

# Packaging poetry? Pupils' perspectives of their learning experience within the post-primary poetry classroom

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*This paper explores the issue of educational commodification within the poetry class. Drawing from research conducted with 200 Leaving Certificate pupils, from 8 post-primary schools in Ireland, this paper investigates these pupils' perspectives on their learning experiences against a backdrop of educational consumerism. The research identifies a number of areas of concern including limited potential for creative and aesthetic engagement in the classroom, a utilitarian approach to the teaching and learning of poetry, the marginalisation of pupil voice and subjective response and the prioritisation of exam performance. Drawing on the findings of this study, it is argued that the teaching and learning of poetry is vulnerable to becoming a packaged commodity. Recommendations for renewed teacher agency in countering pedagogical pragmatism beginning at pre-service level are made.*

### **Knowledge production**

Socio-economic advancement over the last decade has been driven by rapid technological and scientific progression (Massaquoi 2009). Productivism, the belief that scientific and technological knowledge promises a happy ending to the problems of poverty, disease, and tyranny (Smith 1998), has become a globally dominant ethos (Anderson 2008). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 1996) notes that 'in the long run, knowledge, especially technological knowledge, is the main source of

economic growth and improvements in the quality of life' (p.7). Given that education policy is frequently formulated under intense political, social and economic pressure (OECD 2004), the commodification of knowledge has become linked to the demands of corporate globalisation. In the current knowledge economy, knowledge has become something to be commodified and profited from (Summer 2003). A consumerist agenda in education is problematic as it potentially relegates teachers to functionaries satisfying the demands of their managers and clients (Dunne 2002). Many schools now experience increasing pressure to 'package performance' (Eisner 2002: 8) into a tightly restricted and measurable product, resulting in the imposition of micromanagement and curricular uniformity (Hargreaves 2003). Striving to achieve high levels of uniformity has meant that, for the most part, measurability and performativity have become dominant goals in contemporary post-primary education. The pressure of performativity is duly noted by Flutter and Rudduck (2004) who attest that;

'Targets' and 'goals', 'performance' and 'league tables' are the banners waved enthusiastically by education policy makers and the media and, just like football teams, teachers and pupils find their performances vilified when public expectations do not seem to have been met. (p.1)

Within the consumerist agenda, the economic value of creative activities is more uncertain. The pressures of prioritising exam performance often challenges the teacher's commitment to taking pupils on 'meaning-making' journeys (Dymoke 2002; Caves 2003). It has been argued that cultures of performativity leave little room for creativity or caring (Ball 2003), as pupils are

taught to pursue knowledge through objective lenses (Pavlovich and Krahnke 2008).

Within the 'dictates of performativity' (Papastephanou 2006: 85), tensions arise amid aesthetic and creative oriented subjects. Tacit knowledge is frequently relegated in favour of more easily accessible sources of intellectual capital. As a result, there exists a relative silence in the promotion of arts based subjects in education (Arts Council 2008). Therefore, as rigid accountability mechanisms force the narrowing of curricula, the fortitude of arts based subjects, such as poetry to withstand standardisation and reductionist patterns is arguably lessening (Pike 2004; Wilson 2007).

### **The Irish Context: The Post- Primary English Syllabi**

Ireland is not immune to current trends of educational standardisation and bureaucratic accountability. Within Irish schools, there is significant evidence of policy/ practice dissonance and of marketplace ideologies driven by the imperative of terminal assessment (Gleeson and O Donnabhain 2009; Ryan 2010). The current Leaving Certificate English syllabus was introduced in Ireland in 1999. It was presented as a 'radical and original response' (NCCA 1999b: 1) to changing needs of its learners, moving away from traditional 'dry-as-dust' and 'decontextualised' pedagogies of the past (NCCA 1999a: 15). It aims to afford teachers the opportunity to transcend traditional academic approaches to the teaching of English and poetry (NCCA 1999b). It also aims to engage pupils with enriching experiences in language, making them more critically aware of its power and significance in their lives (NCCA 1999b: 2). Lessons taught within this syllabus should 'excite students with aesthetic

experiences and emphasise the richness of meanings and recreational pleasure to be encountered in literature and in the creative play of language' (NCCA 1999b: 2). The teaching of poetry within this framework should meet the vocational and further education needs of its pupils. It should also provide the life-long skills, both written and oral, necessary for adult life (NCCA 1999b: 1). Pupils are encouraged to develop a more sophisticated range of skills and concepts through the domains of composition (such as poetry composition and essay writing) and comprehension (NCCA 1999b). According to the syllabus the effective integration of these two domains in the teaching of English is a 'vital necessity' (NCCA 1999b: 4).

In addition, the *Draft Guidelines for Teachers of English* (NCCA 1999a) highlight the necessity for pupils to engage critically with poetry through a variety of active learning methodologies. It highlights the capacity of poetry to evoke emotive expression and advocates rich encounters with each poem studied. Asserting that poetry develops the imagination through the creation of powerful images that interact to create sensations, feelings and experiences, it is recommended that learning to read poetry means learning to interpret those scenes and experiences not at a literal level but at the level of ulterior meaning (NCCA 1999a: 63). The philosophy of personal engagement with aesthetic education is further advocated in the *Resource Materials for Teaching Language* (NCCA 1999c), which was written to supplement the draft guidelines. Here, teachers are urged to be innovative in their approach to the teaching of poetry. The syllabus advocates that the teaching of poetry through novel and challenging activities will serve to 'enrich their [pupils'] sense of the

resourcefulness of poets and the potential of the imagination to distil poetry out of almost anything' (NCCA 1999c: 26).

However, as noted by Ryan (2010), within the Irish context, the translation of vision into practice is frequently mediated through the lens of assessment and the commodification of knowledge. Since the implementation of the current English syllabus, there has been a paucity of research conducted on the learning experience from the perspective of the Leaving Certificate pupil. Hanratty (2008) advocates that 'poetry requires passionate personal engagement as well as the intelligent deployment of a wide range of pedagogical strategies' (p.56). However, research indicates that a strong transmission approach currently dominates in Irish post-primary schools (Government of Ireland 1999; Gleeson and O Donnabháin 2009; O' Donoghue and Harford 2010). It appears that rigorous accountability in Irish post-primary schooling has significantly increased the influence of the performativity agenda on teachers (Sugrue 2006). Performativity pressures now commonly result in pupils spending considerable amounts of time on note-taking, memorisation and textbook based work (NCCA, 2002). Such evidence suggests divergent values and practice from the constructivist and altruistic aims of the syllabus.

### **The place of pupil voice**

Pupils' perspectives have traditionally remained peripheral to the curriculum making process (Rudduck 1999; Rudduck and Flutter 2000). Yet international legislation stresses the importance of affording recognition to the voice of the

child, acknowledging that 'due weight' must be given to the views of the child (United Nations General Assembly 1989: 4). While debates on curricular reform are plentiful, the voice of the pupil within these debates has until recently remained silenced (Fielding and Rudduck 2002; Wood 2003). Traditionally pupils have been allocated the role of passive recipients of policy and practice rather than active agents of change (Roberts and Nash 2009). As a result, little is known about the subjective experiences of pupils (Corbett and Wilson 1995). They are rarely viewed as 'autonomous social actors but rather as incomplete subjects of adults' legitimate authority' (Thompson 2009 : 672). In addition, school structures which place emphasis on dominant managerial discourses and the subsequent marginalisation of collegiality have been further charged with silencing the pupil voice (Dyson 2006; Thomas 2007). This omission of pupil voice has greatly reduced interventions and limited reform efforts focused on increasing pupil engagement within the classroom (Cothran and Ennis 1999).

However, it is heartening to note that pupil voice is not completely absent. Those advocating for pupil voice validation are frequently motivated by Freirean critical pedagogy, which advocates that by providing the conditions for learners to display an active voice, the experiences of learners are legitimated and learners are provided with a sense of affirmation (Freire 1985). Piaget's constructivist model of child centred learning is also accredited with progression towards a more pupil-oriented educative philosophy (Walkerdine 1984). However, while a Freirean or Piagetian philosophy of education may provide an altruistic motive for greater

acceptance of pupil voice, increased recognition of the role of pupils as consumers has also had an influence (Boorman et al. 2009). Analysing the benefits of leveraging pupils' perspectives in a consumerist milieu, Rudduck and Flutter (2000) note that 'in a climate that respects the market and the consumer, it is strange that pupils in school have not been seen as consumers worth consulting' (p.75).

Pupils' perspectives provide valuable insights into the complexities of teaching and learning, cultivating ownership of learning, classroom dialogue and meaningful learning (Belfour et al. 2006; Chan 2009; Hargreaves and Dennis 2009). However, reluctance amongst some schools to embrace this approach remains (Dyson 2006). Notably Conroy (2007) cautions that failing to address the distinctiveness of childhood, by regarding children as partakers in a political community for determining decisions, holds the potential to overwhelm children with the anxieties of adulthood. However, lack of pupil consultation continues to sustain divergence between teachers' perceptions of pupils' schooling experiences and pupils' actual experience (Leitch and Mitchell 2007). While debate progresses concerning the necessity of student voice in the curriculum, the fact remains that as integral constituents of the school, pupils are actively engaged with many issues that arise in curricular reform and construction (Corbett and Wilson 2002; NCCA 2010). Therefore, pupils are not simply passive recipients, but are active agents in their socialisation process (Thiessen 2007; Thornberg 2008).



## **Methodology**

A pragmatic research approach (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2005) was employed for this study. Pupils' perspectives on their learning experiences were examined through the use of an adapted questionnaire based on that of O' Neill (1998). Permission was sought and received from O' Neill for the reconfiguration of the questionnaire. Questions were re-oriented to focus specifically on the learning experiences of pupils studying poetry at Leaving Certificate level in Ireland. The adapted questionnaire comprised a 66 point instrument including open, closed and Likert scale questions. A Gunning-Fog readability grade of 10.14 was established. For test-retest reliability the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC = 0.86) achieved over a two week interval, indicated a good level of agreement ( $p < 0.001$ ). A pilot survey was implemented with one class cohort of Leaving Certificate pupils ( $n=24$ ) prior to the full survey. Pilot participants also completed a set of customised questions as delineated by O' Leary (2004), concerning questionnaire layout, clarity, speed of completion and content. Stratifying schools by type and location, eight were identified for research participation as outlined in Table 1.

**[Insert Table 1 -Participating Schools here]**

Questionnaires were administered directly by the researcher with each class group. Pupils were advised of the voluntary and confidential nature of the research. Freedom to withdraw from the research at any stage during questionnaire completion was also highlighted. Descriptive statistical analysis was primarily employed on the data set, supported by the use of PASW

(Predictive Analytics Software) Statistics v.17. Ethical approval for the study was sought from and granted by the Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee in the University of Limerick.

## **Findings**

A total of 200 pupils from 8 post-primary schools in the south of Ireland took part. 77 male (38.5%) and 123 (61.5%) female pupils comprised the research cohort. Of this cohort 111 (55%) were 5<sup>th</sup> year pupils and 89 (44.5%) were 6<sup>th</sup> year pupils. Each school has been designated with a pseudonym (A, B, C etc) to preserve the institution's identity. Pupil responses are numerically codified with association to their school (e.g. pupil one from school A will hereafter be listed as A1).

## **Poetry class resources**

The ubiquity of text oriented resources within the class emerged as a prominent theme from participant responses.

**[Insert Figure 1 Class resources here]**

According to pupils, the most commonly utilised teacher resources in the poetry class included; the poetry textbook (87.5%), teachers' notes (50%), books of poetry notes (30.5%) and exam papers (22.5%). The provision of directive resources was noted by many respondents as preferable for the study of poetry. Teachers' notes (i.e. teachers' explanatory/ directive notes on poems dictated in class and scribed by pupils and/or notes compiled by

teachers and disseminated to the class) emerged as the most frequently cited resource utilised by pupils in their study of poetry, with 52.5% of respondents asserting this tool as a preferred learning aid. Additionally, pupils highlighted a desire for increased provision of poetry notes:

I would prefer if my teacher gave more handouts with more notes, explaining the poem, the themes, style devices, language, and gave simple answers so that we will be able to write something like it in the exam (Student B12).

71% of respondents stated that their teacher 'always' (44.5%) or 'often' (27%) provided them with 'poetry notes' on each poem. A further 16% stated that this practice occurred 'sometimes' in their class, while just 12% of the research cohort stated that the provision of pre-scripted responses or 'notes' by teachers in the poetry class occurred 'rarely' (7%) or 'never' (5%).

90% of teachers were identified as using a poetry textbook on a frequent basis, yet only 41.5% of pupils favoured this resource. In addition, a discrepancy emerged in relation to use of ICT with 38.5% of pupils indicating a preference for ICT as a useful learning tool, while only 12% of pupils experienced the use of this resource in their poetry class.

### **Lack of differentiated pedagogy**

The data suggests lack of attention to the development of pupils' aesthetic responses to poetry through differentiated response, such as poetry composition or illustration.

## Figure 2 Differentiated Response

As shown in Figure 2, 94% of pupils reported 'never' or 'rarely' being asked to develop their aesthetic writing skills through personal poetry composition. A similar trend emerged in the practice of creative imitation, where 95% of pupils indicated 'never' or 'rarely' using creative imitation as a poetry composition tool. In addition, 93% of pupils surveyed indicated 'never' or 'rarely' being asked to represent their understanding of a poem through illustration. 76% of pupils indicated 'never' having encountered any form of drama-in-education as part of their poetry studies.

### **Pupils' perception of effective teaching**

More than half of the pupils surveyed (62%) positively endorsed their poetry teacher's pedagogical approach. Pupils believed that an uncomplicated approach to the teaching of poetry, in which meaning is clearly defined was effective; "She makes sure we know the correct meaning of the poem" (Student C12). "We don't have to waste time figuring out the meaning so we can move on quickly" (Student F4). Efficient and pragmatic time management was key for many pupils; "It's easier to get an understanding this way. Less time is wasted trying to understand something you can't" (Student F9). Pupils also noted the importance of exam-focused teacher input in high regard:

The teacher has studied it beforehand. She knows what she's talking about and while our own interpretations are also valid, we must take

hers into consideration so as to obtain a good Leaving Certificate grade (Student H25).

I like the approach my teacher uses because it is exam focused (Student D7).

Of the 38% who reported dissatisfaction with the pedagogies experienced, lack of an engaging approach was highlighted by many as a significant issue. Pupils noted; “It is boring and (the teacher) just reads the meaning and we take it down” (Student C4). “It is the same for every poem, just going through the notes. It’s boring” (Student A21). Many pupils also expressed concern regarding their learning outcomes; “You are focused more on learning it than the actual meaning” (Student E32). The negation of space for subjective analysis was also identified by pupils; “We are just told, rather than finding out for ourselves” (Student F11). Additionally, for many pupils, lack of subjective input into the meaning making process created a sense of unease; “Sometimes the meaning we are given doesn’t seem quite right” (Student A5).

### **Engagement with poetry**

Concerning pupils’ involvement in meaning making during poetry analysis, 53.5% of pupils indicated ‘never’ being requested to engage in the subjective analysis of a poem. Also evident was a particularly limited use of response journals. 80% of respondents indicated they had never experienced this reflective medium in the poetry classroom.

**[ Insert Figure 3 Leaving Certificate Examination Preparation here]**

Rote learning of pre-scripted notes emerged as the primary approach to study for the Leaving Certificate examination, with 77.5% of all respondents indicating their intention to adopt this study practice. Less frequently cited approaches to study for the Leaving Certificate exam included: writing sample answers to questions (48%), rote learning of essays on specific poems (41%) and reading over poetry studied in class (27%). Individual critical and subjective analysis of new or unseen poems was the least frequently cited pupil approach to pre-exam study (1.5%).

When asked to compare the experience of studying poetry as a genre to studying poetry for the exam, 76% of pupils perceived a significant difference between the two experiences, identifying them as two divergent learning processes. Only 8.5% of respondents identified an alignment between the two activities. Commenting on what they perceived as a clear distinction between the two activities, one respondent noted; “I like to focus on improving my college chances rather than increasing my knowledge base” (student B22).

High levels of self-confidence amongst pupils relating to the study of poetry at Leaving Certificate level were identified in this research. However this self-confidence was found to be predicated on the strength of teacher notes. 58% of respondents reported high levels of self-efficacy, with slightly more male pupils (68.8%) than female pupils (51%) asserting themselves as confident regarding their study of poetry. Ownership of ‘good notes’ for rote learning purposes emerged as the most frequently cited factor amongst respondents

for high levels of confidence in poetry, as outlined in the following pupil excerpts;

The book and our teacher provide us with excellent summary notes that provide us with a broader view (Student C3).

My teacher's notes are very detailed and the notes at the back of the book are helpful also (Student E21).

Tensions between pupils' perceptions of the nature of the genre, subjective response, and the transmission pedagogies of many teachers were also identified; "A lot of the time I don't know what the poet is trying to say and sometimes the explanation we are given doesn't fit with what I think" (Student C16). The representation of poems as compositions of fixed meaning was seen to impact negatively on learners' confidence levels. It was also perceived to lead potentially to the discrediting of personal interpretation on the part of the pupil; "I find meanings that are not there" (Student E12). Many pupils indicated a reticence to engage in the analytical process due to the perceived fixed meaning of poetry; "Analysing a poem yourself isn't useful as you might not be right on the meaning... my opinion may be wrong" (Student E4).

However, the impact of teacher-centred rote learning and note taking methodologies was duly noted by respondents who experienced this approach as a routine aspect of their poetry class experience;

She calls it out (poetry notes) to us, we do not discuss it as a class. She just takes it out of a book and doesn't explain it herself. It's a very boring way to learn (Student A14).

I would prefer if there was more discussion before we take notes. Once we're given notes, it's like that's what the poem's about (Student E1).

I wish our teacher would involve us more, try to make it a bit fun, instead of making us feel like we have to do it so let's get it over with (Student D3).

Responses to the question '*What do you hope to achieve from your study of poetry at Leaving Certificate level*', highlighted the importance of the exam for pupils. 73% of respondents asserted achieving a 'good grade' in the Leaving Certificate examination as their primary reason for engagement within the poetry class. Concerning the study of poetry, as illustrated in Figure 4, pupils' educational aspirations outside the remit of the examination appear nominal.

**[ Insert Figure 4 The importance and benefit of poetry here]**

For many pupils, the study of non-examinable material was perceived to be of lesser importance than examinable material;

There is no point wasting time studying something that doesn't have relevance to our exams (Student F2).



I think Leaving Certificate poetry is more important at the moment rather than doing something that won't be examined (Student D11).

Concerns with 'time wasting' emerged strongly for pupils who asserted the acquisition of a good grade as a key priority, while deeming the study of non-examinable material and acquisition of tacit knowledge as a somewhat 'pointless' activity;

It is pointless as it won't help us get a good grade. Time wasting isn't appreciated (Student G29).

I don't want to learn unnecessary poetry that won't help with my grade (Student B4).

Only 13 pupils (6.5%) purported poetry to be a 'very important' part of the English studies course.

84% of pupils reported never engaging in poetry reading as an extra-curricular activity (see figure 5). Additionally, 89% of pupils reported never writing poetry in their free time. Reasons cited included; lack of interest (50.5%), and lack of time (15.5%). While 6% of pupils stated they find poetry writing 'too difficult', 3% of pupils deemed themselves 'not imaginative enough' and 3.5% of pupils reported having nothing of merit to write about.

**[ Insert Figure 5 Pupils' extra-curricular poetry engagement here]**

## **Discussion**

### ***The commercialisation of poetry***

The data suggests limited potential for creative engagement within the poetry class. It identifies a performance-based approach (Bernstein 2000) to teaching as a significant influence for this trend. The dominance of teacher centred, didactic methodologies was evident in the majority of pupil responses. This is somewhat unsurprising in a context where teachers are 'held accountable for results but not for the methods employed unless the results are unsatisfactory' (Bennett 1995: 48). Thus while the aims of the national curriculum state clearly that pupils' subjective responses to poetry should play a key role in the development of critical analysis and reflection skills within the poetry class (NCCA 1999b), in practice this appears limited. The pressures of exam oriented education mean that pupils' subjective responses are potentially becoming marginalised. Reliance on notes/pre-scripted responses to poetry was found to take precedence over analysis and critical engagement. Exploring their personal reticence to engage critically with poetry one pupil commented "You lose time analysing that could be spent learning something meaningful" (student D19). For such pupils, meaningful engagement with poetry equated with exam preparation and assimilation of pre-scripted responses. In an era in which productivity and consumerism abound, the data suggest that even poetry is vulnerable to becoming a packaged commodity. In this study, success was understood in terms of the mastery of an ever-increasing amount of knowledge with little reference to the quality of the learner's engagement with the actual content (NCCA 2010: 22). The value of the product, in this instance knowledge of poetry, specifically for

the Leaving Certificate examination, appears to transcend the value of subjective and creative response.

### ***Packaging the Product***

The data point to a utilitarian approach employed by teachers and pupils alike to the study of poetry. However, while the knowledge economy is predicated on the commodification of knowledge, knowledge itself should not be confined to such narrow parameters (Summer 2003). Nevertheless the data demonstrate negation of the aesthetic, affective and creative in the poetry class in favour of knowledge conducive to assessment. The provision of space for poetry writing was largely absent, with many pupils believing themselves 'not imaginative enough' for poetry composition, a perception that is cause for concern. The provision for differentiated response to poetry through alternative art forms also appears neglected. The tendency to negate non-exam oriented material was evident. The prioritisation of the examinable at the expense of creative poetry teaching may also be negatively impacting pupils' poetic aspirations. Noting that the development of talent is stressed as an educative imperative in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly 1989), the peripheral place afforded to the development of pupils' creative and affective sensibilities within the class is deeply disconcerting.

The experiences of pupils here suggest that teachers have employed a reductionist and exam focused approach to the teaching of poetry. As pupils readily recognise their teachers' methodologies (NCCA 2010), the data

suggest that pupils are both assimilating this approach to poetry and to quite a degree replicating it in their own studies. Respondents who asserted themselves as confident in their understanding of poetry, frequently equated this disposition with exam 'readiness', thereby indicating a reduced conceptualisation of poetic engagement and understanding. Ownership of 'good notes' emerged as the most frequently reported factor amongst pupils for high levels of confidence in poetry studies. Pupils' desired learning outcomes from their study at Leaving Certificate level also failed to extend beyond the examination. It is of concern that the development of aesthetic appreciation or creative ability was deemed unnecessary and considered time wasting by a number of pupils in this study, clearly suggesting that for many pupils poetry has little place in their lives beyond the remit of the examination.

### ***Mindful Packaging***

While the burgeoning demand for performativity continues to drive social and economic policies, opportunities for reform require significant attention. The widespread commodification of knowledge and 'performance packaging' (Eisner 2002: 8) in Irish schools is problematic. Re-evaluation of this 'packaging process' is now necessitated. There exists an urgent need for closer attention to pedagogical and educative priorities. Central to this is the promotion of creativity and innovation as commercially viable sources of intellectual capital. As techno-scientific advancement increases, global economic policy requirements are gradually pointing towards the necessity for innovation rather than standardisation in the workforce (Pink 2006; Peters et al. 2009). The creation of a creative globalised society is increasingly

emphasised. In 2009, The European year of Innovation and Creativity endeavoured to promote creative and innovative approaches across all sectors of enterprise. The axis is now shifting on global conceptions of performativity to recognise the competitive advantage of leveraging creativity (Scase 2007). It holds true then that creativity is no longer a luxury for the few, but a necessity for all (Csikszentmihalyi 2006). Given that schools are often slow to embrace change, the findings of this research are challenging with regard to the teaching of poetry as the kind of minds educators develop are profoundly influenced by the opportunities to learn that these educators provide (Eisner 2002).

### **Implications for Teacher Education**

Educational change is a slow and challenging process (Farrell 2000; Davidson 2003; Fink and Stoll 2005). Given the creative ethos of the current syllabus it appears that renewed teacher engagement and commitment to change, beginning at a pre-service stage, is now a necessity. The promotion of creativity and innovation within initial teacher education courses may be a significant first step. Hennessy et al. (2010) identify the existence of an aesthetic vision for poetry pedagogy amongst post-primary poetry teachers in Ireland. Yet, in practice there appears a reticence amongst teachers to engage creatively with poetry, with teachers favouring instead a more pragmatic approach to poetry pedagogy at Leaving Certificate level. Preparing teachers for the 'paradoxical realities' of globalisation and standardisation (Delgado and Norman 2008:1) poses a significant challenge to teacher education. While the demands of a more globalised economy suggest that

pupils need to engage in creative pursuits, current policies and educational structures are failing to provide space for such pursuits. Countering such tensions, pre-service teachers need to be encouraged to identify the spaces where actions in the pursuit of educational advancement may be undertaken. In doing so, pre-service teachers must be encouraged to critically examine the ideological nature of teaching and the transformative potential of a teacher's work (Hill 2004). Developing pre-service teachers' awareness of the impact of a teacher's 'pedagogic stance' (Russell and Loughran 2007) on pupil learning would be of significant benefit. If pre-service teachers are to develop a critical understanding of poetry pedagogy which will sustain them throughout their teaching careers, they require early training opportunities to experiment with creative approaches (including poetry writing activities) which may, in turn, enable them to develop their creative selves (Dymoke 2007: 93). They also need to be supported to critically engage with the question of how they will, as future teachers, sustain attention to the aesthetic and the creative while teaching poetry in exam oriented schools.

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