

**Enhancing Relationality through Poetic Engagement with  
PhoneMe**  
Transmodal Contexts and Interpretive Agency  
**Améliorer la relationnalité par à l'engagement poétique avec  
PhoneMe**  
Contextes transmodaux et agence d'interprétation

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article explore le rôle de la préférence des utilisateurs littéraires et de l'expérience de contextualisation des informations dans les réponses interprétatives aux poèmes sur PhoneMe, une plate-forme Web de médias sociaux et une application mobile pour la poésie parlée basée sur le lieu. 137 étudiants en éducation de trois universités canadiennes ont participé en remplissant un sondage qui leur demandait de choisir l'un des trois poèmes stylistiquement distincts et ont ensuite introduit des informations contextuelles multimodales sur le poète et le lieu inspirant le poème. Les résultats indiquent une tension productive entre l'agence interprétative du lecteur/utilisateur avec le texte typographique et la relationnalité croissante imposée par l'information indexicale et transmodale, contribuant ainsi à mettre à jour la théorie de la réponse du lecteur.



*Enhancing Relationality through Poetic Engagement with PhoneMe:  
Transmodal Contexts and Interpretive Agency*

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*Abstract*

This article explores the role of literary user preference and experience of contextualizing information in the interpretive responses to poems on PhoneMe, a social media web-platform and mobile app for place-based spoken word poetry. 137 education students in three Canadian universities participated by completing a survey that asked them to choose one of three stylistically distinct poems and subsequently introduced multimodal contextual information about the poet and location inspiring the poem. Findings indicate a productive tension between the reader/user's interpretive agency with typographic text and the increasing relationality imposed by indexical, transmodal information, thus helping to update Reader Response theory.

*Key Words:* Interpretation; Interpretive Agency; Relationality; Place-based Poetry; Spoken Word; Social Media; User Experience; Context Collapse; Reader Response; Multimodality; Transmodality; Aesthetic Literacy

This article presents data from a 14-month study into the affordances of using PhoneMe, a social media app and web platform for place-based spoken poetry, in multiple teacher education contexts at three Canadian universities. This research was instigated in rapid response to COVID 19 pandemic conditions of social distancing, to investigate ways to counter the effects of social alienation and isolation. These conditions presented an opportunity to understand how users respond to multimodal poetry online, and how they connect imagined places and persons to real-world, situated, contextualizing information. In particular, this paper elaborates on our findings regarding user preferences for poems using distinct poetic styles and inspired by contrasting North American locations, and on affective dimensions of user experience when confronted with transmodal and increasingly situated background information about the poets and the places they chose to write about. From analysis of both demographic and interpretative-reflective data, we derive a hypothesis regarding individual agency *versus* relationality in interpretation of literary texts. We suggest that the transactional theory of literacy events at the core of reader response will benefit from a critical lens that takes into account changing patterns of literacy practices resulting from the popularization of social media and the increasingly ubiquitous use of mobile devices for daily literacy needs.

PhoneMe reinvigorates the social poetic experience online, incorporating and commemorating the significance of place-based knowledge and expression through publishing poems to a global interactive map that features writings, voice recordings, Street View panoramas, and poet profiles in a democratic, digital, multimodal environment. PhoneMe is open access and has been implemented in classrooms, teacher education programs, and community settings (Balyasnikova & James, 2020) since 2016. This study presents survey data collected from graduate and undergraduate students participating in PhoneMe workshops in which students completed the survey, engaged in writing place-based poems, then recorded and published their poems on the PhoneMe interactive map. The survey data includes demographic information, prior experience writing poetry, user preference regarding choice of (one of three) poems, reasons for the preference and favorites line(s) in the poem, reactions to a staged sequence of multimodal contextual information, and finally information regarding subject area specializations and perceived value of PhoneMe as a pedagogical tool.

### *The PhoneMe in COVID Study*

In March, 2020, teacher education programs globally were transitioned online owing to pandemic restrictions on face-to-face instruction. As rapid response research, we wanted to understand how educators could facilitate creative and social experiences of poetry using mobile technology. We sought participants who were both practicing and pre-service teachers (graduate and undergraduate students in faculties of education), and developed a customized PhoneMe survey to observe aesthetic preferences and the cumulative effects of transmodal layers of situated, contextualizing information on the user's interpretation and appreciation of a poem. In this paper, we analyze the shifting qualities of participants' interpretative agency as they experience an increase in understanding about the context of the poem through a sequenced transmodal assemblage of relevant information. Reversing the sociological paradigm of context collapse in social media (Androutsopoulos, 2014; boyd, 2010; Davis and Jurgenson, 2014), we articulate the

user-experience perspective (Wexler, Yu, and Bridson, 2018) on aesthetic texts and how increasing contextual knowledge reconfigures interpretation by imposing additional dialogical relationality. Poetry enables imagination and word association, giving the reader leeway to make meaning in their own image. Interpretive agency is the hallmark of the aesthetic stance of a reader's transaction with a poem. But what occurs when this aesthetic reading is confronted with multimodal information that urges the reader to change their perspective, take a more efferent (information seeking) stance, develop a deeper relational understanding, get *a feel* for the real person behind the poem? This research falls within a transliteracies framework (Stornaiuolo, Smith, & Phillips, 2017), because it examines relationality and interpretative agency from the perspective of readers engaging with multimodal texts available within the PhoneMe digital environment and what their experience suggests about the benefit of contextual knowledge for cultivating social solidarities arising from place-based poetic expression (Pierce, Martin, & Murphy, 2011). Put another way, what if the breakdown of audience boundaries is not the primary critical concern, but rather the degree of relationality that the audience is willing to embrace? And if so, how does relationality map onto our digital literacies from an aesthetic user-experience perspective?

### *Theoretical Background*

Louise Rosenblatt, in her book *The Reader, The Text, The Poem* (1978), theorizes the stance of a reader toward a text in the transaction of meaning on a continuum that ranges from purely informational (efferent) to literary (aesthetic) stance. The active stance of the reader in regard to the text influences the interpretive act. Along this continuum, the reader's responsibility for making meaning increases. If the desire is for practical information, such as when reading instructions, they might take an efferent stance, and seek to extract particular information from it. If the desire is for pleasure, contemplation and self-reflection, they might take a more aesthetic stance as interpreters of texts and in doing so, exercise interpretive agency in the construction of meaning. Obviously, these are not in opposition; the reader's stance is fluid, and shifts within a single reading or over time. This theoretical understanding sees the interpretation of a poem as a transactional *event* that occurs between the reader, the text, and the poet. For efferent reading, "derived from the Latin, 'efferre,' 'to carry away' (p. 24) the reader's interpretive agency lies in their ability to decide what is relevant or irrelevant to the desired information they wish to retrieve. In aesthetic reading of literary texts, however, context operates more complexly, "eliciting experiential responses that may reflect back as well as forward, to create a contextual ambiance" (p. 85). Rosenblatt describes contextual ambiance as that combination of a reader's lived experience with the voice, associations, and implications of a print text; how, then, does contextual ambiance map onto user experience with poetic texts in media-rich digital environments?

Resulting from the increased volume and speed of information online, some readers/social media users experience what Pearson (2021) calls "source blindness," impacting the extent to which they concern themselves with authors or contexts of information they encounter, and machine-learning information feeds common to many social media platforms exacerbate this condition, as the reader no longer requires these details to search for information. Marvin and Hong (2017) suggest "we must re-think

agency in rapidly shifting contexts, consider new parameters of time and memory, and ponder spaces arrayed in new experiential envelopes: as assemblages, as medium, as flows, as world substratum, as topologically folded and scaled, as networks of actants and intensities, as heterogeneous imaginaries” (p.3). While much of the theorizing around context collapse regards producers of content (Costa, 2018; Loh & Walsh, 2021; Georgakopoulou, 2017), less is understood regarding the audience’s agency as readers, how they react to additional contextual information, how they adjust their stance toward the text when shifting from imagined to manifest relational contexts. In light of issues related to “context collapse” for content producers on social media, whereby communications may reach well beyond the intended audience, and can often be *taken out of context*, reposted, remixed and reused, we sought to understand how PhoneMe might reverse this trend, and how the limitation of imposed contexts is rendered in the user’s experience of a literary social media platform. How does enhancing relationality in the transactional event through contextual assemblages<sup>1</sup> of background information remedy feelings of isolation, build connections, and augment or diminish the aesthetic experience of literary texts written by professional and non-professional writers alike?

The data reveals many interesting findings about online reading habits and processes of interpretation along a semiotic<sup>2</sup> chain of increasingly contextualizing information. We found that after incorporating layers of relational context, the imagination of the interpreter of a poetic text experiences a shift in stance and a concomitant shift in interpretive agency. This experience is both positive (an increasingly relational understanding, decrease in ambiguity, and appreciation of social connection) and negative (a decreasing liberty to imagine the poet, poem, and their situated context without real-world constraints). As one participant explained, “I feel like I understand [the poem] more, but connect personally with it less because it now feels attached to the author.” Increased understanding reflects a reduction of ambiguity, but this can also impede imaginative associations and personal connections integral to the fullness of aesthetic experience.

### *Methodology*

Expanding on a research direction first undertaken by I. A. Richards (1929) leading to his publication of *Practical Criticism*, a landmark study for the 20<sup>th</sup> Century literary studies movement known as New Criticism which greatly impacted western educational systems, and augmented to suit learning in 21<sup>st</sup> Century transmodal, digital, mobile information environments (Manghi, et al, 2022; Rowsell & Walsh, 2011), our methodology utilizes purposive sampling, which Creswell (2012) defines as one form of non-random sampling, to undertake research through design, in which “researchers develop and deploy novel artifacts, digital or physical, to learn about specific aspects of the human experience” (Dow, Ju, & Mackay, 2013, p. 267). Convenience sampling also played a role, insofar as we are all involved in teacher education and, in addition, some of us teach graduate courses in our

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<sup>1</sup> Our use of “assemblages” as constellations of transmodal, interrelated signifiers with a locus of meaning draws on the works of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, particularly *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Generally, assemblage theory purports that agency is located in the relational network of actors creating meaning (Latour, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Semiotics is the study of sign systems, and a semiotic chain is a process of meaning making in which meaning is derived from a range of different but linked and related texts.

respective faculties of education. As a curriculum activity suited to a variety of literacy education courses, we were able to support the rapid transition to online instruction by providing virtual workshops on the educational use of PhoneMe (Horst, et al, 2022).

Methodologically, we had participants complete the survey prior to giving our PhoneMe workshop to limit our influence on the data. We designed the research survey using the concept of transmodality, which examines “the simultaneous co-presence and co-reliance of language and other semiotic resources in meaning-making, affording each equal weight. “[Transmodality] highlights the complexity of modes and the entanglements and relationships between them that shape meaning in multimodal artifacts and communications” (Hawkins, 2018, p. 64). In the survey, we deliberately foster a chain of semiosis, in which transmodal shifts catalyze semiotic resources from one mode to the next (ledema, 2003). We examine the transactional event with poems across discrete modes, as the reader responds to the theme, idea, or experience of the text in a syncretic interpolation of modes and a chaining of linked interpretive moments (Alghadeer, 2014). Although we intentionally break the “transmodal moment” (Newfield, 2014, p. 100) into discrete yet linked modal resources for the purpose of this study, the result is not merely additive, meaning one mode does not simply augment the prior interpretation: it can just as easily create a sense of dissonance, rupture, and tension, and a subsequent reevaluation of the initial textual resource. Sometimes, the modal resource is decidedly antagonistic to the reader’s overall assemblage of meaning, or creates enough ambiguity to foster questions and disrupt the sense of closure on the interpretive act. Poetry allows for ambiguity to become a central tenet of critical reading (Empson, 1966), creating ideal conditions where the transmodal moment (which Newfield [2014] suggests is metaphoric and of varying durations) is suspended in a state of inconclusiveness, lacking the closure associated with efferent modes of semiosis whereby the reader expects to “get” the meaning and in essence remove it, breaking the chain of semiosis. Instead, poetry pulls the reader back into the text giving agency to the imagination and fostering personal connections in order to make sense of the text. As Empson (1966) wrote, “the machinations of ambiguity are among the very roots of poetry” (p. 3).

Our method was not designed for identifying correct interpretations or the rightness or wrongness of any given stance in reading a poem, nor are we viewing poetry through traditional, canonical lenses of literary criticism<sup>3</sup>. Rather we are interested in the changes the reader experiences as they enact their interpretive agency and their ability to adjust how they voiced the poem, envisioned its location, and constructed the identity of its author through a staged encounter with indexical media such as photorealistic panoramas, audio recordings, and personal biographies. We constructed this survey to help us understand the

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<sup>3</sup> In 1929, I.A. Richards, one of the leading literary critics credited with New Criticism, which was highly influential on literary education in the western world, published his study called *Practical Criticism*. For this study, Richards worked with his students who offered interpretations of more than a dozen poems without knowing who the authors were or anything about them. We recognize his study as a (truncated) precursor to our own. However, Richards was solely concerned with the ability to perform correct interpretations of poems. We, however, are not concerned with right or wrong interpretations, nor whether the poem is good or bad according to literary criteria. Instead, we are interested in how interpretation changes with additional layers of contextual information.



nature of these changes in the reader's stance by structuring the process of textual engagement so that it begins with a literary text (compelling an aesthetic stance from the reader) and then staging additional layers of transmodal, situated, real-world information (Murphy, 2012). Users of both the PhoneMe web interface and now the PhoneMe app simultaneously encounter these modes of information, making the survey's transmodal sequencing artificial; however, when composing poems in the app, the "create" flow follows the same sequence of typing, recording, choosing a location and image, tagging, and publishing. After designing our survey and receiving research ethics approval, we began providing workshops for graduate and undergraduate Education courses at three Canadian universities. Instructors introduced the study and students were encouraged to complete the consent form, the survey, and familiarize themselves with the PhoneMe platform during the week prior to the workshop. Although all students were invited to participate in the survey and workshops, data was only collected from those who answered Yes to the first survey question regarding voluntary consent to use their data for research purposes.

*Participants: "The User/Reader"*

The 137 consenting participants of this study were recruited over a 14-month period (May, 2020 - July, 2021) in several different contexts: The first group were post-practicum teacher candidates in the University of British Columbia's (UBC) Bachelor of Education Secondary Teacher Education Program with many different subject area specializations; the second group were pre-practicum secondary teacher candidates enrolled in an English Language Arts methods course, also at UBC; the third group were secondary teacher candidates in an English Language Arts methods course at Queen's University; the fourth group were graduate students enrolled in an Adult Education course at York University; and the fifth group were education graduate students in a digital research methods course at UBC. Although people may encounter poetry through popular culture on a daily basis, close reading of poetry is typically associated with schooling in many western countries, and therefore teachers play a central role in how poetry is understood and received. Given our aim is to study aesthetic literacies in the digital domain and also to promote the use of poetry as a way to create meaningful social connection during times of social distancing, our sample frame focused on preservice and practicing teachers. While many have a specialization in teaching English Language Arts, we broadened the sample to include participants specializing in other disciplines and practicing in non-formal, community learning environments. Participants ranged from 21 to 50 years of age, with the majority in their twenties and early thirties (see Figure 1). Other demographic information was collected regarding gender identity, subject area specialization, prior experience writing poetry, and COVID specific information such as number of people in the participants' bubbles (number of people with whom they had continual contact during social isolation).

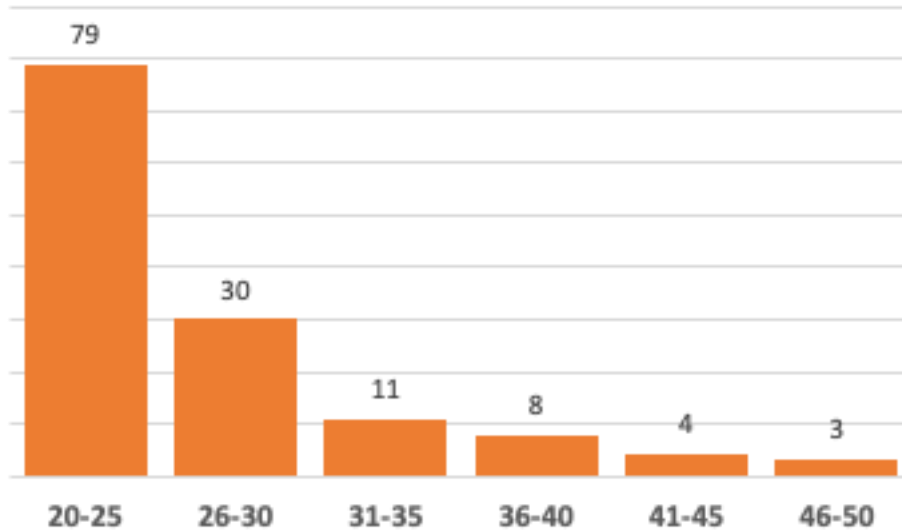


Figure 1. Ages of consenting participants

### *The Survey Instrument*

The “PhoneMe in COVID” survey is structured so that it can be completed in 20-30 minutes. After introducing the study and providing the consent form, it asks participants to share some demographic information. It then presents three poems (more details about the poems in the next section) and asks the user to choose one and reflect on the reason for that choice. In a staged sequence, the user is then introduced and responds to three additional layers of contextualizing information: (1) listening to a recording of the poet reading their poem while (2) exploring related Google Street View panorama of the location the poet is writing about and then (3) reading the poet’s autobiographical profile statement. Finally, the user reflects on their own COVID experience and potential curriculum applications of this kind of mobile, place-based poetry from the perspective of their roles as subject area teachers.

### *The Text[s]: Three Poems, Four Modes*

The PhoneMe platform intentionally creates a horizontal relationality between the reader and the text, situating the reader within an ethos that recognizes the significance of voice, place, and person (as writer) in the transaction of meaning. We take up Rosenblatt’s (1978) transactional approach to the poem as one that “does not permit honorific use of the terms ‘literary work of art’ or ‘literature’ . . . . We can thus leave open the evaluative question of whether the transaction has produced a poor or a good literary work of art” (p. 155). In the survey, three poems are introduced to the reader in the following way: “We asked three poets to respond to their experience of place during the COVID-19 pandemic in poetry. These are the poems they came up with.” In this way, at the outset of the survey, the reader is introduced to the poet as situated in the world, in the contemporary pandemic moment – one the reader knows and shares intimately – and the poem is a response, something that was created for this particular context. This foregrounding and augmentation of the real-



world context of a poem and poet alters the reader's stance as interpreters, and instantiates relationality from the outset of the transaction of meaning.

The three selected poets who wrote place-based poems from the situated context of their pandemic experience and posted them on PhoneMe for use in this study are of different identities, ages, and backgrounds. They have different poetic styles and prior involvements with poetry. In Figure 2, we present the three poems participants were asked to choose between (here shown side-by-side, not sequentially as they appeared to participants taking the survey).

<p><i>Water</i> Vi</p> <p>Water</p> <p>It surrounds me It provides food for my body It cleanses my soul</p> <p>It drops from the sky As liquid sunshine It flows in and out bringing</p> <p>Different gifts every day</p> <p>It is collected in a barrel</p> <p>For my shower. It is the gateway to</p> <p>My solitude</p> <p>To my dream To my love Water</p>	<p><i>We volunteer as tribute: A quarantine poem</i> Amber Moore</p> <p>Here, the world is an April shelter in place where steeped bergamot bourbon helps you wax poetic about magnolia trees. Their blossoms have no nectar, just kidney seeds for the robins to fly north. They only take as much as they need. Y'all keep gunning for that gathering pledge to pull through, extending that southern hospital(ity) (: ) stay. Lean in and call me by my pet name, if you care so much. Meantime, we turn out Tennessee resumes stamped into bonded leathers. They can press our accolades in sunken branded braille, those hasty governors quick to cop a feel for something nonessential.</p> <p>But an unkempt Lady Liberty must dine again and we all want to crunch on something. Head to the Piggly Wiggly for <del>appetizers</del> - perhaps a salty party mix. This takeaway journalism only Zagats us here and there for bites on fevered Friday nights.</p> <p>Or, better yet, let's stay in for pantry play and a whine pairing.</p> <p>It's time for the Volunteer State to get back to business, our natural roots. Then, we can bask in new normals. However, for now, there is an outbreak of tall tales to contend with, all beached on flattened bluegrasses that moan up to the dancing ridges laundering evening air.</p> <p>And the world is swabbed for storied saliva as we hold our tongues still so you don't have to depress us.</p>	<p><i>Catch Me, Outside</i> Lyre</p> <p>Try as much as you like Making complexity kiss simplicity is hard but that's what this is, right? I never really understood art until the object of my obsession came alive in my head, I was always playing a part</p> <p>Until I found myself facing myself this has happened a lot but I always thought I'm no stranger to myself This may not sound so heartfelt but what do you do for yourself when you can't make sense of the cards you were dealt run? hide? do you lie to yourself?</p> <p>I hoped to write stories with this pen in hopes of changing lives with this pen Guess I need to change mine with this pen first but these chains I'm in keep me away from my obsession this box I'm in holds all my attention I'm running out of melodies in my collection the intention was to provide an expression for reflection that could lead to the invention of a protection from the suggestive suggestions that keep me tied to this depression with the exception of the special connection with the object of my obsession</p> <p>that came alive at the cost of our lives No way I'd speak like this in public but these few weeks have felt like lifetimes where any combination of these 26 letters published is out for our lives, out for minds Escape today, there's a special offer Go jump with the author to prevent a mass slaughter Off we fly away from the horrors you wanted my two cents well here's a whole dollar Leave behind your confine For tonight I'm yours and you mine, we'll watch this giant shine, just jump don't decide, time we realize and leave inside, besides, the object of my obsession is outside</p>
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Figure 2. PhoneMe survey poems

Differences between the poems are quite apparent, for example, the locations inspiring the poems starkly contrast: Vi's poem relates being surrounded by the ocean in a remote setting on Canada's northwest coast, whereas Lyre writes about his apartment in downtown Toronto, Canada's largest metropolis, the urbanity of which is shared by Amber's poem which is set in Nashville, USA, where she, as a Canadian, was spending a year as a visiting scholar. Furthermore, Vi writes about connecting with nature and the primal energy of water without going into political implications to do with water as a resource. This is in

contrast to Amber's poem which explores the political activities taking place in Nashville and presents a context of sociopolitical concerns arising around the pandemic. Her poem is outward looking, which contrasts with Lyre's poem which is introspective about the pandemic and its effect on his state of mind and quality of life.

We felt that each of these poems expressed some very personal ways of relating to the world in the grip of a pandemic yet each is distinctly conditioned by the setting in which the poet is living. The remoteness of Vi's location seems to mitigate the day-to-day impact of social distancing as she remains in contact with the natural environment. Social isolation is dramatically felt by the youngest poet Lyre, who experiences a loneliness which is not ameliorated by the environment he is situated within. Amber clearly processes her experience from a more abstract and political framework as an outsider reflecting on her environment from a more critical, even parodic perspective. In terms of style, Amber's poem embraces complex word play, Lyre's is suggestive of rhythm and has a humorous, self-effacing, lyrical quality to it, while Vi's poem speaks directly from the heart without ornament or elaboration from the key point she articulates. The poems may be interpreted in various ways, but the tone suggests that Vi's is more spiritual, Amber's is more political, and Lyre's is more introspective. This difference is borne out through pronoun usage, verbal constructions, generic versus concrete nouns, how the poem addresses the reader, and so on. While each poem generically shares a temporal context (COVID-19), exemplifies place-based poetry, and was written for a common purpose, the differences outweigh these commonalities. Hence, there are enough explicit and implicit differences to shed light on user preferences when engaging with poetic texts online. In order to avoid placement bias (i.e. participants selecting the first poem of the three and not reading the others) we rotated the order of poems each time we engaged a new group of participants. Table 1 summarizes these differences and provides detailed comparisons of the three poems according to their form, content, style, vocal performance, location image, and biographical details.

Table 1. Four accumulative texts in the transmodal poetic experience

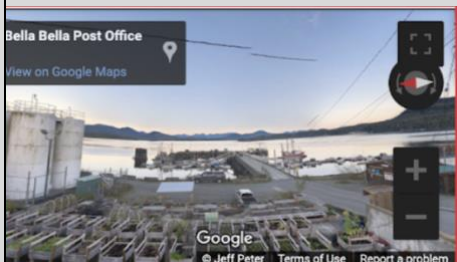
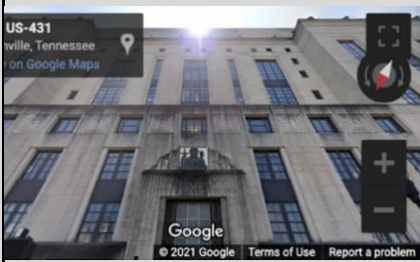
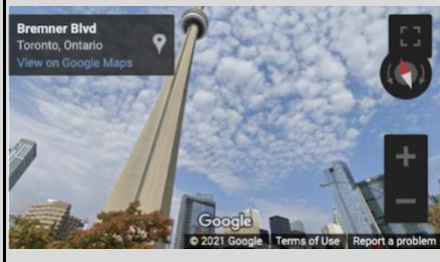
<b>First Text: The Poem</b>			
<b>Title</b>	<b>Water</b>	<b>We Volunteer</b>	<b>Catch Me</b>
<b>Word number : character number</b>	58 : 231	228 : 1065	294 : 1279
<b>Average word length</b>	3.9	4.6	4.3
<b>Words in lines</b>	Min: 1 Max: 6 Average: 3.6	Min: 1 Max: 14 Average: 6.9	Min: 4 Max: 10 Average: 7
<b>Rhyme and rhythm</b>	Repetition of phrases	Internal rhymes and assonance	Rhyme scheme
<b>Place</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A remote setting on Canada's northwest coast</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban Nashville</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban Toronto</li> </ul>
<b>Poet's' connection to place</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This has become Vi's home after years of moving around. She has made a life here and settled down. She is deeply connected to the land.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amber is a visitor. There is a sense that she is a stranger in this place.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lyre is a visitor to Toronto, but has made a connection with the place that has lasted.</li> </ul>

<b>COVID experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remoteness of the location might mitigate the day to day impact of social distancing as she remains in contact with the natural environment and her partner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abstract and political framework as an outsider looking at the world from a more removed, critical perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feelings of being isolated and trapped in interior spaces</li> </ul>
<b>Tone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Naturalistic, emotive, devotional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical, political, cynical, ironic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introspective, witty, sardonic</li> </ul>
<b>Topic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connecting with nature and the primal energy of water</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspired by political events in Nashville around COVID</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal struggles with identity crisis</li> </ul>
<b>General</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generality of metaphors</li> <li>• Conceptual/ spiritual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Materiality, political, specific objects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interior psychological, angsty, subjective</li> </ul>

**Second text (audio recording): The performance**

<b>Quality of recording</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some voice recorder distortion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noise and distortion in recording</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good quality of recording creates a sense of warmth</li> </ul>
<b>Background noise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sounds like she is standing outside</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bad phone connection, creates a sense of disconnection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambient vehicle sounds added by poet for effect</li> <li>• Speakers passing by</li> </ul>
<b>Poetic performance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humour, slight laughter</li> <li>• Breath and slow pacing</li> <li>• Lower tone of voice</li> <li>• Intimate joy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quickly paced, breathless</li> <li>• Assertive and high tone of voice</li> <li>• Cynical irony</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self reflexive humour enjoying the word play</li> </ul>

**Third text (image): Google street view of the place of poem**

<p><b>The Image</b></p>	 <p>Bella Bella Post Office View on Google Maps</p>	 <p>US-431 Nashville, Tennessee View on Google Maps</p>	 <p>Bremner Blvd Toronto, Ontario View on Google Maps</p>
<p><b>Content of image</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking down over a dock in Bella Bella</li> <li>• Community garden project in the foreground</li> <li>• Empty community roads</li> <li>• Large white silos to the left</li> <li>• Calm ocean and mountain scape in the background</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking up at sun cresting over government building</li> <li>• The large building takes up the entire view</li> <li>• The building is imposing, prisonlike</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toronto's distinctive CNN tower is near centre frame</li> <li>• City skyline fringes lower edge of image</li> <li>• Most of the image is full of altocumulus clouds and blue sky</li> </ul>
<p><b>Degree of alignment to the poem</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This image is taken in town whereas the location of the poem is off the grid and surrounded by ocean with no evidence of human-made environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very aligned to content/context of poem.</li> <li>• Exterior, urban, political/government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distinctive Toronto skyline, however poem takes place indoors</li> <li>• The view is of the sky and not the streets - this reflects the interiority and personal perspective of the poem</li> </ul>

<b>Fourth text (written): The biographical statement</b>			
<b>Age*</b>	Early fifties	Mid thirties	Mid twenties
<b>Cultural background*</b>	Indigenous, originally from the Yukon	White settler Canadian	South Asian
<b>Profession</b>	High school teacher	Academic	Computer science student
<b>Connection to place</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep almost spiritual connection to place, sense of home and belonging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poet as visitor/stranger in different political environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place as a part of development of poet's interior psychology and journey</li> </ul>
<b>Personal history shared</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shares her long journey to find home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less personal history shared</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family history and context</li> </ul>
<b>Covid context</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less foregrounded due to remoteness of the environment</li> <li>• Connection to land and her lover</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A political reality</li> <li>• Frustration and bitterness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A psychological experience</li> <li>• Isolation and disconnection</li> </ul>

*\* Some data presented in this table was not included in the poets' biographical statements but is known to the researchers and relevant to understanding the different perspectives represented in the poems.*



After selecting a poem, offering reasons for the choice, and selecting a favorite line, participants were introduced to transmodal contextualizing information about that poem only.

*Aesthetic Choice and User Preference*

Overall, the most frequently chosen poem was “Catch Me” (45.2%, n=61), followed by “Water” (31.9%, n=42), and “We Volunteer” (23.0%, n=31). Table 2 shows a detailed depiction of the demographic distributions of the people who choose the different poems – including age, group, area of study, and number of poems written in the last year, five years, and in their lifetime. Most notably, our analysis of the data shows that poem choice is closely related to the average age of participants who chose that specific poem. Indeed, overriding all other factors that might influence their choices, such as poem length, style, and content and topical location, we found that participants tended to choose the poem by the poet closest to them in age, even before knowing anything about the poet's age or identity. This single finding stands out in several ways: it occurs at a meta-level of interpretation, responding to a nexus of related factors, and purports that readers intuit a great deal about writers from the tone of a text, and that implicit factors in language use significantly influence aesthetic preferences. As Rosenblatt (1978) describes, “tone is located in no specific element of the poem; it arises from diction, images, figures of speech, structure, even rhymes and meter—in short, from the whole.... in the reader's weaving his responses to all of these cues into an attitude, a voice, that can be named 'the tone' of the work, and that enter into 'the meaning'" (p. 96). Beyond age, other factors influencing poem choice included the subject specialization as educators (where Trades teachers predominantly preferred “Water”, all others favoring “Catch Me, Outside”) and, similarly, number of poems written in the participant’s lifetime (where those with no prior experience writing poetry chose “Water” or “We Volunteer”). Results were fairly consistent across the three institutions.

Table 2. Distribution of demographics by the selection of poems. Green indicates high frequency, yellow indicates medium frequency, and red indicates low frequency.

Demographic	Categories	We volunteer Poet’s Age: mid thirties	Water Poet’s Age: mid fifties	Catch Me Poet’s Age: mid twenties
Age	20-25 (n=79)	16.50%	32.90%	50.60%
	26-30 (n=30)	36.70%	23.30%	40.00%
	31-35 (n=11)	54.50%	27.30%	18.20%

	36-40 (n=8)	12.50%	37.50%	50.00%
	41-45 (n=4)	0.00%	25.00%	75.00%
	46-50 (n=3)	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
<b>Group</b>	UBC (n=86)	24.40%	32.60%	43.00%
	Queens (n=35)	20.00%	25.70%	54.30%
	York (n=14)	21.40%	42.90%	35.70%
<b>Teaching Subject</b>	Drama & English (n=53)	26.40%	22.60%	50.90%
	Social sciences (n=35)	25.70%	34.30%	40.00%
	Other languages (n=23)	26.10%	26.10%	47.80%
	Science (n=28)	17.90%	35.70%	46.40%
	Trades (n=11)	0.00%	54.50%	45.50%
	Education (n=12)	25.00%	41.70%	33.30%
	Fine arts (n=20)	15.00%	30.00%	55.00%
<b>Poem written in your life</b>	None (n=3)	33.30%	66.70%	0.00%
	One (n=3)	0.00%	33.30%	66.70%
	Several (n=57)	15.80%	31.60%	52.60%

	Dozens (n=41)	24.40%	31.70%	43.90%
	Too many to count (n=31)	35.50%	29.00%	35.50%

After selecting a preferred poem, the survey asked participants to identify reasons for their choice, prompting them to rank four options with an additional open-ended option to explain other reasons for their selection. Overall, most participants selected *aesthetic properties* as their first choice across all poems (38.5% n=52), followed closely by *connection to the content or issue* discussed by the poem (35.6%, n=48), while fewer chose *individual experience of COVID-19* (11.1%, n=15), or *shared connection with the place* (9.6%, n=13). Only 5.2% (n=7) of participants entered *other* as the most important factor influencing their choice. Written answers to the *other* category include "It is short and sweet" [Water], "Most well-written and witty" [We Volunteer], and "It's clever and tongue and cheek" [Catch me]. Furthermore, when results are disaggregated by poem choice, some differences are made visible—as shown by Figure 3. In “We Volunteer”, for example, people were equally influenced by the aesthetic qualities and the connection to the place (35.5%). In the poem “Water”, however, participants were mainly influenced by its aesthetic qualities (48.8%). Finally, in the poem “Catch Me”, participants claimed to be influenced mainly by a connection to the content or issue discussed by the poem (47.5%).

We interpret the selection of aesthetic properties to suggest the stance the reader is taking is about literary engagement, whereas appreciating the content or issue, as well as a shared context, implies more efferent and relational stances toward the transactional event which the poem instantiated.

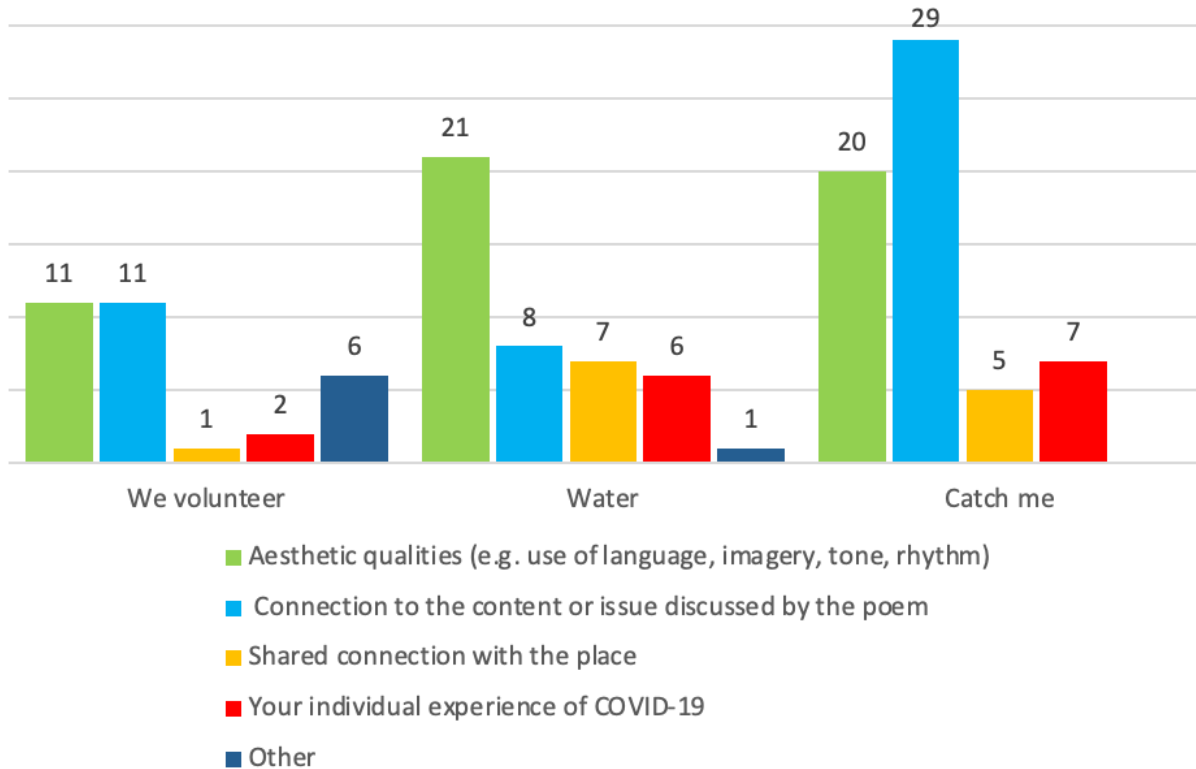


Figure 3. Distribution of participants' reasons for their poem choice

### *Transmodality and Links in the Semiotic Chain*

PhoneMe invites users to engage with poetry as a mobile, multimodal genre, where meanings are expressed through the semiotic ensemble of written texts, recordings of oral performances, Street View panoramas, pinned on an interactive global map. The user is able to search for poems textually or topographically, and to explore a poet's biography. However, emphasis is placed on listening as a crucial mode of transliterate engagement with poetry. As Newfield and D'Abdon (2015) state, "conceiving of a performed or spoken poem as a multimodal ensemble implies looking at the articulation of a poem's meaning through its orchestration of different, culturally shaped modes and media" (p. 522); different modalities create new dynamism and complexity of poetic meaning-making in digital environments (Aghadeer, 2014). In order to foreground the interactions of different modes when using PhoneMe, our survey deliberately requested responses to the different modes in sequence.

Although our presentation of different modes was made possible by the paradigm of *multi*-modality (i.e., treatment of different modes as distinct from one another), our findings contribute to the discussion of *trans*-modality. In transmodality, referring to Streeck and Kallmeyer (1999), Murphy (2012) states that "[modes] do not just *supplement*

each other in relationships of mutual support, they sequentially *perforate* and *interpenetrate* each other, acquiring a certain co-morbid resemblance” (p. 1969). Through perforation and interpenetration, modes modulate, mutate, and amplify one another. As we discuss below, the written texts, audio recording, Street View image, and author’s biography interpenetrated one another and transformed the interpretation of “earlier” modes.

a) *The three voices.* Participants were simultaneously presented with two modes, an audio recording of their selected poem performed by the author and a Street View image. First they were asked to respond to the voice recording, which provides an intimate relationality to the text. Participants responded to hearing the voice of the poet in various ways, from appreciating the intimacy of the poet’s voice to feeling that their vocal presence was almost too close for comfort. Some participants remarked that they imagined the poem with different voicing, and that interest waned upon hearing the poet’s own vocal rendition. This was most common with the most frequently selected poem, “Catch Me Outside” by Lyre – some participants expected a more rhythmic rap-style vocal delivery. Overall, more users (54.7%, n=75) felt that the audio recording helped them get a better sense of the author’s personality in the poem, while 44.5% (n=61) said that it made them feel more connected to the place they were speaking about, and 43.0% (n=59) noted that the audio recording made them empathize more with the poet’s feelings. Only 17% (n=23) of participants added their own written responses to the audio recording, including comments that denoted either an adverse reaction (e.g., “the voice reading detracted from my interest in the poem”) or further elaborating on their response (e.g., “I feel like I know the author”).

Following Rosenblatt (1978), a poem read aloud offers “many nonverbal cues to the listener, for example, through emphasis, pitch, inflection, rhythm” (p. 20). These cues will not be uniform and are highly situated and embodied; likewise participant responses depended on the manner in which the poem was read aloud. It is unsurprising that the three recordings also have significant differences that result from their distinct speech habits and the use of technology. As shown in Figure 4, participants’ responses to the audio recordings varied according to each poet. In the poem “Water”, reactions to the performance leaned towards a better connection to the place that was referenced. In both “We Volunteer” and “Catch Me Outside” on the other hand, participants most often got a better sense of the poet’s personality.

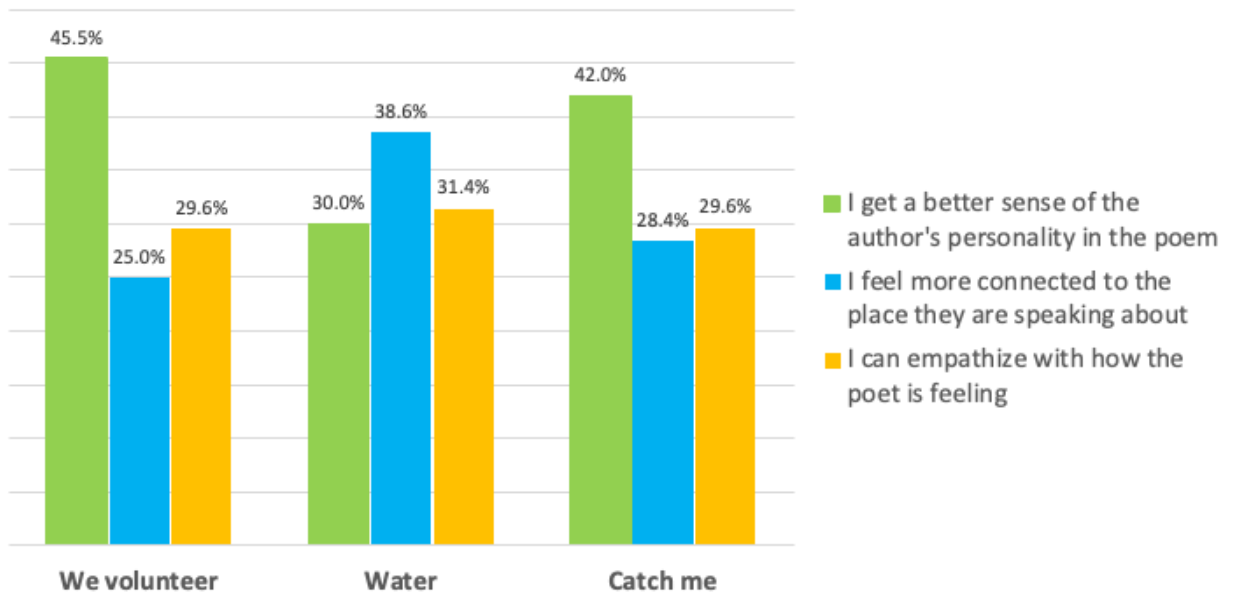


Figure 4. Distribution of participants' responses to the audio recording of the poems

While the cues provided by the poet's voice offer participants situated context clues as well as increasing relationality, the way readers react to the imposition of new interpretive barriers to a poem-already-read is full of possibilities. Indeed, as noted by Rosenblatt, "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). The way this "different poem" collapses against the initial interpretation was elaborated in participants' open-ended responses to the audio recording. For example, Vi's audio was recorded with the microphone close to her mouth, giving the listener an intimate sense of her breath and tonal resonances as she speaks. Such intimacy caused some participants to feel "super uncomfortable" or that "it destroyed [sic] my feeling of the poem." In "Catch Me, Outside", the main concern was around the assumptions about the poem's rhythm, as noted by a participant: "I read it very differently, as kind of a rap." Finally, in "We Volunteer", there was only one open-ended response, which indicated a decoupling of participants' view of the poem/the poet and the way it was performed: "The way she read the poem and her voice was completely different than I had imagined, and it actually made me like the poem less. I did feel more connected to the place and the person's personality, I just... didn't like the personality I heard?"

b) *The three locations.* Simultaneously, the survey introduces a poet-selected Google Street View image related to the location which inspired their poem. Google Street View offers users a photographic 360 degree panorama from a movable, road-located point of view, complete with coordinates and address/place



name. Photography has historically been used indexically to document real places and events (Ball, 2017), and despite the ease with which digital photographs can be modified, semiotically, Street View provides a realistic, consensual, immersive point of view on an actual place. This shifts the reader’s localization of the text from an imagined space to a specific place on a shared map that the reader also inhabits. Google Street View does have some serious limitations, however, given that these panoramas are 1) perforce restricted to ground-level, outside viewpoints, [even though Lyre’s “Catch Me, Outside” poem was written about being cooped up in an apartment because of COVID]; 2) restricted to accessible, public road viewpoints, [presenting a deeply contradictory image for Vi’s poem, since the closest Street View comes to her remote, wilderness island home is the industrial-looking port and ferry dock of Bella Bella, BC]; and, 3) photographed in the daytime, whereas the reader might imagine a more nocturnal setting. To overcome these limitations, the PhoneMe app now provides the ability for users to upload their own place-based photographs. Nonetheless, the framing of imagination within photorealistic representations of specific places impacts the imagined space that the poem conjures for readers. Figure 5 compares responses to seeing the Street View panorama: for each poem over 70% of participants responded that the image changed how they envisioned the location.

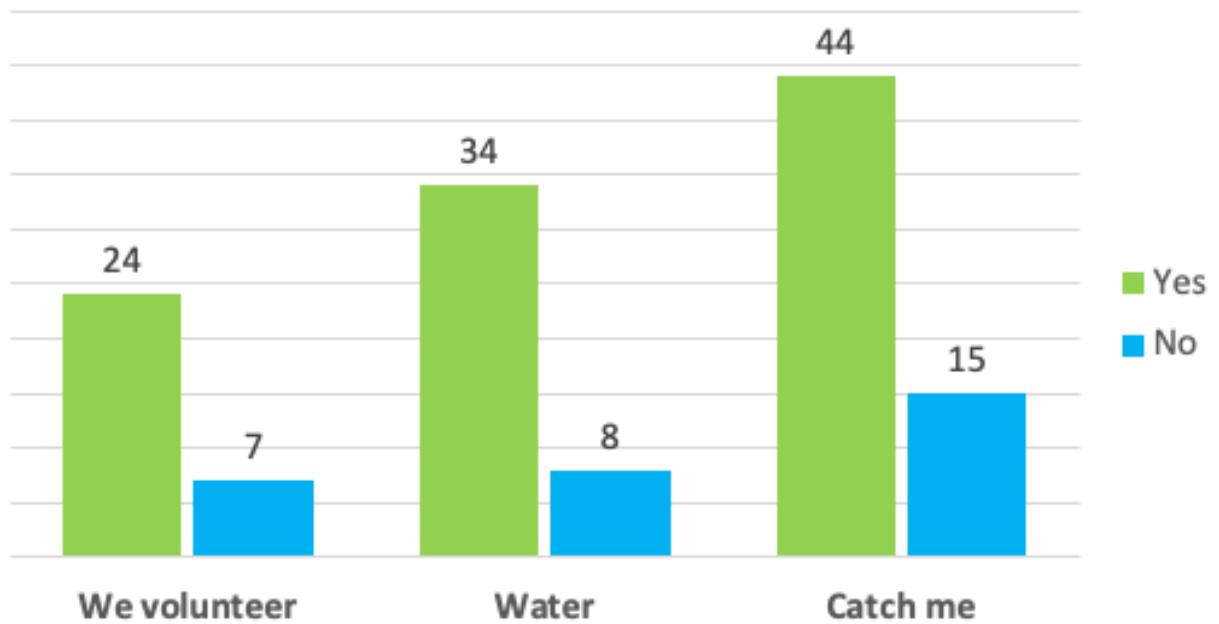


Figure 5. Percent change of envisioned location after seeing Street View panorama

c) *The three poets*. Subsequently, participants were introduced to short biographical descriptions of each poet, provided by the poets themselves, implicating another complex layer of contextual background information—thus situating the experience of reading in a more intimate event of relationship with a real person. One of the most common responses to reading a poet's bio was finding a relational connection between the poem and the poets' identities, which in turn informed participants' interpretations of the poems. For example, after reading Lyre's bio, a participant noted that "You get to understand where they are from, their identity and how it plays in writing their poem." Participants also gained a more general sense of the circumstances surrounding the poet and their poem, such as a respondent who appreciated the socio-political background information for their reading of Amber's poem "We Volunteer" from her bio: "I did not know what was really happening in Tennessee during this time especially about the protesting. I think reading her bio made the poem make more sense and put into perspective that she was furious and frustrated." Responses also illustrate how some participants have a stronger aesthetic connection to the poems due to the authors' bio, as argued by a respondent who said that reading Vi's bio "makes [the poem] even more beautiful."

Some reactions to the poet's biographical information articulated how this new information changed participants' interpretation of the poem. For instance, some participants argued that the biographical information created a distance from their imagined authors: "I had a feeling that the voice was from someone older" [response to Lyre's poem]. Conversely, others argued that it transformed how they imagined poets' connection to the places discussed in the poem, and highlighted how identity is influenced by place-based affiliation: "this author feels that home is BC, whereas that landscape of Toronto felt like home to me. I did not realize that part of this author's struggle was the result of the place that I call home." Finally, some argued that the poets' biographical information changed how they experienced the text, thus reverberating along the entire semiotic chain, as illustrated by a participant who read Lyre's biography and said that "it changes the tone in which I read the poem."

Knowing more about the authors provided further limitations on the possibilities of interpretations of the poem, urging participants to either empathize more with the texts (especially in the cases where the new information matched their previous interpretation) or to relationally reorient themselves in order to integrate the new information. Such reorientation was expressed by a participant who chose Vi's poem, "I gain more personal distance as the first time I read the poem I really read it through the lens of my own experience. I feel closer to the author's voice, however, and it feels more like a conversation with them about the situation and I can compare my different (but similar) experiences." This dialogical relationality underscores an important ethical dimension which literacy events implicate for social cohesion and connection at a distance through an online discursive environment. Additionally, biographies provided information that caused participants to reevaluate previous responses to either the typed poems or the additional modalities that were introduced in the survey. For example, a participant who reacted

negatively to Amber's audio recording noted that reading the poet's bio created a desire to retract their previous comment: "Well now I feel bad that I said I didn't like her personality. I am now understanding where this author is coming from a little more. She put on the Tennessee twang to make a point. It is more a criticism of the social constructs around her."

*Findings: Change in Interpretation*

This study explores the changes that take place in the reader's interpretation and experience of a poem - within a process of expanding transmodal and "contextual ambiance" (Rosenblatt 1978, p. 85). These changes are not linear; for the user they are experienced as recursive retrofitting of prior schemas, the process being dialogical and emergent. Increasing the authenticity of place and person augments, highlights, disrupts, even replaces the imagined. Describing the experience of change in interpretation, participants provided rich sensory and metaphorical language to analyze. In our survey, each link in the semiotic chain grounds the imagination with points of real-world relation. Agency on the part of the user shifts in tandem with shifts in the reader's stance toward the text, which in turn shifts according to additional layers of contextual information orienting the reader not only to a particular place but to the personality of the author. The connection to place enhances the relational construct (Pierce, Martin, & Murphy, 2011). In examining the kinds of changes readers reported as they encountered the series of transmodal texts, only 8 of 137 participants reported that they felt no change at all. 43 participants experienced a change, but did not indicate which type of change it was. Of those who described the quality of the change, we identified three distinct types: *Increase*, *Decrease*, and *Clarification*.

*Increase (in relationality)*: The predominant change reported among participants (87 of 137 or 64%) was an increase in connection, either to the poet themselves, the content of the poem, or the sense of place in the poem. The vocabulary used to describe this increase includes phrases such as: "Resonates more strongly," "easier to relate," "feel more personally connected to the poet," "words hit deeper," "connected to the author," "It humanizes the poem, makes it less constructed," "added layers". This deepening and enriching of the poetic experience via interpolated modalities and poetic context is expressed in visceral terms, and speaks to the creative and pedagogical significance of PhoneMe as an environment where readers can encounter poems in a more socially embedded and emplaced way, and can mediate their own aesthetic-efferent reading preferences and stances as a negotiation between their agency as interpreters and the payoff of developing more relational and dialogically responsive understanding.

*Decrease (in agency)*: While only a minority of participants (17 of 137 or 12%) reported a decrease in agency, the intensity of the change was significant. Participants used phrases such as, "destroyed my feeling," "ruined the poem," "disconnected from the place," "empathy is diminished," "it makes it less about me and more about them." This decrease in connection personalizes the loss of interpretive agency with the addition of 'real world' contextualizing information. Whereas an aesthetic reading of the poem is an invitation to personally inhabit the text, the additional relational constraints on meaning gradually pushed these readers outside the poem. As one participant explained, "This prevents me

from appropriated [sic] the poem into my own experiences and life.” As we have discussed above, poetry asks the reader to engage aesthetically, to open up to feeling, to meet the author within the text and to collaborate in production of meaning and the literary experience. The text is a kind of window upon which the reader may see reflections of themselves as well as offering a viewpoint into the circumstances of the poet. Resisting the loss of agency in interpretation is like defending one’s right to dream, and the indexical authenticity of recorded audio and photographic media might function like an eviction notice if one is attached to their prior interpretation.

*Clarification:* The final change category of clarification describes a similar materialization from aesthetic and imaginative possibility to efferent and concrete actuality. 34 participants (25%) experienced the additional information as a clarification of the meaning of the poem. Ambiguity was reduced due to an increase in information about the poem, but for these participants, the clarification was not experienced with negative affect. Clarification did not distance the reader from the poem. Participants used phrases such as: “Helps you visualize,” “Makes you understand,” “I get a sense of exactly where the author is speaking from,” “Helped concretely materialize the image in my head,” “Better understanding of the true sense of the emotions,” “Now I know,” “I now understand,” “Makes the poem seem more tangible.” This category of change foregrounds how many readers’ sense of poetic enjoyment and understanding can be increased with additional contextual information and concretizing modalities.

*Discussion: Implications for Poetry as Social Media Discourse*

The genre of poetry in typographic form calls upon the reader to supply a fullness of affective resonance, personal context, history, and associative meanings to the reading event to enliven the experience. As such, poetry perhaps more than any other literary artform, is an invitation to open up to the richness of interiority and the reader’s “readiness to think and feel” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 88) rather than seeking one correct meaning that resides within the given text alone. In this study we explored the transmodal poetic experience that PhoneMe offers, one in which the poem is extended by contextualizing information and multimodal texts that are layered into a synesthetic experience of the poem’s connection to a shared world. A tension exists that centers on the agency of readers to inhabit their own interpretative viewpoints and the depth to which interpretation must uphold a dialogical, ethical relationality and responsibility (Murray, 2000). Such relationality begins tacitly through the reader’s selection of texts, which we observed was strongly correlated to the age of the writer, yet relationality becomes more complex as context becomes more explicit. As one participant described, “Knowing more about the author makes me feel closer and further from the poem. It changes the weight of certain words and their meaning or association. I want to know more, whereas when just reading the poem, it could stay as an anonymous poem. Now our interpretations of the chosen words are intermingling.” The initial anonymity of the poem allows the reader to fully inhabit and appropriate the text into their own narrative. But as the reader takes in efferent, real-world information about the life and place of the author, an underlying change occurs

in the relationality between the reader and the text. The text is pulled away from the reader and poetic ambiguity is reduced via the concretizing visual and auditory modalities. As Rosenblatt explained, “[T]he reader has to learn to handle his multiple responses to texts in a variety of complex ways, moving the center of attention toward the efferent or aesthetic ends of the spectrum” (p. 36). In PhoneMe, the poem exists as both an aesthetic work as well as an efferent documentation of the poet’s experience of a place in a shared world. This reduction of ambiguity, however, may strengthen the reader’s affective connection with the poem, the place, the content, and the poet themselves. By doing so, we posit that PhoneMe poetry can foster a deeper sense of connection both to one’s own lifeworld, and to the places and persons that cohabit this planet.

This study increases our understanding of how educators engage with and connect to transmodal poetic texts while offering a pedagogical platform that can be taken up in future classrooms in the promotion of place-based and digitally enriched/enriching forms of poetic expression. PhoneMe promotes an urgent educational imperative to diversify the canon, offering educators and their students a poetic heteroglossia of writing by peers, persons of many different cultures, ages, races, abilities, and languages. Poetic engagement can happen across the curriculum; many non-English specializing participants of this study came up with novel ideas to incorporate PhoneMe in curricula from science to mathematics, as a way to gain a deeper appreciation and personal connection to the meaningful places and sounds associated with diverse subject matter. Given the massive and technologically mediated changes taking place to literacy practices almost daily, a new more relevant, networked, and transmodal approach to poetry pedagogy is called for. This research and pedagogical intervention promotes poetry as a relationally enriching event; one in which many meanings - relational, situated, contextual, and deeply imaginative - can exist and commingle together in the same place. If teachers are to engage young people in caring about poetry, they will benefit from finding ways to help their student engage with contemporary texts that literally and figurative speak to their lived and imagined experiences.

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**Rachel Horst** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia. She is interested in digital literacies, futures literacies, and

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