

# *The Relevance of Poetry in School Leadership Today*

LYSTRA M. RICHARDSON  
*Southern Connecticut State University*

**ABSTRACT:** It could be said that poets serve society primarily by their attention to detail, their insights into life, and their contribution to the human spirit. In destitute times the role of the poet becomes even more critical, since people are likely to move from crisis to crisis without time for reflection. Inspired by the line: "What are poets for in a destitute time" from the German poet Holderlin's poem, "Bread and Wine" (Watts, 1993), this paper examines the role poets play in society, and the context in which public education exists and makes a linkage between poetry and school leadership. Combining the craft and artistry of poetry with reflective practice, the author delineates ways in which school leaders can use aspects of the poet's craft to enhance their ability to read and interpret their environment, and sharpen their communications in ways that can help them maneuver the rapids of educational change.

**RESUME:** A première vue, on pourrait dire que le poète est utile dans la société par son attention aux détails, sa sagacité dans la vie et l'enrichissement qu'il apporte à l'esprit humain. Dans des temps plus durs, son rôle devient plus décisif, surtout depuis que les gens passent, probablement, d'une crise à l'autre sans prendre le temps de réfléchir. Inspiré par le vers tiré du poème de l'auteur allemand Holderlin "Le Pain et le Vin" (Watts, 1993): "Quelle est l'utilité du poète en temps de misère?" ce papier analyse en profondeur le rôle du poète dans la société et le contexte de l'éducation publique qui semble lier poésie et importance de l'enseignement scolaire. En alliant métier et art de la rime à la réflexion, l'auteur ébauche des lignes à suivre. Les éducateurs peuvent y saisir certains aspects du travail du poète pour affiner leur lecture et l'interprétation de leur environnement et rendre les voies de la communication plus aisées; ce qui peut les aider à naviguer dans les méandres de l'échange scolaire.

## *Introduction*

### *Poets and Their Work*

It could be said that poets serve society primarily by their attention to detail, their insights into life, and their contribution to the human spirit. Poets tend to bring to light the hidden landscape of the human psyche; they also cast light on our outer landscape – nature. In destitute times the role of the poet becomes even more critical, since people are likely to move from crisis to crisis searching for answers, explanations, or solutions without allowing time for reflection.

Poets usually address matters of the heart, the spirit, the soul, those aspects of life often kept hidden in the world of work. Walter (1962) posits that the poet's mission is to find out what is going on and interpret it to those who see but do not understand, and that poets have a willingness to face the problems of life and try to interpret them, as well as the desire to discover the significance of common things.

### *Organizational Work*

Traditionally, in the world of work, people in organizations tend to be more technical, procedural, scientific, and less creative, imaginative, passionate, or spiritual. And, today the new economy dictates speed and continuous innovation which are likely to give rise to more formulas with which to manage the explosion of information. Yet, as Lawler (2001) points out, the era of human capital has arrived – an era in which people are valued for their ability to think, analyze, and problem solve. Perhaps the poet's craft can be useful here. Perhaps we now need to awaken the poet within – that part of the human spirit that pays attention to the simple and seemingly mundane aspects of life. The part that can notice the pain in someone's eyes, the hurt in someone's heart, even the despair in someone else's soul. The very part of our being that is willfully stifled in order to get ahead, too focused to see, to listen, and to attend. That part of being human is not usually evaluated in an annual review, nor does it count for promotion or tenure.

Recently attention has been drawn to valuing the human spirit in the workplace. While several management scholars agree that self-reflection plays a key role in learning particularly in the area of leadership (Chiaromonte, 1992; Argyris, 1991; Peters, 1991; Covey, 1989), others point out the value in attending to the human spirit. Whyte (1994) suggests that organizations need the poet's insight and powers of

attention in order to weave the inner world of soul and creativity with the outer world of form and matter; Kouzes & Posner (1999) point out that encouraging the heart is one of the most important behavioral commitments of successful leaders; Greene (2000) argues for deeper meaning making in schools by use of the imagination; Bolman & Deal (2001) observe that there is a greater need for an infusion of soul in the workplace; and Chang (2001) describes how passion can provide direction and improve performance at work. These aspects of being human become increasingly important in destitute times.

### *The Nature of Destitution for Schools*

Why would anyone think we're living in destitute times? For public schools, destitution is embodied in the constellation of interrelated and ongoing social, economic, political, and technological changes that lead to new expectations for schools.

#### *Social, Economic and Political Changes*

Schooling is integrally linked to politics, and societal forces impact schools continually. Recent indicators of the extravagance in everyday American life appear to confirm the egregious disparities in wealth that can pose challenges to schools. In an age of prosperity in which a 32-year-old with an idea for a software company has a net worth that exceeds the gross national product of Sri Lanka, poverty among children is rising in several areas of the country. The juxtaposition of wealth and need is striking. Take, for example, the state of Connecticut, one of the smallest and wealthiest states. A recent report notes that the state's child poverty rate increased from 11% in 1989 to 15% in 1997 resulting in about 40,000 more children (approximately 120,000 total) living in poverty (Geballe & Hall, 2001). Connecticut is also home to one of the wealthiest towns in the country. While the issue is one of relative poverty, the magnitude of income and wealth differences is staggering, and these differences account for inequities in educational funding among school districts.

#### *Demographic Impact*

Ongoing and predictable demographic changes also contribute to the complex environment in which schools operate. Since school districts are fiscally dependent on their local communities, demographic shifts cannot go unnoticed because they are likely to have a major fiscal impact on public schools. The question looms as to whether the aging baby boomers

(70 million) will maintain their interest and support of public schools after their children have left public schools. This could exacerbate the politics.

Additionally, the changing demographic makeup of many school districts in which as many as 20 or more languages co-exist, highlight the need for an increase in the number of foreign language teachers. Moreover, the demographic makeup of classrooms with the recent inclusion of special needs students presents its own set of challenges.

### *Economic Changes*

Additionally, the economic system is transforming in ways that have implications for all social institutions including schools (Conley, 1999). Economic changes have reshaped American values. The affluence effect (Yankelovich, 1994) has accelerated the pace of change in values and subsequently moral concerns. Noting that there is a relationship between capitalism and social decay, D'Souza (2000) points out that in the current environment what markets and technology do is cater to the trivializing and harmful elements of the culture because that is where the profits are. Since there is an integral link between schools and society with social demands filtering down to the schools, the social consequences of the new economy pose increasing challenges to schools. Moreover, as trends in society create the impetus for schools to continually restructure and add to the already overburdened curriculum, leaders are likely to become overwhelmed. Another social symptom of the economic changes is the malaise of affluenza (Bennis, 2001) affecting those who have succeeded materially at an early age and are trying to find meaning in life.

There is also the question of the social and moral cost to be paid for the benefits of advances such as biotechnology where some scientists dominated by their interest in technology, operate on the principle that if something is possible, it should be done. While biotechnology, today, can help cure diseases and extend life, the possibility of remaking our species is also being explored.

### *Technological Advances*

Advances in technology have played a major role in highlighting the nature of our destitution and in exacerbating the chasm. There are the digital haves and have-nots. The haves are able to access information and opportunity, while the have nots are restricted, in large measure trying to get the best use of the remnants of the old economy. Technology

is unfamiliar ground for many schools as they find themselves unable to keep up fiscally as well as in technical ability to adapt quickly to frequent technological changes.

Additionally, America has created the first mass affluent class, in world history. Visible evidence of extravagance in everyday American life abound as different social classes feel the need to indicate where they stand socially. The car one drives or the number and kinds of cars one owns, where one eats, what one eats, the kinds of pets and level of care they receive, are common social indicators of upward mobility

Although the problem is not one of absolute but relative deprivation D'Souza (2000) argues that this does not make it any less real, and what some children suffer is not the physical hardship of going hungry but the psychological suffering of everyday humiliation. In addition to the challenges posed by technology within the schools, in many districts, school leaders are faced with the challenges inherent in both poverty and prosperity.

### *New Expectations for Schools*

At the same time that schools are struggling to respond to the impact of poverty and prosperity, they are subjected to increased public scrutiny. The amount of time spent with community groups, the high visibility, the ongoing demand for high quality interpersonal communication, dealing with angry parents, managing crises, and public criticism and demands are among the challenges identified by Connecticut school superintendents (Richardson, 1999a). Largely driven by international comparisons of American students on standardized tests, accountability has become the watchword of a skeptical public. Recently, national and state standards have been established and standardized testing has increased. Teachers and school leaders, are for the most part, left to make sense of the standards and ensure test scores are high. School leaders operate in a highly politicized environment. Richardson (1999b) observed that at the same time they are dealing with the internal politics they are facing mounting external obligations as the demands on public schools increase.

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the accrediting organization for schools, colleges, and departments of education in the United States (1995) enumerates the tasks of educational leaders as requiring patience and perspective, the exercise of judgment and wisdom, the development of new technical and analytical skills, sensitivities to other cultures, highly developed

communication skills, and personal values that integrate the ethical dimensions of decision making.

Further complicating their role, principals are often pulled in competing directions. DuFour (1998) observes the paradoxical nature of school level leadership thus:

Principals have been called upon to be strong leaders and to give away power to others, to celebrate the success of their school and to perpetuate discontent with the status quo; to convey urgency regarding the need for school improvement efforts over the long haul; to encourage individual autonomy and to insist on adherence to the school's mission, vision, values, and goals; to build widespread support for change and to push forward with improvement despite resistance; to approach improvement incrementally and to promote the aggressive comprehensive shake up necessary to escape the bonds of traditional school cultures. (p. 43)

The paradoxes inherent in school leadership are inescapable.

### *Challenges for School Leaders*

It is against this backdrop that schools operate and in which leaders are primarily responsible for providing leadership for continuous change, and the education of young people. Since the kind of education our young receive largely determines the quality of our society and given that social demands filter down to the schools, these issues have major implications for school leaders. Exacerbated by the technological advances and the new economy that values the rapid transmission of information with little or no time for reflection, the tasks of school leaders is a daunting one.

The scope and alacrity of change require that school leaders go beyond traditional thought patterns and explore new realms. In light of the demands on school leaders and the context in which they operate, the poet's craft, the ability to pay attention to the environment, develop insight and ennoble the human spirit, may serve useful.

## *The Art and Craft of Poetry*

### *The Value of Poetry*

Amid the affluence, the focus on getting rich, and acquiring financial capital, poetry may be considered more ornamental than utilitarian. However, it is precisely in a time such as this that poetry may be most

valuable. Written eight decades ago, and highly relevant today, T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" which portrays a spiritually desolate society in the 1920s, could be easily viewed as a depiction of modern American society. Poetry such as Eliot's tends to go beyond the everyday routines stirring the imagination and helping to create a vision of the future. Similarly, Holderlin's (whose poem titled "Bread and Wine") use of bread and wine – items routinely used for daily sustenance, yet symbols of the divine – poignantly exemplifies the poet's ability to use insight and attention to turn the everyday into the sublime touching the heart and mind at much deeper level, and thereby contributing to the human spirit. Since schools are primarily about people and relationships, so too school leaders are required by insight and attention to rise above the fray of the everyday to inspire and encourage the human heart.

### *Poetry Defined*

First, it is important to point out that poetry does not lend itself easily to definition, and therefore, any effort to clearly define poetry is likely to be open to discussion. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this paper, several definitions are referenced in an effort to view the art from a broad perspective.

Webster's definition of a poet is one who demonstrates great imaginative power, insight, or beauty of expression. These very attributes are frequently ascribed to great leaders: thoughtful, insightful, and effective communicators. The American Heritage Dictionary (1994) defines a poem as a verbal composition characterized by the use of condensed language chosen for its sound and suggestive power and by the use of literary techniques such a meter and metaphor. Poetry paints pictures that stir the imagination, and employs strong, emotive language that touches the human heart and inspires the soul. The use of poetic techniques in school leadership may not only lend itself to effective use of time and enhanced communication, but also to the acknowledgment of one's own humanity as well as the humanity of others.

When closely examined, the process of poetry (examining the environment, thinking deeply/reflecting, imagining, making connections, and communicating) as well as the product of poetry (the poems themselves which demonstrate techniques of concise, effective, inspirational writing) can contribute immeasurably to leadership. Walter (1962) contends that poetry owes its high position in literature to its ability to present ideas and truths concisely and imaginatively.

"The poet can make significant use of emotional appeal and rhythm to present his idea. He must present either a new idea or a new approach to an old idea" (p. 73).

### *School Leadership and Poetry*

Amid the constantly changing environment, school leaders need to be able to present their ideas concisely (in large measure due to lack of time), and imaginatively in ways that can stir the school community to action. This usually requires the use of emotional appeal.

All true poetry is motivated by emotion, contends Walter (1962) who sees the poet's mission as threefold: (a) to express emotion adequately and artistically for his or her own personal satisfaction (b) to share his or her emotional experiences with others, (c) to stir an emotional response in the reader (p. 56). A direct application could be made where leaders need to express ideas clearly and stir others to action.

In their recent work *Leading with Soul*, Bolman and Deal (2001) point out that the heart of true leadership can only be found in the heart of the leader. How then are school leaders to attend to matters of the heart? While there are no quick, simple, or easy answers, the poet's craft, both process and product, may in some ways be useful. It could be argued that while the external environment is constantly changing, the basic needs of the human heart are constant. Hence appealing to the needs of the heart is of inestimable value in most human relationships.

Various definitions of poetry exist, however the following is particularly useful to this discussion:

The poet's eye, in a frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothings  
A local habitation and a name.

William Shakespeare

(as cited in Untermeyer, 1926, p. iii)

The foregoing is a definition of poetry by Shakespeare from which one can readily glean some insights for school leadership. Poets as Shakespeare sees them, are keenly observant. They survey, examine, rather scrutinize the environment and use the imagination to make

comparisons and connections. Then with carefully chosen words, the poet names or frames what has been observed so others can understand. An apt and direct application can be made to schools today where leaders are beset by problems of all sorts in a complex environment. School leaders need to survey the changing environment, identify the big picture by making comparisons and connections, and with carefully chosen words frame the external context for the school community in ways that make sense to them. Walter (1962) observes that the world needs more people who are not afraid of ideas, people who are willing to examine them, evaluate them, and apply them to the solution of our common problems (p. 3).

### *Applying Techniques of Poetry to School Leadership*

A major challenge for school leaders operating in a constantly changing environment is the need to frame innovation in a way that enables sense-making for faculty and staff. In attempting to help others change or take action to make connections between the known and the unknown, the old and the new, the familiar and the unfamiliar engenders meaning- and sense-making in followers. Leaders use of condensed language, the product of poetry – concise, memorable, inspirational words – can be effective in the time-poor environment of schools. This is not meant to reduce leadership communication to sound bites, but there is value in prudent use of some literary communication. The use of metaphors and similes, for example, effectively connects the familiar with the unfamiliar, and could provide fresh insights and stimulate creativity. In communicating with those they lead, comparisons and connections between the known and the unknown help create meaning.

Evans (1996) argues that the key in change is what it means to those who must implement it, that change provokes loss, challenges competence, creates confusion, and causes conflict. These conditions are commonplace in schools. Consequently, school leaders will do well to develop their communication skills both, written and verbal, in ways that will enable their language to facilitate meaning- and sense-making in a way that may help assuage the degree of confusion inherent in school change.

School leadership today requires collaboration in which other stakeholders, particularly teachers, are called upon to engage in leadership activities. In order to generate deep understanding of the thought processes and methods of communication among school

professionals, there is also a need to foster poetic sensibilities in all members of the professional community.

### *Techniques of Poetry*

A brief examination of some techniques of poetry can cast additional light on ways in which the process of poetry may be useful to school leaders. Walter (1962) enumerates the principal characteristics of effective diction for poetry as: simplicity, appropriateness, restraint, economy, and accuracy. Following is an adaptation of her work to school leadership.

*Simplicity.* Simplicity addresses the need for understanding by the reader. A poet searches for the right words not only to express her or his exact meaning, but also to arouse the imaginative, emotional, and intellectual response of the reader. School leaders should not let the search for imaginative words lead them to adopt euphemisms and artificial expressions that are likely to preclude them from being taken seriously, but they must search for the words to convey ideas in a straightforward manner, simply and directly.

*Appropriateness.* In poetry, appropriateness is the ability to say the right thing at the right time; to choose words that suit the mood, the emotion, and the thought. This can be accomplished by the development of one's vocabulary, careful consideration of the needs of the audience and the context in which the message is to be delivered, and revision of one's communications. Reading poetry can also stimulate creative uses of language.

*Restraint.* The necessity of being selective rather than giving in to the need to tell all is referred to as restraint. This technique gives added significance to language and value to spoken or written communication. The tendency to tell all could be fatal to a leader. Just as the best poems are weakened by "laying it on too thick," or by vulgar language, so too is the leader of a complex organization. Restraint includes the ability to avoid engaging in things like name-calling or other antagonizing communication such as violent language, vulgarity, or the tendency to "lay it on thick."

*Economy.* The technique of economy is quite similar to restraint, except that in this instance it has to do with the number of words rather than the kinds of words. Wordiness is not usually a hallmark of poetry. Poets say what they have to say briefly and forcefully. The pace is fast in schools and there is no time for long-winded leaders who take five pages to expound an idea that could well be expressed in one, or who

take two hours to communicate an idea that could be concisely and effectively done in 30 minutes. To be effective, a school leader cannot afford to send memos that are full of careless, repetitious, pointless musings, and unnecessary ruminations. A critical part of school leadership preparation should be learning to eliminate weak words, unnecessary words, and words that add nothing to their verbal or communication. Prospective school leaders require practice in using words that mean exactly what they want to say and do not require an overabundance of additional phrases to explain them.

*Accuracy.* Working in tandem with economy is accuracy. Poets achieve accuracy not by adding all the words that could possibly be used in one connection, but by searching until they find the exact word or phrase to express their meaning, a colorful word or phrase that fits into the pattern. Walter (1962) argues that the writing of poetry is one of the sure ways of promoting word study and that the result is bound to be an increased and more colorful vocabulary. While school leaders do not want to be overly colorful, prudent use interesting or uncommon words can be effective connecting with the right brain and conveying meaning readily. Good diction means not only accuracy in word choice, but also accuracy in word usage, and correct grammar. These too are important for the school leader. A poet searches for the right words not only to express his or her exact meaning, but also to arouse the imaginative, emotional, and intellectual response of the reader. The poet uses not only the significant, accurate word, but the word which at the same time presents the best picture and stirs in the reader an emotional appreciation of the poet's mood and idea. A few additional techniques of poetry of value to the school leader include imagery, word choice, rhythm, and refrain.

*Imagery.* Imagery is the basis of the language of imagination. In poetry imagery presents a mental picture of an idea through sensory appeal, connotative language, and comparison, which help to evaluate the unknown in terms of the known, and expressing likeness in objects that are quite different. Walter (1962) who contends that the imagery of a poem performs its true function when it helps to bridge the chasm between the poet and the reader, goes on to explain that poets use imagery for various purposes. These include giving concreteness to abstract ideas, clarifying in their own minds a thought or a feeling or a dim perception of truth, and awakening in others a similar understanding and response. Imagery, then, includes comparisons, figurative language, concrete picture words, allusions, analogies, and

sensory appeals which can be used effectively by the leader primarily to show connections or among disparate aspects of a complex environment. Additionally, poets examine their work for harsh sounds and phrases unsuitable for an idea, and substitute sounds and phrases which are appropriated to mood and meaning. They select words with accents properly placed to fit into the rhythmic pattern; and choose to make intelligent use of alliteration, assonance, rhyme, and cadence. In this way they add to the artistic significance of their work.

According to Walter (1962) poets are constantly on the lookout for resemblances in things that are quite different and express the resemblances in simile or metaphor or some other figure of speech. Similarly, school leaders can use the poet's eye to scan the changing environment; get the big picture; and, with carefully chosen words, communicate to the school community in ways that will help them to make sense of and use the information.

*Refrain.* Interestingly enough, refrains may at times be judicious choices for leaders in their communication. A refrain is a chorus, a phrase, or a few lines repeated in poem. This brings to mind Dr. King's famous "I have a dream" speech. In that speech, the refrain served to make the speech more effective, pungent, memorable, and moving. While this should not be overdone, selective usage of refrain can certainly enhance a leader's verbal communication.

*Rhythm.* Another seemingly unlikely but useful tool of the poet is rhythm. Rhythm is a measure of movement by more or less regular recurring accents. Untermeyer (1926) claims that rhythm is the base of poetry because it is also a fundamental principle of life. One can readily observe the rhythms of life in the ebb and flow tides, the regular progression of day and night, the ordered march of the seasons, even the breathing of one's body, and the throbbing of the heart. Rhythm, then, is as natural to us as breathing. Applied to school leadership, this does not mean leaders should speak or write in rhymes, but that they should in examining the environment, look for patterns, recurring themes, and point them out in their communication with the school community.

### *Reflective Practice*

Given the context in which schools operate, it behooves school leaders to make use the poet's insight and powers of attention. And, reflective practice offers a viable vehicle for honing one's insights and powers of attention. The concept of reflective practice (Schon, 1983), emphasizes the need to avoid standardized, formulaic responses to situations

encountered in professional practice, and to recognize that human problems cannot be solved by the simple application of technical solutions. Bradley (1997) suggests that reflective practice involves coming to terms with the complexity, variability, and uncertainty of work, and of constructing solutions rather than passively following procedures or guidelines. Further, Kouzes & Posner (1987) note that unexamined experiences do not produce the rich insights that come with reflection and analysis. Applied to leadership, it means that school leaders must carefully consider their environment and their actions in order to gain insights.

Attention and insight, hallmarks of the poet, are arguably required for effective leadership. In delineating standards for school leaders, NCATE organized 11 knowledge and skill domains under four broad areas which comprised strategic leadership, organizational leadership, instructional leadership, and political community leadership (NCATE 2001). Common to each of these areas of leadership is the leader's ability to manage information and resources, lead and connect people, understand external context and create linkages, and produce student achievement, each of which could undoubtedly be enhanced by attention, insight, and reflection. This is where the poet's willingness to find out what is happening, face the problems of life and try to interpret them, and the desire to discover the significance of common things (Walter, 1962) can serve the school leader.

A commonly held belief is that learning to practice reflectively can lead to improved professional and organizational effectiveness (Chiaromonte, 1992; Argyris, 1991; Peters, 1991; Covey, 1989). Reflective practice, explains Peters (1991), involves more than simply thinking about what one is doing and what one should do next. It involves identifying one's assumptions and feelings associated with practice, theorizing about how these assumptions and feelings are functionally or dysfunctionally associated with practice, and acting on the basis of the resulting theory in practice. "In this sense, reflective practice involves critical thinking and learning, both of which are processes that can lead to significant self-development" (p. 89). And, as Kouzes and Posner (2001) note, leadership development is self-development. The primary focus then is on one's behavior. Recently management education has begun to place emphasis on self-reflection as a means to prepare students for professional practice. The need to reflect critically on one's own behavior is now considered vital to one's continued learning and performance in leadership positions (Argyris, 1991; Chiaramonte, 1992; Bigelow, 1996; Vicere, 1996; Kilmann, 1994; Covey, 1989).

The challenge for school leaders is the need to continuously "weave the inner world" (Whyte, 1994, p. 9) with the boundaryless outer world and to make decisions and take actions that impact the lives of students

and subsequently the future of society. They need to develop insights into and pay attention to the far-reaching social, economic, political, and technological changes that comprise the context in which they operate.

### *Combining Reflective Practice with Poetry*

Reading and reflecting on poetry can greatly influence a school leader's communication, both verbal and written. While reflective practice can serve to strengthen school leaders' powers of insight and attention, use of poetic technique can enhance their communication, sharpen their language, and stir their own imagination as well as that of their followers' to see above the day-to-day routines and perceive a grander mission that can ennoble the work. Poetry has the potential to help leaders discover deeper meaning in their work, encourage original thought, to engage in clear and brief communication, and to more carefully examine and reflect on their experiences.

To follow the way of the poet, school leaders would need to:

- Invest in people, that is develop them, get to know them;
- Develop their own self reflection skills, that is, consciously contextual factors with conceptual lenses anchored in knowledge of people and their needs;
- Communicate what is important clearly and succinctly by engaging in bridge-building. Connecting the new with something that is already known, the unfamiliar with the familiar using poetic techniques such as similes and metaphors;
- Show appreciation, acknowledges one's own humanity as well as the humanity of others.

Investing in people enables the leader to gather information about, understand the needs, and see the potential of their followers. Practicing self-reflection provides the knowledge of self and others, and a deeper understanding of the environment in which one operates. While this knowledge helps facilitate effective communication by providing content, studying and applying techniques of poetry helps facilitate the form of communication. Appreciating and recognizing others could conceivably be a natural outgrowth of investing in people.

### *Professional Development*

The professional development framework proposed in Table 1 is meant as an initial framework for fostering some poetic sensibilities in school leaders. The activities are designed to help school leaders develop poetic sensibilities that hold potential to engage them in addressing some of the "destitution" in and around schools.

*Table 1. Proposed Professional Developmental Framework*

<i>Poetic Sensibility</i>	<i>Skill</i>	<i>Use</i>	<i>Experiences</i>
Attention	Observation	Environmental Scanning; Identify the big picture	Reflection & analysis to come to terms with complexity. Go beyond usual ways of viewing problems; collect perceptive data. See beyond day to day routine.
Insight	Imagination & Memory	Make comparisons & connections	Metaphorical thinking, synthesizing. Discern & make connections, bridge familiar to unfamiliar, perceive new & different possibilities.
Communication	Writing & Speaking	Choose words to engender meaning	Read, write, & examine poetry to develop or enhance speech and writing.

Of course, openness to the idea of using poetry and motivation to learn would be important elements for success with this type of professional development. Developmental experiences are focused on three areas of poetic skill: attention, insight, and communication, each aligned with corresponding skills to be enhanced or developed, and use of those skills. These developmental experiences can be conducted through seminars, workshops, and on the job assignments.

In addition to the developmental experiences, and the motivation to learn, it is important that organizational structures support rather than hinder this type of professional development. To that end, it would be

advisable that whole school staffs be trained together in order to foster broad understanding of the skills, so that leaders are not suddenly using metaphorical speech to which others can make no connection or meaning.

A basic full staff development training centered on the needs of people in schools and ways in which they can be attended to through communication can help in laying the ground work for some level of institutional support.

School leaders need additional role-specific training designed for refining and sustaining poetic sensibilities. Like all communication skills, if not practiced they are likely to be lost. To be sustained, organizational supports for continuous learning must be in place, and new ways of thinking must be honored.

It is certainly understandable that many school leaders may not be familiar with poetry, may feel anxiety about poetry, or even feel uncomfortable with poetry. Some may even question its academic legitimacy, and be much more willing to settle for knowledge about poetry rather than the experience of poetry. The developmental experiences are to be structured to address different levels of motivation. For example, some school leaders may initially engage in either listening to poetry or reading poetry. Others may choose to do both. Still others may be ready to engage in writing poetry.

Ultimately, however, this professional development is not about poetry. Rather, it is about ways of enhancing or developing new skills that will help leaders in their challenging tasks of running schools, in becoming more attentive to and insightful about human needs as they present themselves in the school setting. It is also about how leaders communicate in ways that engender meaning for those they lead.

This paper is not advocating how to read and write or critique poetry for the sake of doing so. Rather, it is concerned with using the process of poetry, a way of looking at the world and a way of discovering realities and their connections, it is about uncovering at a deeper level what makes us human and attending to that unity and community that goes beyond the fragmentation, and responding beyond the rugged individualism. It is about developing enhanced insight, critical thinking, and meaning making, going beyond analysis to synthesis. And, it speaks to the need for leaders to examine the lenses through which they view the world to discover its vibrancy and beauty.

This framework is proposed with the foregoing in mind and with the understanding that a critical need exists to provide a sound rationale for legitimizing poetry as a form of leadership development. In no way is the use of poetry meant to be construed as a silver bullet. It can, however, bring some levity to an otherwise increasingly daunting role, put things in a new light, stimulate the flow of interesting or provocative ideas,

foster divergent thinking and creativity, and generate deeper levels of meaning in school work. School leadership is not in such an advanced state of development that it should ignore attempts to improve it.

### Conclusion

The adage, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care" may be a cliché yet quite practical, for just as great poetry moves us by touching the heart, so too does great leadership. Poetry serves to remind us of what truly matters in life. And, in destitute times we need to focus on what truly matters. Schools are ultimately about people—some who influence, some who supervise, some who teach, and some who learn. Establishing and maintaining relationships among these groups is critical. School leaders play a pivotal role in establishing and maintaining these relationships. The quality of schools, to a great extent depends on the effectiveness of the leaders, yet they are under substantial pressure.

As the new economy influences leaders to accelerate speed and to innovate, and as the range of social, economic, demographic, political, and other changes impose new expectations on schools, it would be prudent to explore the poet's craft for its potential to contribute immeasurably to the human spirit.

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*Lystra M. Richardson* is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Southern Connecticut State University. She earned her Ph.D. at the University of Connecticut, and has been a language arts teacher, a central office administrator, and an implementation coordinator for a national school restructuring program. Her forthcoming book to be published by Scarecrow Press is titled *The Power of Poetry and School Leadership*.

