individual tells the reason for choosing this particular poem. The themes are resonant of the universals of the human experience: memory, grief, joy, and discovery, made particular by the circumstances of the individual life. A remarkable feature of the videos is the use of a setting for each presentation that offers insight into the person and to the connection between the life and the art, rather than a background for the poem.

The institute’s seminars were conducted by distinguished poets in the manner of a graduate course on poetry. In addition to Pinsky, participants of the three institutes were privileged to work with Mark Doty, Carol Muske-Dukes, David Ferry, Gail Mazur, Heather McHugh, Rosanna Warren, and Louise Glück. Later in the day, the visiting poets presented readings attended by institute participants and faculty, and open to the general public.

In the afternoon, participants met in grade-level groups, each led by an experienced teacher who had been successful in teaching poetry in a classroom setting. These groups had a single purpose: to apply what the participants had learned from the seminars and videos to the creation of lessons for use in classrooms, schools, and communities. The classroom lessons included the sources of the poems for the lesson; teachers’ reflections; teaching ideas; and teaching connections to other topics, subjects, and projects. In addition, teachers planned activities for school and community poetry events. At the conclusion of
the institute, the lesson plans were edited and sent to the participants in time for
the opening of schools in September.

Each institute concluded with a favorite poetry reading by the participants.
Representatives from each group read a poem and offered insights into their
reasons for choosing the selection. The audience responded often with laughter or
tears, in the latter case, evidence of the trust that had been developed during the
institute. Many of the participants offered, as well, their own poetry, some created
with or by their former students.

The responses of participants in the institutes have affirmed the wisdom of
the principles that guided their design and conduct. A statement in the evaluation
completed by one of the participants is reflective of many others. A high school
teacher wrote,

We, as teachers have shared so much information here through this program that
the contributions seem endless. Specifically, however, the concepts of physicality
and autonomy have seemed to jump out at me as necessities for next year.
(Favorite Poem Project: Feedback From Teachers, n.d.)

In the next section, we present a description of the ways two classroom
teachers, Jennifer Hauck Bryson and Merri Jones, with the support of their
principal, Nancy Birmingham, and their Title I director, Sheila Garnick,
implemented the work of the institutes in their urban school district. All four
professionals have attended one of the poetry institutes, and Jennifer Hauck
Bryson and Sheila Garnick have served as teacher leaders. Here we present, as
well, the ways the principles and the lessons designed to guide the reading of
poetry have been applied to writing.

The Implementation

The setting for the implementation of the Favorite Poem Project is an elementary
school in a small city located north of Boston, Massachusetts, and which, for many
generations, has been home to immigrant families. The school is one of four in an
elementary complex that shares a central library. Data reported by the district
indicate that during the 2001–2002 school year, of the 475 students, 70% were
Hispanic, 18% white, 6% Asian, and 8% black. The home languages spoken by
72% of the children included Spanish, Khmer, Portuguese, Serbo-Croatian,
Vietnamese, Somali, Filipino, Farsi, Luganda, and Haitian Creole. The principal
and the faculty are committed to helping the students and their families realize
their aspirations by providing a high-quality education for the children and
respectful collaboration with the families.

In the following sections, third-grade teachers Jennifer Hauck Bryson and Merri
Jones describe the initiatives they introduced as a result of their attendance at the
Poetry Institute, from the first steps taken within the confines of the classrooms to
the districtwide projects adopted later. These initiatives were implemented over the
course of two years (2001-2003) and are continuously being improved to represent
the principles of the Poetry Institute and to meet the needs of the students.
Jennifer and Merri also describe their goals for the initiatives in the near future.
The Classroom

We are committed to the diverse community our school serves, and we wish to ensure that all the students benefit from the project. Our initial goal was to provide poetry to the students and, guided by the principles of autonomy and physicality, to give them more opportunities to choose poems, to perform them, and to respond in oral and written forms of language.

Before our attendance at the Poetry Institute, our students kept notebooks of all of the poems learned during the daily morning meeting or as part of the literacy curriculum. The poems came from many sources but were most often selected by the teacher. After attending the institute, we began to consider the ways the principle of autonomy could guide our future efforts. Our first step was to replace the notebook of poems selected by the teacher with a personal anthology of poems chosen by the individual student from anthologies that they read during classroom reading time, school and classroom library visits, or at home. When a student found a favorite poem, a sticky note was placed in the text and brought to the teacher for copying and placement in the anthology. The children had absolute freedom to choose poems they liked. If a child chose a poem that was too difficult to be read independently, we ensured that the student had an opportunity to read it with someone who could help. As part of our literacy curriculum, the children were given opportunities to share their anthologies with the class during the one period per week known as Poetry Anthology Time.

In addition, students frequently chose to read their poetry anthologies during our reading workshop. Reading workshop is a time when students choose what they read, and it was during this time, as well, when students added to their anthologies poems that had a personal meaning or were marked by a particular rhythm. The results of our commitment to the principle of autonomy were evident very early as we saw many of the children giving the anthologies a permanent place in their book bags. They enjoyed sharing them daily with their friends and families. It was remarkable to hear the words of Robert Frost and Emily Dickinson whispered throughout the room. Furthermore, students were encouraged to keep their anthologies from year to year as an ongoing personal collection of poetry anthologies.

The student response to this change from poetry notebook to personal anthologies has been dramatic. Our students now view poems as belonging to them, and for many, Poetry Anthology Time is the favorite period of the week. They also have become far more articulate when discussing why they like or dislike particular poems and are not reluctant on occasion to respectfully disagree with their teachers. Merri once taught her class a poem about Alaska and invited the children to recite the poem as a class during the morning meeting. At the end, one of the students raised her hand and asked if she could recite another poem instead because she felt the one Merri had chosen “did not sound good out loud.” Many other students agreed, so a new poem was chosen. Similarly, during Poetry Anthology Time in Jennifer’s room, two students were sharing their anthologies when at the conclusion of a reading of Eloise Greenfield’s “Honey, I Love” (1978), the other student replied, “I think it is supposed to sound more like this...” and read the poem aloud with a liveliness and appreciation for the voice heard in the poem. During the reading, the student added hand motions and facial expressions to deliver a dramatic reading that left all of us stunned. The principle of physicality was at work.
Having established the principles of autonomy and physicality as children selected their favorite poems, read, and responded to them, we have begun to seek ways to have the children begin to write their responses to their chosen poems and to those chosen by their classmates. In the next section, we describe the steps that we took to involve parents in our work with poetry.

**The Home**

Once our poetry anthology routines were established, we searched for a way to bring more poetry into our students’ homes and to encourage parental involvement. As a result, we began a home-poetry project. Poetry homework provides opportunities to extend curricular themes and to support family reading and discussion of poetry.

During the first open house of the year, we introduced the poetry project and discussed the institute with teachers, parents, and students. We promised parents that at least one poem would be sent home each week as part of homework. A letter was sent home with the initial poem to inform those parents who had not attended the open house. We made a great effort to include poems written in other languages, with English translations. Parents were encouraged to read and talk about the poem with their children and to write a response in their home language. About one month into the initial year, many parents began including their own responses to the poems. Following their lead, we began to include a place for adult responses on the homework. We assured parents who wrote in their home languages that we would find a translator to share the response with the class. These responses were brought to the classroom where many were posted with copies of the poems.

Although parents’ responses were not mandatory, nearly three-quarters of them responded regularly, an impressive number. Parents have also informed us during meetings or conferences that this poetry addition is their favorite part of the homework each week. They have stated that they enjoy reading the poems with their entire families and discussing them together. Many children have said that their parents often dramatize the poems or try to memorize them. Some of the parents have sent their favorite poems to the class. As a result of these shared experiences, students have included these “home” poems and the written responses in their poetry anthologies. The children also enjoyed sharing their parents’ poems and the family responses to all the poems they read together. Parents were invited to the classroom during Poetry Anthology Time to join in class discussions and to share their favorite poems and their responses.

We have been most pleased with this project because it allows us to serve both the students and their families in a community where many cultures enrich our collection of favorite poems. The responses we have received from both parents and students have been insightful and moving. In response to “The Dream Keeper” by Langston Hughes (1932/1994), many parents expressed their worry and concern for their children in this harsh world, as well as their enthusiasm and support for their children’s dreams.

Throughout the years we have conducted this part of the project, our students’ responses have shown an increased level of sophistication when responding to poems, both in class and at home. Their responses have evolved from simply
re-telling the poem to making both personal and literary associations. (See Figure 4.1 for examples of a child’s and a parent’s responses.)

As a result of the enriched discussions that began in the home, our classroom discussions have changed. In the beginning, the prompts we provided to elicit responses were open-ended questions, such as What did you like about this poem? How did this poem make you feel? As our students progressed in responding to poetry, we have refined the prompts to focus on a particular poem and to invite more elaborate responses. The cooperation of the school and the home has benefited the children and their families in countless ways and has contributed to our aspirations for a community of learners.

We have observed that our students are using poetry to enhance their voices in all of their writing. Poems such as “The Dream Keeper” were used to teach the craft of voice and served as excellent models and inspiration to our student poets. Poetry has also been used to teach simile, metaphor, alliteration, and repetition. Although students are encouraged to write poetry, reading and responding to poetry is taught months before we expect our students to write. During the early part of the year, a poetry study was conducted during the writing workshop. Students read a wide variety of poetry and wrote responses to the poems they read. These experiences were the first step in writing poetry. (See Figure 4.2 for poetry written by Jennifer’s third-grade students who were inspired by “The Dream Keeper.”)

Figure 4.1  A Child’s and a Parent’s Responses to “The Dream Keeper” by Langston Hughes

Read the Langston Hughes poem The Dream Keeper with an adult at home. Then talk about what the poem means to you. What was your favorite part and did you see any pictures in your head? Both you and the adult may write a few sentences describing your favorite part and your discussion at home. Then illustrate the poem.

Child: I imagine a person telling me to bring all my dreams to him, because he is going to keep them apart.

Adult: It’s his job when we dreamed, it’s not just that our illusions, wishes, everything it’s the secrets and we can do or be anything we want to be.

Illustrate the pictures you saw in your head as you read the poem.
The School
Following our attendance at the Poetry Institute, Nancy Birmingham, our principal and a former institute participant, gave us the opportunity to introduce the Favorite Poem Project to the entire faculty at an early September meeting. We described the highlights of the institute, presented the notebook of lesson plans, and showed selections from the video collection. We conducted a series of staff development sessions in which we shared the lessons with our colleagues and used the videos to initiate discussions of poetry. In The Sounds of Poetry (1998), Pinsky states, “poetry is just as physical or bodily an art as dancing” (p. 8). The videos were most helpful.

Figure 4.2 Poems by Third-Grade Students Inspired by “The Dream Keeper”

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*Dreams*

Dreams are like wishes that you can depend on.
Dreams are nice to think about.
Dreams will be with you.
Do not give up on your dream because dreams will come true.
What ever you want to be just follow your dream.
Like a teacher...
that is what I want to be when I grow up.

*By Elizabeth Rodriguez*

*Dreams*

Dreams are scary like rollercoasters.
Dreams are funny like comedians.
Dreams are full of thoughts like daydreams.

*By Juan Pagan*

*My Dream*

I dream to be a baseball player.
Or maybe a football player.
It’s hard to choose, so I’ll just be myself.

*By Carlos Figueroa*
in illustrating to our colleagues what is meant by the principles of autonomy and physicality, and the value of the individual’s response to a poem.

Throughout these staff development sessions, our goal was to convey the primary focus of the Favorite Poem Project. This is not to say that poetry was not being performed in the elementary classroom; most, if not all, of our colleagues read poems to and with their students every day. It was the application of the principles of autonomy and physicality, and the act of responding—the oral and written dialogue between the reader and the poet—that was missing.

Inspired by our seminars with Pinsky and other notable poets during the institutes, we set an initial goal for the first year to increase the poetry collection in the elementary classrooms to include fewer poets who write exclusively for children and more classic and contemporary poets who write for readers of all ages. Our principal, who understood and supported our goal, quickly helped us to achieve it by ordering a series of classic poetry anthologies for every classroom library.

In the next year of our poetry initiative, we created a poetry corner in an alcove in a central location in the school. The corner was filled with beanbag seating and a variety of poetry books, including anthologies written by individual students and whole classes. On the bulletin board opposite the corner, a showcase of famous poets and their work was posted, along with copies of their poems for children to take with them when they returned to their classrooms.

Students were invited to visit the corner during the daily half-hour independent reading period that is a part of the literacy curriculum. Although teachers schedule and structure this time in different ways, they encouraged children to read poetry in the poetry corner or in the classroom during this period. Because the independent reading time occurs at different times during the day, crowding was not a problem, but students were reminded to return to their classrooms if the corner was fully occupied when they visited. A timer was given to the students when they left the classroom to assure their prompt return at the end of the independent reading period. Students also visited the poetry corner during indoor recess time when inclement weather prevented them from playing outside. The teachers monitored the students in the poetry corner according to their availability.

During our weekly school assembly, students were invited to share talents and favorite books and poems. Sharing poems continues to be the request received most frequently by our principal. Students read poems individually, with partners, and even groups comprised of whole classes. In the manner of the original Favorite Poem Project Readings, the students were invited to tell why they chose their favorite poem. (See Figure 4.3 for introductions to favorite poems offered by two fourth graders who were previously members of Merri’s class in second and third grades.)

We saw the results of these expanded opportunities to read and respond to poetry demonstrated in many ways. A study of the circulation of books in the school library, which is used by three other elementary schools in our complex, found that the circulation of poetry books increased by 38% in the year following our attendance at the Poetry Institute and 92% in the second year, when the other schools joined in our poetry project.

At the same time, our school implemented the writing workshop model to better develop students’ writing abilities. Although we never intended the two initiatives to intersect, we found that the reading of poetry provided inspiration to
teachers and students, both for the teaching of the craft and for making models of good writing accessible.

The culmination of our efforts to share with our school community what we learned at the Poetry Institute was a family poetry night. Our principal gathered a group of teachers and led the group in planning every aspect of the event. The evening began with a welcome by the school principal and a favorite poem reading by several

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I like the poem Honey. I love because it tells people all about the things that she likes and places that she likes to go. I also like how she says I love a lot of things a whole lot of things. I like how she expresses herself with her words in this poem. I also like this poem because it reminds me of things I like and places I like to go and things I like to do with my family and my friends. The picture in my mind is me playing and doing things with my friends and places I like to go like a vacation. This is my favorite poem by Eloise Greenfield and always will be.

Shandalee Colon
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I like a poem named Dreams by Langston Hughes. My favorite lines are Hold fast to dreams or if dreams die Life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly. Hold fast to dreams or if dreams go life is a barren field frozen with snow. The poem Dreams reminds me of dreams. I want to dream again. It feels like my soul is that girl in the poem. I get a picture in my mind of the little girl sleeping in her bed and then her dreams just flowing away from her mind and never coming back.

Veronica Martinez
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community members. The variety of poems exemplified the principle of autonomy as the superintendent of schools read “Fog” by Carl Sandburg (1916/1992), a custodian read “The Children’s Hour” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Schoonmaker, 1998), a school nurse read “Sick” by Shel Silverstein (1974), and a member of the school district read a poem he had written as a young boy.

Following the favorite poem reading, families visited six poetry stations created by the teachers. The station-centered model of our poetry event was inspired by our school’s consistently successful science family night. Instead of offering science experiments, these stations were places where families could read or write poems and participate in accompanying activities. The themes of the stations were mathematics, science, art, music, and physical education. A faculty volunteer was available at each station, where there were three different poems and three activities. For example, the teacher at the science station read a poem about plants with the families, then helped the children to plant seeds in small cups. An activity at the physical education station involved students jumping rope while reading jump-rope rhymes posted on large charts. Children were given personal copies of the poems at all of the stations. Our goal was to introduce a wide variety of poems while providing an atmosphere where autonomy and physicality were encouraged.

The District

In the summer of 2002, Sheila Garnick, our Title I director, who had been a lead teacher in the institute, invited us to coordinate a summer workshop for educators interested in learning more about the Favorite Poem Project. Teachers from the four elementary schools in our district were invited to attend this five-day workshop. This workshop comprised two parts: exposure to the Favorite Poem Project and the development of a K–4 districtwide poetry homework binder. Each day began with a viewing of the Favorite Poem Project videos, followed by a discussion of the principles and practices we had learned in the institute and the ways these ideas can be implemented in the elementary school classroom. In the second half of the day, groups of teachers read, collected, and discussed poetry and developed response sheets consistent with the instructional themes of the curriculum. The poems and response sheets were discussed in the larger group, final decisions were made, and a binder was created for each of the four elementary schools in the hope that all elementary classrooms would begin to participate in this project in the next school year. Although representatives from each school attended the workshop, we also presented this project at each school at a September staff meeting. Our presentation of the binder and our own family responses from the previous year led to great excitement across the elementary schools and a quick adoption of the home-poetry project. Today, classrooms throughout the elementary complex actively engage their students and families in the home-poetry project.

The Professional Community

We have had opportunities to make presentations to the participants in the two poetry institutes that followed our initial attendance. At these events, we have described many of the initiatives presented in this chapter and, as a result, have been invited by some of the participants to present professional development
sessions in their school districts. During the first year of the implementation of the poetry project our school was named a Compass School by the Massachusetts Department of Education. Both Nancy Birmingham and Sheila Garnick believe that the poetry initiatives were instrumental in our success in literacy. We made presentations at two Title I conferences to audiences that included educators from many school districts in the state.

**Next Steps**

The genesis of the implementation described in this chapter is the direct result of our (Jennifer and Merri’s) attendance at the Poetry Institute. Our ideas about how and when to teach poetry were changed. We were reminded of our own love of poetry and affirmed what we knew to be true, that many methods of teaching poetry in primary and secondary schools generally have the effect of muting the voices of the poet and the reader in the midst of exhaustive studies of syntax and meter. We encourage university departments of literature and education to join in replicating Boston University’s Summer Poetry Institute for Educators in their areas. We can think of no better way to encourage broad changes in the way poetry is taught in schools and to convince educators that giving poetry its rightful place in the curriculum will not result in a negative effect on high-stakes testing.

Our goals for the near future are to continue to refine the initiatives we have in place and to encourage more family involvement. We hope to invite parents to come to school each week to participate in Poetry Anthology Time and to host regular Favorite Poem Readings throughout the year. In light of the recent study by the National Endowment for the Arts (Bradshaw & Nichols, 2004) that finds that the reading of literature has declined dramatically, we hope to reverse that trend by giving our students and their families a forum in which to read and respond to their favorite poems. Our efforts to nurture and teach the next generation of poets will continue as well.

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