‘DISSECTING THE BIRD TO ARTICULATE THE SONG’

EXPLORING THE NATURE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING POETRY IN THE IRISH LEAVING CERTIFICATE CLASSROOM

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The substance of this thesis is the original work of the author and due reference and acknowledgement has been made, when necessary, to the work of others. No part of this thesis has been accepted for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted for any other award.

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Abstract

Motivated by the conviction that listening to pupils’ and teachers’ perspectives enables the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of teaching and learning processes, this research explores the nature and provision of poetry at Leaving Certificate level in Ireland. It draws on research conducted over a four year period from 2007-2011 with 80 practising Leaving Certificate poetry teachers and 200 Leaving Certificate pupils of poetry. Set against a backdrop of educational consumerism, this research identifies a number of areas of concern for educators including; a narrowing of the curricula, a traditionalist approach to pedagogy, widespread teacher dissonance and pupil disengagement in addition to a ubiquitous teaching to the test ideology at Leaving Certificate level. Drawing on the research findings, it is argued that poetry is vulnerable to becoming a marginalised and technicised endeavour in the Leaving Certificate classroom. Recommendations for renewed teacher agency are proposed in striving to renew a critical and creative approach to poetry pedagogy in schools.
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At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lit the flame within us. - Albert Schweitzer
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Poetry needs to dust its knees and hurry to the nearest basketball court to shoot a little hoop, grab one of its rusty medals and use it for a hopscotch marker, jump rope on a crowded asphalt playground, scrawl graffiti on bathroom walls, get off the shelf and into the lives of kids.

Poetry is held too sacred, revered a bit too much to be useful. Someone lied to us a long time ago when they whispered, “Kids hate poetry”. Kids might hate the poetry that rustles in old pages and asks them to bow and be quiet when they come into the room. They might hate reading poetry unlocked only by the teacher’s key and writing poetry that’s delivered up like the New York Times crossword puzzle, but give them poetry that presses its ear against the heartbeat of humanity and they’re in love.

Linda M. Christensen. (1991, p.27)
Chapter I

Introduction
Introduction

On First Looking into Chapman's Homer

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,  
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;  
Round many western islands have I been  
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told  
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;  
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:  
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken;  
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes  
He star'd at the Pacific—and all his men  
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

- John Keats (1816)

It is attested that after spending all night reading Chapman’s translation of Homer with a friend, Keats was so greatly moved by the power and vitality of the writing that he penned the above sonnet. The sonnet expresses the intensity of Keats’ encounter with Homer. He describes his literary experience as one of transformational exploration and discovery. Such an encounter according to Robert Frost, “begins in delight and ends in wisdom” (Frost, cited in Rath 2003, p.115). Somerset Maugham (1943) advocated poetry as ‘the crown of literature’ professing it to be “the sublimest activity of the human mind...the achievement of beauty and delicacy” (p.599). Thus to imagine the death of poetry is to imagine a narrowing of experience and a contraction of mind. Breathing life into poetry involves the provision of opportunity for journeying in the subjective and adventuring through the ambiguous, the wondrous and the inspirational. Poetry also provides the opportunity to sustain experience through the ages. Just as Keats’ Grecian urn acts as a timeless historian recounting the enigmatic lesson ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’, it is Shelley’s poem, ode to Ozymandias that outlives its muse and remains for posterity through the poetic form.

The poetry classroom can act as a medium for unlocking enduring insights, growing the mind and opening the windows of imagination through engaged encounters with poetry. Passion and commitment on the part of the poetry teacher is central to the development of pupil
enthusiasm and engagement. The pedagogical practices employed by the poetry teacher hold a significant role in the development of a pupil’s relationship with poetry. Yet, in Ireland little research has been conducted into the experiences generated in the poetry class.

**Context**

The current English syllabus was introduced at Leaving Certificate level in 1999. More than a decade has elapsed since its implementation and as yet, little evidence exists of any focused research conducted on practice within the Irish poetry classroom. In 1998 a study of the teaching of poetry at Junior Certificate level in the post-primary school was conducted. It noted adherence to a ‘traditional’ model of teaching directed by teacher-led analysis of poetry in the majority of cases studied (O’ Neill, 1998). Additionally, in 2006 a report was published into the teaching and learning of English in Post-Primary schools (Department of Education and Science, 2006). Specific references to poetry pedagogy in this document are sparse. It does suggest however, that many pupils receive very limited exposure to poetry. Furthermore, it suggested that when focusing on figurative language, teachers “frequently concentrated too much on terms and definitions rather than on effect or purpose” (Department of Education and Science, 2006, p.34). The report recommended that “teachers need to be mindful that it is useful for students to master the terminology only insofar as it assists their understanding of and response to the poem. It is not an end in itself” (ibid). Beyond this, a fixation on meaning and accuracy is purported to preclude effective poetic engagement. These findings highlight a worrying trend of teacher centred instrumentalism in Irish post-primary poetry classroom.

**Research Focus**

The potential of creative pedagogies to positively influence the learning experiences generated within the poetry class is afforded detailed attention and endorsement by arts pedagogists and within the Leaving Certificate English syllabus. This conviction is strongly is argued in this thesis. Creative approaches to poetry pedagogy hold the possibility to generate enriching educational experiences which not only meet the vocational and further education needs of students, but also to provide students with the life-long skills, both written and oral, necessary for integration into society (NCCA, 1999, p.4).
The relationship between creative pedagogies and traditional summative examinations is contentious. This thesis points towards the relegation of engaged and critically creative approaches to poetry in the face of the performativity pressures experienced by teachers and pupils in this context. Such relegation of creative engagement has consequence for the educational advancement of pupils. Here, the dichotomisation of creativity and performativity holds the potential to impact the effective translation of altruistic and aesthetic vision into practice (Ryan, 2010).

The development of the research objectives for this thesis was guided through the insights gained as the researcher became familiar with literature in the field and identified the significant lack of focus afforded to this area within the Leaving Certificate years. The development of the research objectives facilitated the researcher in placing emphasis on the silenced voices of teachers and pupils as outlined in this chapter, therein embedding the constructs of power and dialogue into the research. In addition, discourses of utilitarianism and reductionism, as evidenced in the literature, were contested through the affordance of space in the research objectives for in depth critical inquiry into the field.

Grounded in the conviction that “rich descriptions of the social world are valuable” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.9), the researcher sought to respond to the dearth of literature evident within the Irish context. The construction of the research objectives sought to facilitate the provision of rich empirical evidence on classroom practices pertaining to poetry at Leaving Certificate level in Ireland. In achieving this ambition two objectives were established:

1) Explore the experience of teaching poetry at Leaving Certificate level in Ireland from the perspective of the teacher, focusing on areas of significance as denoted by the cohort.

2) Explore the perspectives of pupils on the experience of studying poetry at Leaving Certificate level in Ireland, focusing on areas of significant as denoted by the cohort.

The objectives of this research are grounded in a theoretical framework which premises the potential of creative pedagogies to positively impact teaching and learning, as outlined in the following section.
Personal Context
As noted by Ennis (1999, p.130) “a research plan often develops quite slowly and builds over many years, perhaps over your entire career”. I believe that poetry is point of entry into a world of mystique, where language provides unique opportunities to explore experience and our subjective realities in a creative space. As a student in school poetic texts became a place where I both lost and found myself and I began writing poetry at an early age. I believe that the more I experienced and explored poetry, the more confident I became in my own creative capacity, indeed poetry taught me to grow creatively.

Thus, my commitment to and respect for the genre also grew. Each September, as a new school year dawned, I eagerly awaited a new textbook, and on receipt, I looked forward to the potential of the poetry section. When at last we would finally focus on poetry in class, the pages of my book seemed familiar friends. However, the my experience in the class left me disappointed and lead to the realisation that in English teaching, poetry seemed the poor relation. My love for poetry saw fulfilling space only in my own time, after school, when all prescribed study was complete.

During my Senior Cycle schooling I became aware of the tension between the curiosity and possibility of poetry and the apparent moratorium of poetic exploration within the classroom. I was expected to know more but somehow it felt less. It felt artificial. Poetry became something quite different for me at this time, something less invoking, distant. I also became aware of how I silenced my questions and grew compliant to this approach. At a distance from poetry, I studied it and excelled at it, but became less confident in my understanding of texts. Seeking to reengage with the genre, I undertook an undergraduate education in English teaching. However here too, I remained at a distance from poetry.

Finally when teaching poetry in secondary schools, I approached it with enthusiasm and vigour but quickly discovered that my enthusiasm was not reciprocated. I was left to question, was it my pedagogy that was causing this reaction? Was I choosing poems that failed to meet the pupil’s needs? I struggled to understand where this palpable dispassion was originating from. Even post-graduation as a secondary teacher I still did not have answers to my questions. This emergent and growing sense of role discord was preclusive to my teaching aspirations. I needed to understand my experiences.
Chapter I  Introduction

It was at this point I decided to undertake postgraduate study in order to make meaning of my experiences of poetry teaching thus far. Slowly, with guidance, further inquiry and theoretical scaffolding, my questions concerning the nature of poetry provision found the space to be explored and this directed the construction of my research objectives. Here, at last, I found the space to examine long held questions, and in so, I have gained deeper insights into the broader complexities that inform the practices and experiences of the poetry teaching in Irish Post-Primary schools. I have by no means arrived at all the answers, but without doubt I now have a much deeper understanding that will inform my future career as a teacher and researcher of English pedagogy.

Thesis overview

A criticism often levelled against research is, though a researcher’s aim usually relates to the advancement of knowledge within their field of study, many fail to disseminate their findings in a timely manner, if at all. Delayed dissemination of research often reduces the impact of research findings. The author is committed to the advancement of knowledge pertaining to the teaching and learning of poetry. For this reason pursuit of an article based doctorate was chosen over the traditional monograph. This approach enabled the researcher to contribute in an expedient manner to global discourse surrounding the experience of teaching and learning poetry, particularly within the Irish context, where a notable gap in the literature was identified. The researcher not only pursued publication in a variety of peer-reviewed journals, but also attended conferences hosted at both national and international levels (See appendix B). Feedback obtained at conferences from peers working within the field, in addition to feedback obtained through the blind review process for journal publication served to inform the researcher’s thinking and critical analysis greatly throughout the research period. It is important to note that for the researcher, this thesis marks the beginning rather than the end. It is hoped that the publication of this research will provoke thought and open up discourse on the challenges and opportunities associated with the teaching and learning of Leaving Certificate poetry in Ireland, and indeed further afield.

This thesis comprises three published peer-reviewed papers, one paper in peer-review at the time of submission and one paper in preparation. Copyright permission has been obtained for the publication of all published works from the respective journals (see appendix C). The PhD candidate is the principal author of each paper.
Therefore, the structure of this document is as follows:

Chapter I: *Introduction*. This chapter provides an outline of the research area and in so doing, delineates the aims and objectives of the study. It identifies the context from which the research originates and highlights the personal commitments of the researcher in the pursuit of this research. It also provides a detailed signposting of the thesis structure.

Chapter II: *Literature Review*. This chapter provides an overview of current literature in the field and begins with an exploration of the nature and purpose of poetry, exploring the process of symbolisation as a form of expression and the role of poetry in the facilitation of this. The role of poetry in developing the cognitive and affective domains is outlined, followed by a delineation of their dichotomisation in schools. An overview of the Irish educational context is provided and juxtaposed with an overview of the place and status of poetry within New Zealand and England and Northern Ireland. A chronological delineation and critique of the established models for and of the teaching of English is provided. Themes of teacher dissonance, epistemology and agency are also discussed.
Chapter III: Methodology. This chapter provides an overview of the methodological approach employed in this research. It also outlines the rationale behind the methodological choices made. It delineates the nature of the study and the ethical considerations of the research. The research design is then outlined with a delineation of the actions taken during each phase of the study. A timeline for the research and graphical overview of the research is also provided.

Chapter IV: Poetry and Pedagogy: Exploring the opportunity for epistemological and affective development within the classroom. This paper, published in the Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal, highlights reduced opportunities for epistemic and affective development within the Leaving Certificate poetry classroom. It identifies a dualistic approach to the teaching and learning of poetry by teachers and pupils identifying the widespread provision and assimilation of pre-scripted notes at this level, in conjunction with a predominantly teacher lead approach to pedagogy. As a result, a growing trend of pupil passivity within the poetry class is identified. In addition, this paper argues that development of the affective domain is limited in this context owing to a lack of creative and pupil oriented pedagogical approaches within the poetry classroom.

Chapter V: ‘The points, the points, the points’: Exploring the impact of performance orientated education on the espoused values of senior cycle poetry teachers in Ireland. This paper, published in English Teaching Practice and Critique, contributes research on English teacher identity, identifying a dichotomisation in the professional ambition of many Leaving Certificate poetry teachers. Tensions between teachers’ altruistic ambitions and the pressures exerted by the summative examination are noted to be central in this trend. The emergence of a ‘cognitive culture’ within the poetry classroom is identified as an outcome of teacher dissonance and is charged with the artificial separation of feeling and intelligence in this context. The paper makes the case for a more integrated pedagogy which enables the development of pupils as both creative and critical thinkers.

Chapter VI: Packaging Poetry? Pupils’ perspectives of their learning experience within the post-primary poetry classroom. This paper, awaiting publication in English in Education, contributes to the debate on educational commodification by discussing the emergence of a consumerist agenda in the Leaving Certificate poetry classroom. It highlights the often self-imposed deprofessionalisation of many poetry teachers who potentially assume the role of
functionary to the terminal examination in the class. It also draws attention to the increasing concurrent passivity of many pupils who assume the role of consumer in the class. This paper makes the case that poetry is now vulnerable to becoming, in consumerist terms, a packaged commodity.

Chapter VII: “What rough beast?” Conceptualising the poetry teacher in Ireland through the eyes of the pupil. This paper, currently in review, contributes to the understanding of pupils’ views of effective poetry pedagogy. It argues for pupil voice in developing strategies to counter growing trends of pupil apathy and disengagement in the poetry classroom. This paper reveals five categories of learning, deemed significant by pupils, which should inform teachers of poetry aiming to enhance engagement in their class.

Chapter VIII: Poetry in crisis: A Critical Review of Current Ideology and Praxis. This paper, currently in preparation, contributes to the debate on the neo-liberal agenda in education by exploring patterns of performativity and hegemony in the poetry classroom. The paper makes the case that poetry exists currently within a state of crisis in the Leaving Certificate classroom. It asserts that a narrow and politicised realisation of poetry has displaced the potential for engagement with poetry at a critical and creative level. The paper identifies the acquiescence of poetry teachers, and consequently pupils, to this trend. The paper argues the necessity for ideological redress beginning at pre-service level.

Chapter IX: Conclusions and recommendations. This chapter provides an overview of the conclusions derived from the research. It discusses inter alia the issues of teacher dissonance, pupil passivity, affective and epistemological development, the impact of exam-driven schooling and the current place and status of poetry at Leaving Certificate level. A number of key recommendations are provided. Recommendations for future research in the field are also provided.

In order to enhance consistency for the reader, a number of formatting decisions have been made. References will appear at the end of each chapter. The referencing style will vary according to the publisher’s guidelines of each journal. Table and figure numbers have been amended to cohere with the rest of the thesis, affording a coherent document overview.
The researcher is dedicated to critical inquiry in the pursuit of educational advancement. She believes that in holding our assumptions and practice open to question and critique that we open up unique and infinite possibilities for the improvement of our teaching. As Greene (2000) has advocated;

Only when the given or the taken-for-granted is subject to questioning, only when we take various, sometimes unfamiliar perspectives on it, does it show itself as what it is contingent on many interpretations, many vantage points, unified (if at all) by conformity or by unexamined common sense. Once we can see our givens as contingencies, then we may have the opportunity to posit alternative ways of living and valuing and to make choices. (p.23)

This thesis offers evidence of the researchers’ commitment to questioning and critique, and her belief in the potential of poetry to provide pupils and teachers with creative and empowering learning experiences.

References


Chapter II

Literature Review
Overview
This chapter begins with an overview of the nature and purpose of poetry. It outlines the significance of the symbol and the process of symbolisation in poetry. It also illustrates the capacity of poetry, as an arts based subject, to act as a medium for both reflection and expression. The potential of poetry to develop both cognitive and affective sensibilities is also explored and critiqued. For pupils, it is posited that the school may offer an effective milieu for critical and creative engagement with poetry.

Next, a contextual outline of the nature and ethos of Irish education system is provided with a specific focus on poetry pedagogy. This is juxtaposed with an overview of the provision of poetry in New Zealand and Northern Ireland and England. This is followed by an historical delineation of the Teaching of English in Ireland as well as an overview of the widely established Models of English Teaching. The final section of the chapter takes a Janusian overview of the field, outlining the challenges and implications of the aforementioned models and highlighting the opportunities and spaces for advancement available to the teacher of poetry in Ireland.

The Nature and Purpose of Poetry

Poetry as a symbol
The poetic form and the potential of the symbols contained within act as a medium through which many find meaning and expression. For Yeats, the symbol was not an occasional tool used to embellish poetry, but a way of thought and a means of arriving at an imaginative understanding of the world (Bushrui & Prentki, 1990, p.27). The significance of the symbol is outlined by Abbs (1976), who contends that transcendental inquiry may be facilitated through the ‘energy’ of the symbol where “man could draw the external world into his consciousness, where he could ponder its nature, purpose and meaning” (p.15). Langer (1979) adds that “a symbol is used to articulate ideas of something we wish to think about, and until we have a fairly adequate symbolisation we cannot think about it” (p.28). The process of assimilating, analysing, understanding and quantifying symbols is described as “the most amazing symbolic system humanity has invented” (Langer, 1979, p.30). Through man’s unique use of symbols “the mystery of existence becomes capable of expression” (Waters, 2007, p.9).
Levinson (2000) contends that the ability to symbolise experience segregates and elevates us above what Dessalles (2007) refers to as our ‘animal substratum’ (p.4). In doing so, it allows the manipulation of symbols into systems and patterns, thus permitting the translation of experience into perceived reality. Cassirer and Lukay (2006) concur with Levinson’s assertion stressing that “as compared with the other animals, man lives not merely in a broader reality; he lives, so to speak, in a new dimension of reality” (p.29). This dimension, unique to man is referred to by Cassirer and Lukay (2006) as our ‘cultural dimension’, by Clark (2006) as our ‘cognitive niche’, or as Levinson (2000) proposes, man’s ‘socio-cultural adaptation’. Through this ‘cultural dimension’ or ‘cognitive niche’, the human mind is constantly translating experience into tangible representations in the form of symbols particularly in poetry. Take as an example Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, a poem prescribed for study within the English curriculum in Ireland. This poem can be read as an attempt by Coleridge to convey the suffering of the mariner. This purpose is achieved not through prescriptive description however, but rather through the reoccurring symbol of the albatross. Moreover, it is believed that Coleridge wrote this poem as an autobiographical portrait of himself. From this perspective Coleridge appears to compare the Mariner’s loneliness with his own feelings of solitude as expressed in his letters and journals;

‘Alone, alone, all, all alone
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.’

- Samuel Coleridge (1798)

Coleridge’s poem illustrates the symbolic translation of experience into tangible representation through the poetic form. Such translation affords the opportunity to formulate a cognitively accessible understanding of self and the world. Moreover as language is “profoundly more than a mere set of symbols” (O’ Neill, 1998, p.3), the use of the symbol or metaphor in language and poetry is representative of ‘complex patterns’ and integrated meanings that point to ‘equally complex relationships in the world’ (Langer, 1976, p.135). This idea is duly noted by Sylvia Plath (1959) in the following aptly titled poem;
Metaphors
I'm a riddle in nine syllables,
An elephant, a ponderous house,
A melon strolling on two tendrils.
O red fruit, ivory, fine timbers!
This loaf's big with its yeasty rising.
Money's new-minted in this fat purse.
I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf.
I've eaten a bag of green apples,
Boarded the train there's no getting off.

A reductionist analysis of this poem may prove fruitless! The ability to analyse these metaphors and acknowledge texts in a broader conceptual manner than its prescriptive terms suggests that our ability to comprehend is interwoven with our sense and understanding of experience.

However, the endeavour towards expression, through symbolisation, in an attempt to advance understanding of experience is often thwarted, as noted in Pope’s famous dictum “What oft was thought but ne’er so well express’d”. In his book ‘The Interpretation of Dreams’, Freud (1911) alleged that meaning is not always presentable in conventional terms or feelings presentable in traditional forms. O’ Neill (1998) points towards art as an alternate form through which expression, representative of experience, may be made possible (p.5). Therein, just as dreams may facilitate subconscious acquisition of ‘repressed wishes’ (Freud, 1911), art holds the capacity to facilitate communication of the subconscious thought, cast illumination on the human experience, provide a source of emotional stimulation and also act as a form of imaginative understanding (Graham, 1997).

Art as Expression

Art offers life; it offers hope; it offers the prospect of discovery; it offers light.
(Greene, 1995, p. 133)

As an educator Plato was very much aware of the importance of the arts, recognising the impact of the arts on the development of the human character. More recently, in Art as Experience, Dewey (1934) echoing the counsel of Plato, outlined the fundamental connection between the consciousness and the creation of art:
The existence of art is the concrete proof...that man uses the minerals and energies of nature with intent to expand his own life... Art is the living and concrete proof that man is capable of restoring consciously, and thus on the plane of meaning, the union of sense, need, impulse and action characteristics of the live creature. The intervention of consciousness adds regulation, power of selection, and redisposition...the greatest intellectual achievement in the history of humanity. (p.26)

Eisner (2002) also outlines the role of the arts, and poetry as an art form, in “refining the senses and enlarging the imagination” (p.14), asserting that the arts provide a ‘way of knowing’ (p.20). Graham (1997) too commends the value of art as a self-contained experience. In this capacity, he argues that art seeks not to direct the viewer elsewhere, but rather encourages the individual to become immersed in its own aesthetic space and acts as a self-fulfilling entity in isolation from all else (p.19).

The power of poetry as an arts based medium for expression and reflection is highlighted by Robert Frost who advocates that “poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words” (Frost, cited in Davis and Murphy 2010). Heaney also notes the capacity of poetry to act as a medium for experiential exploration and reflection commenting; “I can't think of a case where poems changed the world, but what they do is they change people's understanding of what's going on in the world” (Heaney, 2004, p.16). Warren (1985) raises the question “What is a poem but a hazardous attempt at self-understanding?” (p.10). Indeed, the work of Shakespeare suggests the emancipatory prowess of poetry in an extract from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*:

    The poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
    Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
    And as imagination bodies forth
    The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen
    Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
    A local habitation and a name.

    (Shakespeare, 1623)

What Shakespeare describes in this passage is the power of poetry to give form to the creative and subconscious mind or the ‘poet’s eye’.
Defining Poetry: The Poet’s Perspective

Shelley (1840) describes the unique power of poetry to elevate the seemingly mundane and ordinary in life above the realm of the rational and into a metaphysical realm of mystery and wonder as “poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar” (p.13). This poetic capacity is too reflected in the words of Samuel Johnson (1818) who stated that “the two most engaging powers of an author are to make new things familiar and familiar things new” (p.381).

Poetry allows us to broaden our experiences and “gives you permission to feel” (Autry, cited in Fox, 1999, p.3), to heighten our senses and access the aesthetic in the world around us. It is the “physical enactment of a process of knowing by means of language” (Doty, cited in Neuman, 2008). The creation of poetry is the examination of the subconscious; it is a journey of endless discovery and wonder. Robert Frost noted that in his writing of poems: “I have never started a poem yet whose end I knew. Writing a poem is discovering” (Frost, cited in Burnshaw and Donoghue, 2010, p.121). According to Georges Braque (cited in Hyams, 2007) “reality only reveals itself when it is illuminated by a ray of poetry” (p.1). This view of poetry as the illumination of reality and truth is also held by Seamus Heaney (1995) who stated that “in fact, in lyric poetry, truthfulness becomes recognizable as a ring of truth within the medium itself” (p.28).

Poetry not only provides an emotional outlet for our thoughts, musings and meditations but also provides space in which to examine these insights in closer detail. “Poetic language honours polarities. We use the language of poetry to provide the many levels of feeling, facets of knowing, simultaneously, so we can examine them and move forward” (Osna Heller, 2009, p.9). Therefore, poetry exists not only as an emotional outlet but also as a medium for emotional exploration. As noted by Eavan Boland (1999) “I write it (poetry), not to express the experience but to experience it further” (p.180).

The inimitable power of poetry is materialised when appreciated for its sensuousness, its lyrical quality and its unity; rather than for its potential for lexical examination alone, as highlighted by the poet E.E. Cummings (1953), “Poetry is being, not doing” (p.24). According to Gerard Manley Hopkins (cited in Hopkins, House, and Storey, 1959), poetry is “speech framed ... to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of
meaning” (p.289). Poetry encapsulates more than the written word. The intensity of its composition elevates meaning beyond the prescribed. In the words of Alfred de Musset (cited in Salomon, 2003), “Each memorable verse of a true poet has two or three times the written content” (p.xiv). Babettes Deutsch’s (1962) words serve to eloquently define her understanding of poetry as “the art which uses words as both speech and song to reveal the realities that the senses record, the feelings salute, the mind perceives, and the shaping imagination orders” (p.111).

**Poetry: Cognitive and Affective Domain Development**

The school, as milieu for educational growth and enhancement, stands as formidable bastion in opening up the experience and power of poetry to pupils. Here, pupils may discover the capacity of poetry to symbolise, translate and reflect upon experience. It may provide space for reflection on the value of poetry as a self-contained art form, allowing for immersion and creative play within the form. In so doing, the poetry class holds the potential to grow the imagination, enhance affective and cognitive sensibility and encourage critical reflexivity through engaged encounters with the genre.

**A Symbiotic Relationship**

Bloom (1956) proposed that learning can be categorised into three dynamic and interrelated types of learning behaviour, namely the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. The word ‘cognitive’ derives from the Latin word *cognoscere* – meaning *to know*. It follows that cognitive activity includes all processes involved in thinking and knowing. Cognitive development then, involves the development of concepts and ‘products of reasoning’ which aid in the apprehension of experience (Johnston & Nahmad-Williams, 2009). The term ‘affective’ is derived from the word ‘affect’ which refers feelings, emotions and moods. Affective development involves the advancement of pupil’s attitudes and values. According to Snowman, McCown & Biehler (2011) affective objectives are more difficult to define than that of the cognitive, as learning outcomes within this domain are often demonstrated in subtle or indirect ways. Affect can be, according to Lerner & Keltner (2000) both pre and post-cognitive, with thoughts being produced as a result of emotional responses (pre-cognitive), and affective response also being produced by thoughts (post-cognitive). It is clear from the deconstruction of the poetic form outlined that poetry has a significant role to play in the development of the both the cognitive and affective domains of learning.
Dewey (1934) observed that the aesthetic cannot be separated from the intellectual, and for the intellectual to be complete it must bear the stamp of the aesthetic. In essence Dewey posited the existence of a symbiotic relationship between the domains. Similarly, Eisner (1982) asserts that in schooling, if pupil development is sought after, cognitive forms of development cannot be isolated from affective forms. Scheffler (2010) argues that any dichotomisation of cognition and emotion must be challenged as it “distorts everything it touches: mechanising science and sentimentalising art” (p.2). He argues that such dichotomisation within education splits the development of the mind and attitude into ‘two grotesque parts’: unfeeling knowledge and mindless arousal (p.2). Moreover, it is argued that without attention to affective development, the provision of a holistic education is potentially negated, leading to a compromised vision of democratic education (LeBlanc, Gallavan, & The Association of Teacher Educators, 2009, p.xii). In examining the cognitive and affective benefits of poetry for the pupil, recognition of their interwoven relationship is fundamental.

**Development of the Domains through Poetry**

The power of poetry as an art form to develop the cognitive domain of the pupil is widely acknowledged (Bresler, 2007; Davis, 2008; Efland, 2004). When contrasted with other genres of English studies, the study of poetry emerges favourably in terms of the cognitive development of students. In a study of secondary school students’ knowledge of the conventions and aesthetic operations that theorists hypothesise are associated with the poetic genre, Peskin (2007) highlighted that students noted poetry to be more enjoyable, cognitively challenging, emotionally engaging, and as eliciting more imagery than prose. In her study, pupils spent a longer period of time analysing and contemplating ‘the poem’ than prose, therefore she concluded that “poetry triggers the tendency to engage in active and meaningful thinking by guiding us to see language in new ways” (p.32).

Poetry composition can act as an effective medium for the development of the cognitive domain. In the writing of poetry pupils are challenged to incorporate only the most effective and essential words necessary in order to effectively convey their intentions. Joseph Brodsky (1991), then Poet Laureate and consultant in poetry at the United States Library of Congress argued that as a tool of cognition poetry presides over any existing form of analysis because “it pares down our reality to its linguistic essentials, whose interplay, be it clash or fusion,
yields epiphany or revelation, and because it exploits the rhythmic and euphonic properties of the language that in themselves are revelatory” (p.32).

Development of and attention to the pupil’s affective domain is important in the provision of holistic education. According to Lynch (2001) “the necessity for individualistic and expressive emotional output is urgent and essential for the contemporary adolescent and the provision of such in the form of affective education is integral to the promotion of equality in schooling” (p.407). Poetry holds the potential to act as an effective medium in achieving this aim. British Poet Laureate, Motion (2001), writing in The Guardian newspaper, highlights the cathartic quality of the medium noting that;

...poetry is the form we turn to instinctively at moments of intensity, whether it can be to celebrate or grieve. Why? Because of the compressions and distillations, its different perspectives, its meditative space. Because of its link with our strongest emotions. (p.16)

Bolton (1999), highlighting the process of affective development through emotional analysis, refinement and expression in poetry writing, identifies poetry as “an exploration of the deepest and most intimate experiences, thoughts, feelings, ideas: distilled, pared to succinctness, and made music to the ear by lyricism” (p.118). The strength of poetry as a communicative medium and forum for affective development is also acknowledged within the Irish Leaving Certificate English syllabus, which notes:

If students are reflective about language they should come to recognise its unique power. They will come to see acts of speaking, listening, reading and writing not just as instrumental skills but as interpretative, creative activities through which specific meanings can be placed on experience. Through using language accurately and appropriately, they themselves can realise a sense of personal significance and discover how words can work for them in revealing meanings, inviting thought, and facilitating effective communication. (NCCA, 1999a, p.7)

In conjunction with the development of the pupils’ affective domain, the development of emotional intelligence is also important for holistic educational experiences (Cohen, 2006; Lynch, 2001; Morris, Urbanski, & Fuller, 2005) as it forms an integral aspect in the socio-emotional development of the student. In addition, it provides the social nurturance necessary for the development of affectively aware students. Poetry can act as a beneficial forum for developing emotional intelligence because “poetry and the fine arts have the power to shape minds and give meaning to what is seen and heard, (and) they provide a rich contextual
background for developing components of emotional intelligence” (Morris et al., 2005, p.893). The power of poetry and poetry writing to increase one’s awareness, recognition and control over emotion is poignantly outlined in the following poem by Mueller (1996). The poem illustrates the development of a cathartic relationship between the poet and poetry, when other forms failed, or appeared ‘indifferent’ to the poet’s emotional turmoil. Poetry is described by the poet here as ‘the only thing’ to give voice and ear to her emotions;

**When I Am Asked**

When I am asked  
how I began writing poems,  
I talk about the indifference of nature.

It was soon after my mother died,  
a brilliant June day,  
everything blooming.

I sat on a gray stone bench  
in a lovingly planted garden,  
but the day lilies were as deaf  
as the ears of drunken sleepers  
and the roses curved inward.  
Nothing was black or broken  
and not a leaf fell  
and the sun blared endless commercials  
for summer holidays.

I sat on a gray stone bench  
ringed with the ingenue faces  
of pink and white impatiens  
and placed my grief  
in the mouth of language,  
the only thing that would grieve with me.

Cognition and Affective Affiliation

Despite the clearly outlined benefits of aesthetic awareness and the necessity to engage with poetry not only at an analytical level but at an affective level also, there was during the 20th century, a widespread reluctance to recognise this link within the classroom. A report commissioned by The Arts Council in 1979 entitled ‘The Place of the Arts in Irish Education’ (now commonly referred to as The Benson Report) outlines this trend;

While science benefited from changes introduced after 1900, arts subjects continued to be under-emphasised if not seriously neglected. Certainly if aesthetic education is regarded as integral to a balanced education then the characterisation of the system as “the murder machine” was all too true. (Benson, 1979, p.18 1.14)

The place of the arts and poetry in the classroom became devalued as focus on measurability and accountability in education emerged at the forefront through the promotion of ‘subjects of quantitative’ measurability such as mathematics and science. Science and the arts, including the genre of poetry became estranged within the education system;

Science was considered dependable; the artistic process was not. Science was cognitive; the arts were emotional. Science was teachable; the arts required talent. Science was testable; the arts were matters of preference. Science was useful; the arts were ornamental. (Eisner, 2003, p.374)

With such a stringent focus on measurement, rationality, assessment and the quantifiable according to Eisner (2003) “schools were to become effective and efficient manufacturing plants” (p.374).

This psychosocial shift in perspective has had a lasting impact on modern schooling. Contemporary society and consequently education, prizes rationality, logic and cognitive exposition, so much so that this technical approach to schooling has been charged with ‘freezing’ the imagination (Greene, 2000, p.124), an occurrence which seems to belie the innovative and constructivist roots of the current poetry syllabus. Education has systematically extracted the affective, the creative and the subjective in order to increase the economic value of academia. In doing so, skills such as visualisation and creativity as advocated as integral to the development of the student, have been negated in place of the skills of rationalisation and analysis;
We look for “best methods” as if they were independent of context; we do more testing than any nation on earth; we seek curriculum uniformity so parents can compare their schools with other schools, as if test scores were good proxies for the quality of education. What we are now doing is creating an industrial culture in our schools, one whose values are brittle and whose conception of what’s important narrow. We flirt with payment by results, we pay practically no attention to the idea that engagement in school can and should provide intrinsic satisfactions, and we exacerbate the importance of extrinsic rewards by creating policies that encourage children to become point collectors. Achievement has triumphed over inquiry. I think our children deserve more. (Eisner, 2004, p.3)

The performative pressures exerted on teachers and pupils alike in the poetry class and beyond, is duly acknowledged by Flutter and Rudduck (2004) who attest to the ubiquitous strains experienced by many in the achievement of socially eminent goals;

‘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. It is easy to see how this model has infiltrated education: through government schemes that aim to recognise and reward the successful, through systems of inspection and measurement designed to pressure relentlessly for ‘higher scores’ and through the establishment of competitive structures where some schools find themselves singled out as ‘failing’. The public have been captivated by the language and style of this winner-takes-it-all culture. (p.1)

This ideological evolution is highlighted by the former Irish Minister for Arts, Sports and Tourism who stated “It is a continuing challenge to discover the extent of such disconnect (between society and the arts), the reasons for it and more importantly how to rectify it” (Brennan, 2008, p.1).

Best (1992) discusses the ‘myth of the arts’ that is the perception amongst society that poetry and the arts derive from subjectivity alone and are estranged entirely from any developmental cognitive process. This ‘myth’ he terms as ‘the danger of subjectivism’. The subjectivist believes that feeling derives from an inner event which is autonomous and unrelated to any external experience. Those who argue the subjectivism of the arts see it as a frivolous and unnecessary element in the curriculum therein demoting the place of poetry in schooling to the negligible. Best (1992) dispels this myth highlighting that not alone is creativity and imagination evident even in the sciences but that cognition and reason is also implicit in the arts and poetry. Moreover, he argues that cognition and rationality are inseparable from artistic feeling and creativity, whether spontaneous or not, and that artistic feeling is itself cognitive and open to objective justification.
Stevens (2007) adds that subjectivity and objectivity should be treated as mutually beneficial rather than mutually exclusive and recommends that one teach with a vision of ‘informed subjectivity’. In this sense the teaching of poetry should embrace both the cognitive and affective elements of the poem and highlight the interdependence of both in the poems studied. As noted by Seamus Heaney in his *Redress of Poetry*, “poetry cannot afford to lose its fundamentally self-delighting inventiveness, its joy in being a process of language as well as a representation of things in the world” (Heaney, 1995, p.5).

However, as a result of the propagation in society of the ‘myth of the arts’ the place of arts in our schools both nationally and internationally has become overshadowed and undervalued (Mission & Sumara, 2005). Pink (2006) performed a survey of pupils, both primary and post primary, in which he simply asked if they would like to become artists upon leaving the education system. He found that as the pupils progressed within the education system, their desire to become artists declined concurrently. Pink attributed this trend to the growing view amongst society that artistic, creative, aesthetic skills, inherent in the study of poetry are of less importance and thus less valued then ‘easier assessed’ cognitive, linguistic and mathematical skills. Pink proposed that we are now living in what he termed an “era of left brain dominance” (Pink, 2006). This perception is not an isolated one; a report on the place of the Arts in New Zealand stated that “the education of feeling is generally ignored in education, despite the fact that all curriculum work affects the pupil’s view of the world and his/her life” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p.20).

**The Irish Educational Context**

Post-primary (secondary) education in Ireland aims to provide a comprehensive, high quality learning environment which enables all pupils to live full lives appropriate to their stage of development, and to realise their potential as individuals and as citizens (Government of Ireland, 2011). This programme of education is comprised of two distinct but interconnected ‘cycles’. Students enter post-primary education at the age of 12 or 13 years and immediately enter the Junior Cycle. This programme spans three years, building on the education received at primary level and culminates in the state run Junior Certificate Examination. Following the completion of the Junior Cycle, students at the age of 15-17 years enter the Senior Cycle, more commonly referred to as the Leaving Certificate years, the name of which derives from the final examination at the end of this two year cycle. The Senior Cycle builds on the Junior
Cycle and culminates with a summative examination, entitled the Leaving Certificate Examination, also run by the State Examinations Commission. The Leaving Certificate exists as a high-stakes examination because the points gained from this exam forms the primary route through which places in third level universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education are allocated.

While public opinion of the Irish educational system remains ‘broadly positive’, public discussion has focused more on academic outcomes, specifically examination grades, than on the provision of a broad educational experience (Smyth, McCoy, Darmody, & Dunne, 2008). A strong transdisciplinary emphasis on the summative examination exists at Senior Cycle level (Government of Ireland, 1999) due to the structure of the matriculation system. Thus, the Leaving Certificate years form a distinctly pressurised time for student and teacher alike. The Points Commission (1999) (established to examine the system of selection for third-level entry in this country), highlights a number of damaging effects attributed to this system. Issues raised included negative impact on students' personal development; a narrowing of the curriculum arising from the tendency to teach to the examination rather than to the aims of the curriculum; and an undue focus on the attainment of examination results. Perhaps somewhat unsurprisingly then, a prevailing measurement-driven and performance oriented model dominates in Irish education (Glatter, 2003) and has a significant impact on the pedagogical methodologies drawn on by teachers within the classroom. Here, contractual accountability, with its emphasis on standards and measurement, dominates over responsive accountability which premises ‘character as well as performance’ and ‘social and emotional as well as cognitive learning’ (Glatter, 2003, p.51; Gleeson & O Donnabháin, 2009; Hargreaves, 2003). A teaching to the exam ideology, with a strong concurrent focus on the transmission of subject knowledge is now evident throughout post-primary schooling (Government of Ireland, 1999; Hyland & McCarthy, 2009). The resultant milieu is one where “knowledge is now construed as a commodity, education as a business, students and their parents as customers, and teachers as mere functionaries who must satisfy the demands of their managers and clients” (Dunne, 2002, p.86). Here the promotion of empowerment, critical questioning of power relations and affective education (Lynch, 2001; Lynch & Lodge, 2002) are often negated in favour of more short term utilitarian objectives. Within this environment, there appears a collective reluctance to acknowledge that “in education not
everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts” (Lynch, 2007, p.58).

**Teaching Methodologies: Finding a Balance**

In terms of the teaching of poetry, Pink’s era of left brain dominance is problematic as “poetry is not an intellectual activity pure and simple” (O’Neill, 1998, p.10), but rather it represents a complex representation of both intellect and emotion in unison. In fact, Greene & Melton (2007) argue that “to omit poetry from students' literacy instruction would leave a monumental gap in their literary, intellectual, and emotional development” (p.ii). However, as a result of the complexity of the genre, it is often treated with hesitance and even anxiety on the part of both the teacher and the student, who may struggle in the attempt to negotiate this perceived conflict of interests between objective and subjective, functionality and aesthetics. From the perspective of the pupil, the opportunity for aesthetic engagement and subjective response is often limited by an analysis moratorium, where pupils seek to come to a swift and definitive understanding of a poem, as delineated in the poem above. Bennett (2009) outlines a similar sense of anxiety amongst those engaging with poetry, asserting:

> There is a word, a ‘name of fear’ which rouses terror in the heart of the vast educated majority of the English-speaking race. The most valiant will fly at the mere utterance of that word. The broad-minded will put their backs up against it. The most rash will not dare affront it…the word is ‘poetry’” (p.77).

In a utilitarian attempt by both teachers and pupils of poetry to be expedient in the study of texts, holistic significance of a poem is often overlooked due to its complex nature. Holistic awareness has in many cases been replaced by technical deconstruction as outlined in the *Resource Materials for Teaching Language* handbook:

> Traditional approaches to comprehension assumed that by focusing on the understanding of each individual word and sentence the whole meaning of the text would be revealed. However, what tended to happen was that while students made sense of the small parts they did not realise how these achieved overall meaning within the total text. Students failed to understand or respond in a significant way to the meaning of a text although they could explain and understand each word and sentence. At worst they failed to interpret and integrate the text and simply made serviceable local meaning to survive teacher questions, the lesson assignment or the examination. (NCCA, 1999c, p.9)

This trend is further asserted by Meehan (1999) who, in an excerpt entitled ‘Slitting the Songbird’s Throat to See What Makes It Sing’, noted that “we are in danger of elevating
meaning to a fetishistic level at the expense of the real experience of poetry” (p.176). The worrying implications for the poetry class of a technicist approach to the genre are duly outlined in the following poem which notes the frustrations of a dualist approach to poetry on the part of the pupil;

**Introduction to Poetry**

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a colour slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

- Billy Collins (2003)

As noted by O’ Neill (1998), “man does not live by cognition alone; his experience of the world is multifaceted” (p.14), therefore poetry should not be experienced at a cognitive level alone, but also for its effect on our nature as aesthetic beings that feel, sense and have the power to be moved by the creative and artistic. Technical prowess should merge to form a symbiotic relationship with the aesthetics and subjective response in order to fulfil its potential in the creation of poetry. The Leaving Certificate Draft Guidelines for Teachers of English handbook advocate that “while content and context are stressed the teaching must emphasise ultimately the process of interpreting and meaning making” (NCCA, 1999b, p.10). Recognition of both the aesthetic and the cognitive is important in the reading and writing of poetry:
Unless technique can take us to that clear mirror that is called style – the reflection of personality in language, everything having been removed from it that is not itself – the most perfect technique is as worthless as mere egotism. To reach that point we have to feel deeply and to think clearly in order to discover the right words. Once work reaches that clearness, the writer’s task is ended. His or her words will not live again until and unless they find their true reader. (McGahern, 1999, p.155)

In the teaching of poetry, acknowledgement that poems are created often for aesthetic appreciation alone is important as “a poem is more than the sum of its parts; a poem’s overall aesthetic unity, and critical evaluation of that unity, should transcend a mere inventory of its component parts, both formal and thematic” (Hanratty, 2008, p.152). This perspective is aptly reflected in the opening stanza of the following poem;

Admonition
If you dissect a bird
To diagram the tongue
You’ll cut the chord
Articulating song.

- Sylvia Plath (1953)

Plath’s message here speaks to poetry pedagogy and evokes the sentiments of Robert Frost’s (cited in Honig, 1985) famous adage, “Poetry is what gets lost in translation” (p.154). When reading poetry it is important to pay attention to the place of emotional awareness during analysis. Poetry is unique as an artistic endeavour in its invitation for both critical analysis and emotional empathy (Stevens, 2007). This understanding must translate from theory to the classroom in order to achieve deep engagement, encourage critical analysis and facilitate emotional development. As noted by Hanratty (2008), “successful poetry lessons will draw attention not primarily to a poem’s separate or discrete parts, but to its aesthetic effectiveness as a completed composition” (p.152). However, despite this Eisner’s (2002) assertions that the ‘cognitive culture’ dominates the contemporary classroom remains in effect with a growing ideology amongst pupils that poetry can be ‘solved’ and that knowledge is dualistic. This tension is duly noted by Dymoke (2003) who outlines that;

The notion of poetry as a puzzle is, sadly in my experience, a common perception amongst students (and their teachers), who engage in a hunt for the missing clue which will help them solve the poem. Too often the students believe that the teacher is keeping the clue from them which causes discussions about poetry to turn into a closed guessing game when it should be a shared exploration of the words on the page. (p.3)
Educational Provision Lessons from the Arts and Poetry

Poetry has an integral role to play in the development of the pupil (Moore, 2005). The reader’s ability to connect with the poem affords the pupil opportunity to reflect, engage and inquire. However, the benefits of poetry in education are not confined solely to their potential for pupil development. The arts, and indeed poetry, as an arts based subject, have much to offer teachers in guiding and encouraging reflexivity around pedagogy. Eisner (2004) argues that poetry possesses the capacity to influence and direct not only what we teach but also how we teach. He proposed that valuable lessons about educational practices can be learned from studying the arts. Accordingly, he compiled five areas of significance for reflection;

Working Autonomously

“The arts teach students to act and judge in the absence of rule, to rely on feeling, to pay attention to nuance, to act and appraise the consequences of one’s own choice, and to revise and then to make other choices” (Eisner, 2004, p.5). Poetry can encourage the pupil to be autonomous in their own learning, to avoid over reliance and to become independent critical and reflective thinkers. It can encourage an astute awareness of the aesthetic form and potentially empowers the student to engage at both an aesthetic and critical level.

The rejection of standardisation

The arts teach us to reject standardised and traditional modes of task setting and accomplishment. Traditionally according to Eisner (2004), when approaching a task or decision, the objective or desired end is established and from there the means to achieve this is set. In this scenario ends are perceived to precede means. Value is placed on the product rather than the process. However he argues that the arts, and therein poetry, teach otherwise as they capitalise on the emergent features appearing within a field of relationships. In addition, he argues they are not rigidly attached to predefined aims when the possibility of better ones emerge. The teaching of poetry should therefore also reflect this ethos, placing value on the imaginative rather than the prescriptive and permitting inquiry rather than conformity and standardisation.

The Importance of Pedagogy

Form and content are usually inseparable. According to Eisner (2004) the ‘how’ is interwoven with the ‘what’. He asserts that if change occurs in the candescence in a line of
poetry and it changes the poem’s meaning. The creation of expressive and effectual relationships, according to Eisner is what is celebrated in artistically guided work. Therefore, how poetry is taught is equally as important as the poems and poets taught. This sentiment echoes the assertions of Vallance (1991p. 163), who suggests that in educational contexts, works of art and curriculum are both ‘artifactual’. They are both ‘constructed’ by individuals. It follows then that in recognising the ‘artifactual’ nature of both poetry and curriculum, the teacher is facilitated in the use of representational teaching methods which recognise, reflect and celebrate the value of poetry. By maintaining a representational focus on pedagogy in the poetry class, pupils are encouraged to be critical and reflective thinkers. Elster (2000) identifies the importance of poetry in developing critical thinking skills. Teachers too are encouraged to become more critically aware and reflective educators through the recognition of content and form alignment in poetry teaching.

Perceptions of knowledge

“What not everything knowledgeable can be articulated in propositional form” (Eisner, 2004, p.7) Meaning is not limited to that which can be explained. The student may understand more than they can explain, describe or quantify. In fact the most primitive of emotions; grief, love, anger, loss and elation run most freely when expressed without the necessity for structure and explanation as illustrated in Coulehan & Clary (2005) and Kaufman (2008).

Recognising Opportunity

The relationship between thinking and the material with which teachers and their students work is significant. In order for a work to be created, recognition must be given to the constraints and affordances of the medium (Eisner, 2004). For the poetry teacher this lesson holds value. The opportunity for creative and student centred teaching and learning within the curriculum and poetry is clear. Recognition of such opportunity holds merit.
The Place and Status of Poetry in Education: International Perspectives

The Case of the NCEA - New Zealand

Until the introduction of the NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) in New Zealand in 2002, students sitting School Certificate examinations were internally assessed. The teacher held dominion over the selection and suitability of material taught and also over the examination prescribed, with the exception of students who sat bursary or scholarship examinations, who were externally assessed. Therefore English, and consequently poetry was an optional subject in post primary schools. As a direct result there existed a strong tendency amongst teachers to entirely negate the teaching of poetry in school (O'Neill, 2006).

The NCEA is a standards based assessment designed to provide three levels of a national qualification to students. Prior to its introduction in 2002, as a qualifications framework, it had virtually no trialling and had no parallel elsewhere in the world. (Locke, 2007, p.26). The NCEA has enhanced standardisation through the requirement for approximately 50% of the student’s grade to be externally mandated and assessed. While in New Zealand students can choose to complete alternative equivalent examinations such as the Cambridge International Exam and the International Baccalaureate (IB), the majority of students currently choose to sit the NCEA (O'Neil, 2006). As of yet, English is not compulsory at any level of the NCEA, except in relation to the literacy requirements needed for a National Certificate of Educational Achievement and for students considering pursuing third level study.

O’ Neil (2006) examined the perspectives of English teachers teaching at NCEA level 1. In this study the teaching of poetry was found to be limited to only one week per term, or ‘the occasional period when opportune’ by almost half of the poetry teacher cohort. These teachers cited that lack of time, the particular class and other curricular choices dictate the amount of poetry taught in the class.

One teacher added that it is customary to omit the poetry unit if events such as sports’ day, class camps, exchange visits from schools, anniversary days, ski trips, problems with adverse weather conditions and flu epidemic interrupt the normal routine. (O'Neill, 2006, p.74)
Pedagogy within the English classroom also poses cause for concern. Locke (2007) argues that “in many instances, teaching has become replaced by drilling” (p.31). He contends that a pervasive ‘outcomes fetish’ has encouraged behavioural modes of learning. This according to Locke has lead to a “real sense of commodification, as students play the system as credit accumulators rather than learners” (ibid).

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, O’Neill (2006) found that almost one third of poetry teachers in New Zealand rated their students’ attitude towards poetry as between hostile and uninterested, 63% between uninterested and reasonably interested and 6% between interested and enthusiastic (O’Neill, 2006). Among the reasons cited by the teachers for negative attitudes was the introduction of the NCEA level 1, leading to a more examination-oriented climate and the increasing number of immigrant pupils for whom English is a second language. Teachers also cited other barriers such as level of work load, not enough scope in the exam to illustrate learning, pupils’ intolerance of critical inquiry, the ambiguity regarding poetic analysis, pupils’ failure to identify the necessity of poetry, intimidation by structure and school ethos. The result of which is argued to be “a profession increasingly technicised and ‘managed’ (Locke, 2007, p.31).

Reflections by teachers on their reasons for teaching poetry included a strong focus on a sense of duty, with many asserting a desire to get it completed in expedient a manner as possible (O’Neill, 2006). Of those teachers who prepared pupils for both poetry and the short story 100% reported that their pupils wrote a short story rather than responding to a poem in the exam.

Ironically, quite a large number of teachers reported a love of poetry with only eight out of fifty-eight teachers indicating a lack of interest in poetry. However, according to the teachers in question, the external factors noted above play a significant role in their anxiety towards the teaching of poetry and added that other texts in the curriculum, such as the novel, short story, non-fiction, drama, film and television viewing/writing, electronic texts, newspapers, short and extended hyper-fiction, radio, and advertisements have more appeal for today’s students. It appears somewhat predictable then that in this context poetry is frequently “consigned to the ‘too hard’ basket in favour of easier, credit-earning options” (Locke, 2007, p.32).
In November 2007, a revised curriculum was launched for use in New Zealand schools. Under this framework, the NCEA now measures each student’s learning against set standards, in place of the previous practice of comparing students and thereby ranking them. The revised national curriculum serves to determine the standard of achievement to be to be reached by pupils at the end of each year. As such, pupils studying under the revised curriculum are no longer awarded a single grade for a subject. Instead, each subject is now divided into sections of skills and knowledge, referred to as standards. These standards explicitly state what a student needs to be able to demonstrate to achieve each particular standard. Each standard has a certain number of credits. When a student receives what is denoted as an ‘achieved’ for a standard, they will have earned credits towards their NCEA qualification. Therein the NCEA now allows students to work towards other qualifications on the New Zealand qualifications framework at the same time as they are working toward their NCEA. In adopting this approach, the Ministry for Education in New Zealand asserted itself to be rejecting practices evidenced in other contexts which “lead to narrowing the curriculum, and mediocre outcomes” (New Zealand Ministry for Education, 2011). The requirement for schools to implement the New Zealand Curriculum came into effect on 1 February 2010. Research into the impact of this revised approach on the teaching and learning of poetry in New Zealand is yet unavailable, however caution is expressed by Locke (2000) concerning previous curriculum revisions in this context where terminology ‘outdated’ or ‘pedantic’ has served to result in a “generation’s worth of confusion in both teacher and student” rather than the clarification of curriculum aims (p.64). Moreover, commenting on the recurring theme of ‘standards-based reforms’ emergent at the four yearly 2011 International Federation for the Teaching of English conference, Hodgson (2011) highlighted the negative impact of this movement that, in the name of ‘standards’, paradoxically reduces teachers’ pedagogical agency and effectiveness” (p. 262).

**The Case of the GCSE- England and Northern Ireland**

Secondary education in England and Northern Ireland covers two key stages: key stage 3 (pupils aged 11- 14) divided into years 7, 8 and 9; and key stage 4 (pupils aged 14 – 16) divided into years 10 and 11. Post-compulsory study (A level years) is made available in a range of different educational establishments in this context including sixth form in most secondary schools and also in Further Education colleges, catering for pupils aged 16 – 18 years of age.
The National Curriculum for England at key stages 3 and 4 was first published by QCA in 2007, and implementation in schools started in September 2008. The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is the academic qualification awarded in a specified subject, generally taken in a number of subjects by students aged 14-16 years in secondary education in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Education to GCSE level is usually required of students who study for A-levels.

The full GCSE course assesses four skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing and is available at two tiers of assessment; foundation and higher level. Assessment weighting for each skill is twenty five per cent. Most awarding bodies offer one hundred per cent external assessment if required. Here, English and English Literature are taught as a single course of study but are assessed as separate subjects at GCSE level. Within this programme, the English programme of study aims to develop students’ ability to communicate accurately and effectively in speaking and writing, and to read and respond to written English. The English Literature course aims to develop students’ understanding of a wide range of literary texts. Students are encouraged to study prose, poetry and drama. The combined syllabuses aim to provide students with an appreciation of the English Literary Heritage. At the end of the two year course, students receive a grade for each subject studied to examination. Grades awarded, from highest to lowest, are: A*, A, B, C, D, E, F and G. A requirement of five or more A* to C grades, including English and Math, is often present for students wishing to study A-levels upon completion of the GCSE.

In this context, Hanratty (2008, p.147) postulates that poetry can have a “radical, and even subversive role” on what he describes as, “an increasingly examination-driven educational culture”. He also discovered that within this context the “pernicious influence of an examination-driven curriculum could be particularly malign where the teaching of poetry is concerned” (p.155). Similarly research conducted by Benton (2000) found that 58% of teachers surveyed saw the effects of National Curriculum Assessments as negative on the teaching of poetry. In addition he noted that within this context “when poetry is introduced it is often primarily with the examination in mind” (p.86).

Dymoke (2002) focuses attention on the widespread use of the Northern Examinations and Assessment Board ([NEAB], now part of the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance [AQA]) anthology in the preparation for the GSCE poetry examination. Within the NEAB syllabus
students are required to respond to questions from sections of a poetry anthology (15% of their overall grade). This anthology is chosen from a prescribed list and can be provided free of cost by the NEAB. According to Benton (2000) sixty six per cent of all candidates for GSCE English nationally opt to choose the NEAB anthology and syllabus. Hanratty (2008) found that teachers felt ‘tied’ to the anthology and unable to explore beyond the parameters of those poems assigned within. Benton (2000) theorised that this may lead to passivity and even a handover of the power of text selection to the NEAB, asserting that if teachers “feel themselves to be hard pressed for time (as they certainly do) then there may be a tendency to take the poems offered by the board and the supporting material as a package without finding opportunities to develop their own knowledge” (Benton, 2000, p.85). Consequently, Dymoke (2002) proposes that as a result of the pervasive use of the anthology “students could well become more technically competent and able to write under examination conditions, but less able to make their own choice of texts and to develop confident individual responses to them” (p.92).

Benton (2000), Dymoke (2002) Hanratty (2008) and Perryman, Ball, Maguire & Braun (2011b) all attest to the significant pressure exerted on teachers of poetry by the terminal examination. Benton (2000, p.84) found that over 50% of teachers surveyed agreed that they found the English curriculum to be too crowded for them to be able to teach as much poetry as they would like. In addition, 55% felt that the prescriptive nature of the syllabus prevented them from teaching some poems they would like to teach. Benton surmised that that while teachers were more confident in their handling of poetry than before the introduction of the National Curriculum, they illustrate a growing concern over the impact of the National Curriculum Assessments on their teaching (Benton, 2000, p.92).

Furthermore Dymoke (2002) observes that within this context “there are no compulsory requirements to respond to poetry in written or oral course work, to read poems other than those being studied for the final examinations or to write poetry” (p.85). Therefore, she contends that a significant lack of focus exists on the development of oracy through poetry within the National Curriculum, as a result written response tends to preside over the development of oracy within the context of these syllabi. The findings of the 2007 OFSTED report ‘Poetry in Schools and Pupils’ Responses to Poetry They Hear’ acknowledge this trend and assert that “assessment frameworks give considerable status to the written mode, and there exist highly developed discourses for describing elements relevant to print.
Corresponding frameworks and discourse do not exist, however, for considering and understanding the semiotic resource of sound” (Gordon, 2008, p.224). As a result, teachers are not required to cater for the development of oracy. Gordon (2008) admonishes what he terms as this ‘deadening effect’ on the teaching of poetry arguing that poetry is being systematically treated as a ‘monomodal medium’ in post-primary schooling. Dymoke (2002) concludes that “poetry has become solely, and one could argue, deadeningly linked, with written response on terminal examination papers” (p.85).

In conjunction with the lack of oral development witnessed under this framework, Dymoke (2001) also highlights the negative categorisation of poetry writing in the 1998 NEAB chief examiner’s report. In the 1998 NEAB examination, in response to a question in which pupils were required to craft a response ‘in such a way it can be easily imagined by your reader’, a number of pupils responded with the use of poetic verse. An excerpt from the subsequent chief examiner’s report stated that those who had opted to craft a poem in response to the question “limited their own personal achievement” (NEAB, 1998, p.25). This response sent a strong and unambiguous message to teachers and students alike studying under the NEAB framework concerning the perceived place of ‘creativity’ and the limitations of poetry in the GCSE.

Perryman et al. (2011b) draw attention also to the increasing audit culture generated in recent years. They contend that an overwhelming preoccupation with policies of achievement has resulted in schools adopting a results-driven approach. They point specifically to the additional pressures placed upon teachers of English due to the inclusion of the subject (from 2007) as one of the five GCSEs to be reported for league table publication. They argue that as “the reputation and status of the whole school” depend on such performance indicators, it is unsurprising that intense pressure to ‘deliver’ is felt by teachers of English (p.180). The result of which holds a ‘stressful and untoward affective consequence’ for many English teachers including feelings of frustration, creative sterility and deprofessionalisation (p.193)
The English Syllabus in Ireland - An Historical Delineation

English teacher guidelines reflect and are shaped by dominant societal ideologies concerning the purpose of education (Apple, 1981; Fiala, 2007). A syllabus which advocates recitation and stringent technical prowess potentially limits the creative role of the poetry teacher within the class, whereas a syllabus which advocates pupil engagement and dialogue can serve to encourage creativity and inquiry both on the part of the poetry teacher and the student of poetry.

Liberal Humanism, with its focus on the classics has historically influenced Irish syllabi with its roots in the Irish history of colonisation. In 1885 British imperialism was the governing cultural context, a factor which was clearly represented in the English syllabus and examination at the time. During this time, the study of English was assumed to civilise readers while advancing the intellect and promoting cultural refinement (Eaglestone, 2000). The study of English in Ireland was equated with the study of the classics, suggesting an equivalence of value for the Irish pupil in terms of cultural initiation and intellectual development (Mullins, 2002, p.107). The English language was promoted to offer freedom from superstitious immorality, to hold place as the language of modernity and intellectual rigour, and to be the language of poetry (Crowley, 2000) The role of the English teacher during this period was therefore that of a classical studies educationalist. A traditionalist approach to the teaching of literature was advocated and duly employed by teachers who utilised this subject as a means “of qualitatively refining the sensibility of the nation so that it could resist the crass and tasteless commercialism that was now widespread” (Mullins, 2002, p.41). Students were required to paraphrase lengthy passages from the canons of English such as Goldsmith, Milton and Gray and also to provide commentary on words and passages in a manner which perpetuated the ideology of pupils as ‘empty vessels’ and the teacher as the provider of information which was to be unquestionably ‘assimilated’ (Novak, 1998, p.62). In their study, students were expected to memorise whole essays and poems by different authors and poets and to write out full chapters from novels in response to examination questions (Intermediate Education Board, 1883). The impact of this approach on pupils’ approaches to literature at the time is duly noted in the 1885 Report of the Intermediate Education Board which states;
Many who could repeat with great precision the quotations asked for had plainly a very imperfect perception of the meaning of the more difficult passages.

(Intermediate Education Board, 1885)

As noted by Thompson (1969) “A prescribed syllabus from outside, mechanically applied, makes life easy for the bad teacher, impossible for the good one” (p.47). This approach discouraged creativity on the part of teacher and pupils alike and encouraged conformity aligned with the goals of the state, thus exposing the strong influence of political bodies on the education system at the time (Mullins, 2002). Support for teachers was also limited in terms of professional development opportunities and as a result teachers often focused singularly on the exam as a means of guidance within the classroom. In placing an over reliance on the examination, it can be argued that teachers were inadvertently relinquishing their pedagogical autonomy to outside politics therefore further limiting autonomy over their own professional practice;

English teachers were encultured to look to the examinations for a guide to their teaching rather than to a syllabus and their own professional training and expertise. This decidedly coloured teachers’ perceptions of their role and power. It nurtured a dependency on examination procedures which inhibited them taking on more authority and responsibility in relation to their own professional practice. (Mullins, 2002, p.117)

This deprofessionalisation has had a lasting impact on the English teacher. In conceding pedagogical control to outside forces and opening up the classroom to political influence, a historical legacy was established within the Irish classroom. The influence of this upon both teachers and students alike was acknowledged by the Commissioners of Intermediate Education who noted the many defects prevalent in the system (Commissioners of Intermediate Education, 1898-9). Following the formation of the Irish state in 1921 a new syllabus was implemented. The development of the education system under the new state was driven by the ideology of Padraig Pearse, who was outspoken in his criticism of the former system. Having worked as a school teacher, his commentary reflected an intimate knowledge of what he perceived to be the failings of the system. Pearse (1916) commented;

One of the most terrible things about the English education system in Ireland is its ruthlessness...It is cold and mechanical, like the ruthlessness of an immensely powerful machine...It grinds day and night: it obeys immutable and predetermined laws: it is devoid of understanding, of sympathy, of imagination, as in any piece of machinery that performs an appointed task. (p.11)
Pearse urged the development of teacher driven, democratic schooling which would challenge the hegemonic educational practices of the time. Calling on curriculum developers to imbue a new ideology in the classroom, he commented:

I would urge that the Irish school system of the future should give freedom- freedom to the individual school, freedom to the individual teacher, freedom as far as may be to the individual pupil. Without freedom there can be no right growth; and education is properly the fostering of the right growth of personality. (p.13)

However, the political climate afforded little room for the growth of such ideology and the development of what can be viewed as a ‘new version’ (Mullins, 2002, p.119) of the former model was established.

The aims of the new Senior Cycle course were to give the pupil;

- An acquaintance with a considerable amount of good literature and such training in the elements of the theory of literature as will lead to the cultivation of a sound literary taste.
- Power to write a critical analysis of, and commentary on, works in prose and verse.
- Power to do original composition work.

(The Department of Education, 1926, p.23)

The introduction of this syllabus afforded teachers somewhat increased autonomy over their class in relation to the selection of texts used. Teachers were advised to introduce their pupils to “a considerable amount of good literature” (ibid). This statement was a definitive transition from the prior prescriptive model which had largely only permitted texts relating to the classical traditions of Greece and Rome. The role of the teacher now extended to the selection of texts from a broad range of what was seen to be ‘good literature of sound taste’. This ‘sound taste’ however did not extend to permit any material beyond the classics, as it was inevitably “determined by the dominant cultural and intellectual beliefs of an elite and was dismissive of anything that smacked of popularity and common appreciation” (Mullins, 2002, p.125). Included in the category of undesirable educational advancement was the concept of pupil centred learning. Those condemning such advancement proposed the child as ‘corrupt’ and as requiring ‘strict authoritarian teaching’ (Titledy, 1983, p.138).

Between 1932 and 1941 a gradual alteration in focus for the English syllabus was orchestrated under the guidance of the then President, Eamon DeValera. This was evident in the aims of the 1941 syllabus. One such aim noted an obligation for the teacher to “enable the
pupil to express himself correctly and effectively in the language, both in speech and writing, and to derive pleasure and profit from his reading” (The Department of Education and Science, 1941, p.28). The focus of this syllabus shifted from the primacy of philology to the development of language skills, with emphasis placed on grammar, syntax and spelling. This shift in pedagogical focus resulted in further shaping the role of the English teacher. No longer a transmitter of the classics, the English teacher was now expected to place emphasis on lexis and grammar in the study of literature and poetry. This syllabus once again had the impact of limiting the creativity and autonomy of the poetry teacher within the class. In terms of poetry teaching, critical engagement with poems and poets was negated as the stringent focus on grammar and syntax held autonomy. The extract below from the 1941 Rules and Programmes for Schools document demonstrates the dominant linguistic focus;

The course should comprise instruction in grammar, simple composition, use and meaning in words and idioms, re-handling of passages, (expansion, summarising, paraphrasing etc.) pronunciation. Spelling should receive attention.

(The Department of Education, 1941, p.28)

As a result of this focus on grammatical prowess, a report issued by the Department of Education on the teaching of English in the post primary school three years later noted that “pupils read little at present apart from books named on the course” (The Department of Education, 1942-3, p.22). However, despite the publication of such findings, focus on the development of lexical and grammatical prowess among students presided in the study of English and poetry at post-primary level for the next thirty years (Mullins, 2002).

Following the establishment of The Association of Teachers of English (ATE) in 1964 a revised syllabus was introduced at Leaving Certificate level. Both this course and the Intermediate Certificate course “were presented not really as teaching syllabi but rather as examination syllabi” (Mullins, 2002, p.138) as no actual syllabus documents were written for the new course. The stated aims of this new exam syllabus were:

To help equip the pupils for life after school, whether at work or higher education by:
- Cultivating their powers of communication through language.
- Developing their judgement in relation to language, literature and life.
- Enriching their experience of life through literature.

(The Department of Education, 1970, p.121)

A significant change in the focus of the English course emerged. A move towards aesthetic and cultural awareness represented the ostensible development of the subject as a
contemporary and modern course of study. Yet, while a progressive focus on the holistic development of pupils emerged from this syllabus, difficulties remained in terms of interpretation of the document as “the syllabus steered a careful course attempting to keep a balance between freedom and control, between exploration and initiation” (Mullins, 2002, p.140). Guided by overtly generic aims, teachers were often forced to turn to the examination as a means of prescription for the subject. This ambiguity had the result of limiting teachers’ pedagogical capacity within the poetry class. However, even the limited liberation that was afforded was warmly welcomed by teachers across the country as a small but noteworthy positive ideological shift from the straightjacket confines of former models. While minor changes in prescribed texts were witnessed in the study of English at Leaving Certificate Level over the ensuing years, this syllabus remained relatively unchanged and without review for the next thirty-five years, until the introduction of the current syllabus in 1999 (Mullins, 2002, p.144).

The Current English Syllabus

The current English syllabus was introduced at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland in 1999. The syllabus aims at initiating students into enriching experiences with language so that they become more adept and thoughtful users of it and more critically aware of its power and significance in their lives (NCCA, 1999a, p.2). The syllabus further advocates that English, at Leaving Certificate level, must “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” (ibid). It advocates that the teaching of poetry must not only meet the vocational and further education needs of its students, but also provide the life-long skills, both written and oral, necessary for integration into society. However, since the implementation of the current English syllabus there has been a significant paucity of research conducted on this learning experience from the perspective of either the pupil or the poetry teacher.

The Leaving Certificate Syllabus serves to build on the aims of the Junior Certificate English syllabus, which emphasise the development of a range of literacy and oral skills in a variety of domains- personal, social and cultural (NCCA, 1999a, p.2). These key objectives are further refined and developed within the Leaving Certificate syllabus. Here, students are encouraged to develop a more sophisticated range of skills and concepts (ibid). The key
objectives pertaining to the aesthetic use of language at Leaving Certificate Level in the area of comprehension highlight the necessity for active pupil engagement through reading and writing in a wide variety of aesthetic genres; engagement in the interpretative performance of texts; the development of skills of reflection; re-reading and evaluation. In the development of pupils’ skills of composition, the syllabus encourages frequent writing within the aesthetic forms encountered (for example, poetry); the composition of ‘interventions’ (i.e. alternative scenarios based on texts studied) in order to enhance understanding; the use of response journals- expressive of students’ growing acquaintance with a text over a period of time and the composition of analytical and coherent essays relative to a text (NCCA, 1999a, p.14).

In addition the Draft Guidelines for Teachers of English handbook (NCCA, 1999b), developed for teachers of the current syllabus, highlights 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;

Poetry works in a sensuous manner. It seeks not just to communicate ideas or to give a message. It creates a series of powerful images/ pictures/ scenes in our imagination which interact in various ways and create sensations, feelings and experiences. Learning to read poetry means learning to interpret those scenes and experiences not at a literal level but at a level of ulterior meaning. (NCCA, 1999b, p.63)

The Draft Guidelines for Teachers of English handbook advises that “to be successful, literacy development must be contextualised within meaningful experiences of language” (NCCA, 1999b, p.6) The philosophy of personal engagement with the aesthetic genre is further exemplified in the Resource Materials for Teaching Language handbook which was written to supplement and develop the ideas and methodological approaches outlined in the Draft Guidelines for Teachers of English. In this document teachers are urged to be innovative in their approach to the teaching of poetry in the acknowledgement that “each author will play creatively with the genre; it is through being able to appreciate the characteristic approach of an author in contrast with other authors that we can come to understand and achieve insight into individual artistry” (NCCA, 1999c, p.26). It is avowed that the teaching of poetry through novel and challenging activities such as those outlined in this text will serve to “enrich their (students) sense of the resourcefulness of poets and the potential of the imagination to distil poetry out of almost anything” (ibid).
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. Unsurprisingly then, current research indicates a strong transmission approach to be characteristic of practice in Irish post-primary schools (Gleeson & O Donnabháin, 2009; Government of Ireland, 1999; O’ Donoghue & 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 (Government of Ireland, 1999, 2007). Such evidence suggests divergent values from the constructivist and altruistic aims of the poetry syllabus.

**Models of English Teaching**

According to Moneith (2005, p.47), the question of what is English, is inexorably linked to who teaches it. The same can be asserted of poetry. Models of English teaching demonstrate social trends on what constitutes ‘English teaching’ at any given time. They also feed into the contemporaneous reflective and philosophical approach to planning and teaching (Clarke, Dickinson, & Westbrook, 2004, p.57). The following delineation of Dixon’s (1967) widely recognised ‘Models of English Teaching’ serves to illustrate the evolving pedagogical focus of the teaching of English and poetry, and in doing so highlight the impact of these models of teaching on the current philosophy and ideology underpinning the teaching of poetry in Ireland.

**Origins of the Models**

In response to opinion generated, at the 1966 *Dartmouth Conference of English Teaching*, where educators of English from North America convened to meet with educators of English from England, Dixon (1967) outlined a succinct overview of the predominant models of English teaching in use at the time. The first was the Cultural Heritage Model. This model encapsulated a focus on literature and the written word. The second was the Skills Model, which encapsulated a focus on language and the spoken word. In identifying and naming the aforementioned models, Dixon illustrated how an acceptance of both the child-centred approach advocated in England and the more formal skills based approach advocated in the USA could be seen as mutually beneficial approaches for the teaching of English and poetry within the classroom, thus leading to the conceptualisation of the third model, namely the
Personal Growth model. This model signalled a new focus for the teaching of English which according to Dixon (1967) could be incorporated into a variety of contexts. While criticised for its promotion of ‘child-centeredness’ at the expense of teacher autonomy and its promotion of a ‘value free’ conception of language, it has been internationally influential and widely acknowledged among English educationalists (Hollindale, 1986).

The Cultural Heritage Model
The Cultural Heritage Model is characterised by the belief that for a society in crisis, canonical literature held the solution. The study of English was viewed by many as a replacement for the study of the classics such as Latin and Greek for those who were not able for the demands of these subjects (Eaglestone, 2000). Whitla (2010) delineated the predominant pedagogical approaches in English teaching at the time:

Teaching literature until the end of the nineteenth century consisted chiefly of one of three methods: an application of modes similar to those used in studying the Greek and Latin classics through minute philological and grammatical analysis line by line; a declamation of passage from Shakespeare, Milton or some other author with little commentary; or impressionistic thoughts expressed in the presence of a text. Little attempt was made to offer detailed comment on content, or argument, or to relate any work to its author or historical context. (p.7)

The popularity of this model grew in strength due to its acceptance and promotion by teachers such as William Lyon Phelps, Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin. The ‘civilising’ philosophy of this model of teaching is illustrated in an extract from Phelps’ (1939) Autobiography with Letters:

I shall never forget the afternoon in my father’s house when I read Maud for the first time. I entered the room one kind of man and left it another kind of man….I shall always be grateful to this poem, for it was the means of my conversation; I escaped from the gall of bitterness and the bond of Philistine iniquity, into the kingdom of light. And after all, it is a great poem. (p.145)

The language used by Phelps in the description of his first encounter with Tennyson’s Maud reflects the culture and promotion of ‘high literature’ as an engagement with the ‘greatness’ of English heritage. This mirrors the proclamations of Matthew Arnold (1869) in his essay Culture and Anarchy. In this essay Arnold, like Phelps, attempts to promote the cultural greatness of ‘high class’ literature and poetry. He discusses ‘civilising’ young people through literature, developing their taste and elevating the waning culture and civility of the
contemporaneous society. Arnold proclaimed that by introducing young people to such literature their souls would be filled with “sweetness and light” (ibid). Similarly commenting in his role as school inspector in 1880, Arnold argues that poetry is close to divine in its affective power for and cultural elevation of the educated masses;

Good poetry does undoubtedly tend to form the soul and character; it tends to beget a love of beauty and truth in alliance together, it suggests, however indirectly, high and noble principles of action, and it inspires the emotion so helpful in making principles operative. (Arnold, 1880, p.200-201)

Arnold asserted that English literature of this quality would act as “a means of contact with great minds, a channel by which to draw on their experience with profit and delight, and a bond of sympathy between the members of a human society” (Arnold, 1921, p.15). The Cultural Heritage Model focused on rote learning and the verbal recital of prescribed poems (De Castell & Luke, 1988, p.163). Poetry was taught with a view to enabling pupils to interpret language and further their skills of syntax, promote clear speech and diction and to train the memory through recitation. As outlined in the 1840 English Annual Report, poems prescribed were “calculated to improve the minds and characters of young persons, to promote the cultivation of a humble, contented and domestic spirit and lead to the more intelligent perusal of the sacred Scriptures” (Altick, 1998, p.154).

Prescribed poems were largely based on “white, male Anglo-Saxon, middle-class values and outlook which was very much concerned with preserving its special status and position of power” (Mullins, 2002, p.25). This resulted in the prescribed poems remaining inaccessible to a wide audience. Similarly the focus on complex issues and hypothesis arising in poems such as those by Chaucer and Wyatt when taught to young children served to create a sense of impenetrability, ambiguity and resentment around the topic. The elitist and obscure poetic content often failed to communicate with pupils. This ostracising rigidity of focus was a calculated attempt to preserve the virtues extolled by advocates such as Arnold and ensure a focus on the classics and social virtue was maintained and untainted thus placing strict emphasis on cultural growth over personal growth.

Such a prescribed and focused model is not without critique. Critics of the Cultural Heritage Model and of Arnoldianism have been vocal in their critique of this model of teaching, arguing the failure of this model to address the needs of pupils and engage with them at an
accessible cognitive level, thus ostracising them from the very subject which they are being encouraged to appreciate. Dixon (1967) noted that within the Cultural Heritage Model “there was a constant temptation to ignore culture as the pupils knows it” (p.3). Consequently this model failed to legitimise or draw upon the student’s own experience (Klein, 1970, p.237). Abbs (1976) launched a scathing attack on such ‘values’ and traditions as outlined by Arnold (1852) in his official report on elementary schools in which he expressed a desire for homogeneity of culture and heritage:

Politically and socially desirable? To efface a language, a unique and ancient window on the world? To destroy a heritage? To make culture homogeneous? These are perverted wishes for a man of culture, and we can only understand them, I suspect, by recognising the narrowness of his definition of culture; the confining of cultural forms to the urbane, the civilised, the intellectual, the Hellenic, the Perfect. The lucidity of the rational ideal, so nobly incarnated in Greek culture, and which Arnold admired so fervently for its sweetness and light, blinded him to the need for cultural variegation.

(Abbs, 1976, p.17)

More recently, Giroux (2009) has commented that such an elitist view of pedagogy treats culture and knowledge as static and “as either a warehouse of great books or a list of information that need only be transmitted to willing and grateful students” (p.443). The limits of this model and the implications of employing such an approach to teaching, according to its critics, are patent.

The Skills Model
The Skills Model focuses on the development of language skills as well as striving to ensure pupils are competent in their reading and writing abilities. A steady evolution in the Skills Model can be tracked over the past number of decades with its shifting emphasis illustrating the capacity of English pedagogies and literature to cater for the needs of its learners and also the needs of its contemporaneous societies or publics (Mullins, 2002).

At its earliest stages in the nineteenth century the focus shifted away from rote learning and recitation to grammar and lexis development. The role of literature was seen as a means of preparing pupils to enter into the adult workforce equipped with the day-to-day literacy skills necessary for this role. Cox (1991) defined this version of the model as the ‘adult needs’ pedagogical approach. Advocators of this model stated the apparent necessity for such a model of teaching and advocated its usage within the classroom noting that “too many
children and adults have not achieved the language competencies required to cope successfully with life needs” (Petty, Petty, Newman, & Skeen, 1977, p.73).

However, under this primary form of the model, language was studied in a manner which mirrored that of classical studies. “English was to be learned like Latin or Greek with the emphasis on grammar, etymology and philology” (Mullins, 2002, p.26) and many of the prescribed and widely used canonical texts within the Cultural Heritage tradition were still being employed to teach linguistic skills. Meaning was seen as “relatively unproblematic so long as a writer has mastery of a range of skills at sentence and text level” (Locke, 2007, p.14). Emphasis was placed primarily on elements such as correctness and accuracy through plot analysis, spelling and paragraph structure. This pedagogical approach resulted in English studies remaining utterly disconnected from the lives of the pupils.

By the mid-twentieth century the emerging development of a new focus within this model is evident. The focus shifted away from a prescriptive view of language and instead centred on the descriptive power of language (Mullins, 2002). This progressive focus extracted English studies from its residence in the past and placed it within the parameters of a ‘living’ language. As noted by Mullins (2002), English evolved into a subject to be studied contextually and with a multi-genre approach;

One of the key conceptual changes in relation to language use and the understanding of literacy that this version introduced was the replacement of the insistence on correctness and accuracy with the more generous and flexible concept of appropriateness. Literacy was no longer perceived as a monolithic concept identified with the writing of Standard English. Instead it was possible to conceive of a range of literacies related to different contexts of language use. (Mullins, 2002, p.27)

Educational research once again influenced another significant development in this model in the 1990s. Research conducted on the significance of genre in English studies by educationalists such as Frances Chrisite (1990) found that pupils who were proficient only in a singular genre of English and were not as successful within society as those who had command over more than one genre. Essentially the earlier Skills Model was failing in its aim to develop pupils into young adults capable of excelling in a mature ‘adult’ society. Work conducted by Christie exemplified the need for contemporisation of the both the subject and its pedagogy, as the model had remained rooted in the cultural context of its origins (the 1970s), and therefore had failed to progress and evolve accordingly. Evolutions of this model
have thus been constructed in an attempt to cater for this cultural discrepancy. Abbs’ (1987) model of Sociolinguistics and Jeffcoate’s model of Linguistic Pragmatism (1992) for example can be seen to be closely connected with the Dixon’s Skills model. However, as in the case of the Cultural Heritage Model while variances may occur in aspects of the model the principles of the original models remain intact, the limitations of which are outlined by Locke (2007);

At its worst, this model offers a field day for skills acquisition advocates, for framers and fixers of discrete and often decontextualised learning outcomes, which are non-problematically describable and measureable. This is where you will see reading reduced to simple decoding and semantic practices, basic communication skills, and writing as the successful completion of various substitution drills (with words correctly spelt, of course). (p.14)

The Personal Growth Model

The Growth Model while in progression for a number of years prior to 1966 was first defined at the Dartmouth Conference on English Teaching, then clearly delineated in the subsequent conference report (Dixon, 1967). Dixon’s in-depth analysis of this model served to provide a common form through which advocates of the opposing Cultural Heritage and Skills Model could find an integrated, holistic and acceptable means of teaching English in which both former models were acknowledged. As noted by Mullins (2002):

If the emphasis was put on the student’s growth through language as the central purpose of English teaching then what was created was a broad field of endeavour in which all factions within the subject’s sub-culture could be in a vague way accommodated. (p.28)

The Growth Model acknowledges the limitations of its predecessors and in exemplifying the development of pupils’ growth through language gives autonomy to the teacher within a framework which views English teaching as a process orientated activity rather than an activity which focuses solely on the attainment of prescribed objectives. In this model Dixon exemplifies the linguistic power and advantage of “recalling experience, getting it clear, giving it shape and making connections, speculating and building theories, celebrating (or exorcising) particular moments of our lives” (Dixon, 1967, p.7). Essentially, Dixon was promoting the central concept of the teaching of English as personal engagement with language. As a result of this focus, the Growth Model is seen by critics such as Eagleton, to be unsubstantial and lacking focus. However, advocates of the model argue that the holistic
development of the pupil through a more pupil centred rather than objectives oriented model allows English to become more accessible to pupils at both an academic and cultural level. Charlesworth (1969) outlines the potential benefits of this model in relation to the enhancement of linguistics through personal engagement and personal reflections with the texts:

Working from the prime centre of the students’ own experience, one may hope for that refinement of linguistic skill that comes from the effort to make plain to ourselves the recognitions and perceptions of our own personal experience; for the further advance that comes when the student needs to use language in earnest ‘to tell the teacher something that he does not already know’ (the right response); and from the more genuine response to literature that comes from seeing it as an encounter between the writer’s experience and the student’s, rather than the passive ‘appreciation’ of the writer’s experience alone. (p.47)

Adaptations of the Growth Model

Within the Growth Model, as it developed in the mid twentieth century, two distinct adaptations emerged. Both models respected and prioritised the personal experience of the pupil within the English class however variations in pedagogies and ethos between these adaptations are evident.

The first adaptation of the Growth Model derived from the Cultural Heritage tradition. This adaptation evolved as a response to the growing trend of mass schooling within second level education. Advocates of the Cultural Heritage tradition began to acknowledge the failure of their model to cater for this changing culture and in response began to focus on the personal experience of pupils in relation to classical texts as a means of connecting English studies to the lives of the pupils. Within this sub-model, those who advocated the Growth Model also believed that the meaning of a text was governed by historical and cultural factors. Classical texts were examined through a personal response methodology and the imagination of the pupil began to be incorporated into the analysis of such works. In addition pupils’ own creative writing styles were focused on and significance was given to developing genre appropriate responses, an inclusion somewhat reflective of and in acknowledgement of the Skills Model. The residual permeation of the Cultural Heritage Model however into this model is still clear through discourse analysis of its advocates such as Peel et al. (2000) who describe the reading of imaginative texts as the opportunity to ‘escape from self into
enchanted worlds’. This notion of English as a cleansing and almost religious experience echoes the proclamations of Arnold within the Cultural Heritage Model.

The second adaptation of the Growth Model derived from developments in the Skills Model emerging from the writings of James Britton. The primary aim of this model is to successfully integrate the pupil’s experiences in English studies and life. Britton (1974) proposed that following this model, language acts as a medium for learning. Previous advocates of the Skills Model promoted the benefits of a new culturally inclusive model. These advocates acknowledged the previous disparity in the received experience of the pupil between English studies and their own daily lives. This sub-model attempts to reduce the chasm in received experience and develop English into an area of study that provides an accessible and socio-culturally reflective area of study for pupils. In order to achieve this aim the study of English literature under this sub-model is approached in a thematic manner. Themes chosen by the teacher are to reflect the needs, interests and lifestyles of the pupils they teach. This move from canonical texts and towards incorporation of the mass media has been vehemently condemned by right wing Cultural Heritage advocates who believe that such a liberal and contemporary focus in English studies de-values its status and reduces its content to that of a superficial and anti-traditionalist forum.

The Growth Model, as a unit, despite its advances and developments on both the Cultural Heritage and Skills Models, has been criticised as being detrimentally ‘non-interventionist’ and lacking in socio-psychological foundation (Dowse, 1988, p.308). The atmosphere of trust, inclusion, acceptance and interest on which Dixon builds his Growth Model teaching scenario has been revoked as unattainable and Utopian in premise. Klein (1970) asserts that the construct of such psychological conditions in a system where pupils are seen as ‘subordinates’ and inferiors’ is idealistic and impractical. These critics remain in the minority, with the Personal Growth Model being widely accepted as a holistic, inclusive and accessible model for the teaching of English. As observed by Sawyer (2007) “powerfully literate citizens are not made by having their own languages denigrated or neglected” (p.45).

**Developments on the Established Models**

Doecke, Homer & Nixon (2004) draw reference to the notable ‘compulsion’ of later commentators who have attempted to supplement Dixon’s triad of models. Since the
delineation of these three models by Dixon in 1967 a range of taxonomic variations, emergent from ‘the original three’ have been constructed in attempt to influence the direction of English studies and pedagogy. These models attempt to redefine the approach to the teaching of English and consequently poetry, and our inherent conceptualisation of the subject. Researchers such as Cox (1989), Ball (1990), Mullins (2002) and Locke (2007) have all contributed significantly to the study and pedagogy of language and literature within English studies domain, however educational change is largely orchestrated via development including research, promotion and syllabus adaptation together rather than proposal alone. Therefore, the ‘original’ triad model of English teaching as proposed by Dixon (1967) and outlined above remain preeminent.

Models for the Teaching of English: Challenges and Implications

The noted ‘compulsion’ (Doecke et al., 2004) of commentators to critique and therein advance on Dixon’s models has lead to growing onotological and ideological ambiguity amongst English and poetry teachers, who in striving to actualise a sense of role identity, are met with dissent and discord. According to Mulhern (1987) “we are facing a situation in which a maximum of intellectual attack, a maximum of desire to reconstruct the subject, coincide with a near minimum of institutional opportunity” (p.19). As a result younger teachers are increasingly expressing uncertainty about the nature of their job (Protherough & Atkinson, 1993, p.10). Lack of pupil consultation on core content areas, including the teaching and learning of poetry has too compounded this sense of role ambiguity with little information available on pupils’ needs and requirements in the poetry classroom (Corbett & Wilson, 1995). Concurrently, within Irish education an emergent and stringent focus on performativity and bureaucratic accountability has emerged (Gleeson & O Donnabháin, 2009), where teachers are increasingly being evaluated on test scores and pupil performance. Given the uncertainty surrounding the role of the poetry teacher, and the concurrent technicised demands imposed upon them, an emergent reconceptualisation of the role of the poetry teacher is becoming evident within the classroom, which places priority on exam performativity and pupil conformity. Given the implications for pupil learning resulting from adherence to this new model, a pattern of teacher dissonance and subsequent reorientation of practice and/or belief is notable.
Lack of Pupil Voice
Within the development of the aforementioned models, while the perceived needs of pupils are well debated and developed, there appears a lack of reference to and focus on pupil consultation or pupil voice. The significance of this apparent oversight is highlighted by Leren (2006) who notes that “students know which methods and models work for them, what they see as interesting, and what they do not profit from” (p.367). Therefore pupil consultation would appear to hold a significant contribution in any prospective curricular reform. The insights held by pupils provide valuable information for curricular development strategies according to Flutter & Rudduck (2004), who note that;

Pupil commentaries on teaching and learning in school provide a practical agenda for change that can help fine-tune or, more fundamentally, identify and shape improvement strategies. The insights from their world can help us to ‘see’ things that we do not normally pay attention to but that matter to them (p.29).

Wood (2010) also suggests that as pupils are ‘closer to the ground’, they have unique perspectives to offer when constructing knowledge about teaching and learning. Moreover, Fielding (2004, p.296) proposes that the development of ‘radical collegiality’ between teachers and pupils is important in the promotion of democratic practice through the recognition of pupil voice.

Ideological Inconsistency
Owing to the ideological inconsistency between the outlined models of English teaching, McEwan (1992) argues that teachers’ pedagogies often reflect this absence of a clear vision for English as a subject. Consequently, as teachers are often held accountable for exam results but not for the pedagogical approach employed in achieving these (Bennett, 1995, p.48), in the absence of a common vision for English, exam performativity often emerges as the primary objective of study. The concept of performativity is outlined in detail by Ball (2003) who argues that;

Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as, means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organisations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of ‘quality’, or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation within a field of judgement.” (p.216)
Owing to the dominance of bureaucratic accountability in Irish post-primary schooling (Gleeson & O Donnabháin, 2009), the pressures of performativity form significant concern for educators and pupils alike. The pressure to meet targets and improve performance levels falls particularly heavily on English teachers due to its centrality in the school curriculum (Perryman, Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2011a). In striving to meet performative demands teachers are increasingly feeling compelled to employ a ‘teaching to the test’ approach, often aligned with a strong transmission style of teaching (Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006; West, 2010). In doing so, the development of skills, aptitudes and competencies in areas not prescribed for examination is often denoted as superfluous and consequently negated in the classroom. In addition, McNeil (2000) highlights the issue of student voice relegation owing to patterns of endorsed standardisation and conformity in performative cultures. She argues that in this context “the role of students as contributors to classroom discourse, as thinkers, as people who brought their personal stories and life experiences into the classroom” is often silenced or severely circumscribed (p.4). Increased standardisation and decreased opportunity for critical encounter in the classroom poses serious concerns regarding the dominant ideological values being transmitted within such education systems. Perhaps the most significant concern here is the impact of such ideology on teachers’ and pupils’ epistemological beliefs.

The Significance of Epistemology
The work of Perry (1970) on epistemology has immense implications for the growing national focus on critical thinking as an essential outcome of education. Perry explored the impact of pluralistic pedagogical strategies and the social environments of university on students’ epistemological development. Following extensive qualitative analysis Perry’s research led to a theory of epistemological development illustrated though a schema of intellectual and ethical development. The model portrays a pattern of increasing cognitive complexity that has proved to be useful for analysing teaching/learning concerns and attempting to measure the education outcomes (Perry, 1981). Within this scheme learners move from perceiving truth in absolute terms of right and wrong, to the acknowledgement of multiple, conflicting versions of “truth” as demonstrative of valid alternatives. Although initially consisting of nine positions, refinements of the schema as part of its ongoing evolution have resulted in the development of four successive categories, namely Dualism, Multiplicity, Relativism and Commitment within Relativism. As approaches to teaching are
directly related to approaches to learning (Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 1999), the epistemological position assumed by a teacher in the class may hold significant consequence for pupils’ epistemological development.

**Teacher dissonance**

While the imperative for teachers to avoid practices which restrict learning and creative thought by the espousal and practice of a positive epistemic stance is clear, the realisation of this imperative exists as an area of contention for many poetry teachers. Enacting a positive approach to pedagogy, through critical encounters with texts and creative approaches to learning, in a student centred manner is not without its challenges. Ball (2003) and Perryman et al. (2011b) note that teachers are increasingly being forced to set aside their beliefs and values about teaching and learning in meeting the demands of externally imposed measures, standards, targets and comparisons. According to Moore (2004) a new hegemony in education locates ‘good teaching’ within discourses of technicism, performativity and curriculum ‘delivery’ and lies often in strong opposition with teachers’ existing pedagogical preferences. Consequently, a growing pattern of ‘cognitive dissonance’ is emergent in the wake of such ideological struggle for teachers.

The theory of ‘cognitive dissonance’ suggests that cognitions must be consistent and that where there is dissonance or inconsistency, this results in uncomfortable tensions (Fitzgibbon, 2006, p. 24). In this instance a desire to reduce dissonance follows. Seeking to reduce dissonance, individuals frequently change their attitudes to be more compliant with their actions (Van Veen, Krug, Schooler, & Carter, 2009). Handy (1999) also proposes that dissonance can be tolerated when it is reduced by altering either one’s image of reality, or by finding a way of explaining or rationalising the discrepancy. This holds significance for the teacher working within a culture of performance and testing. To ease the discomfort of dissonance as proposed by Handy (1999), the acceptance of standardisation and performative processes is necessary in order to align with established practices of compliance. Ball (2003) notes that performative systems offer to some pupils the opportunity to be and the satisfaction of being excellent. According to Perryman et al., (2011a, p.190) this rationalisation of the performative culture perhaps alleviates some of the discomfort of dissonance for teachers, affording space to accept practices of standardisation and performativity. Critically Ball (2003) proposes that within performative cultures a
closing down of space for autonomous practice and subordination of professional judgment occurs frequently. Consequently, the teacher often exhibits ‘cynical compliance’ (p.226) with the institutional fabrication, leading to what Sennett (1998) terms the ‘corrosion of character’. The rationalisation of compliance, may as a result, extend to dialogue concerning the perceived limitations of ‘licensed autonomy’ (Avis, 2003) and imposed de-professionalisation (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2010), where Gleeson & Knights (2006, p.277) argue that teachers position themselves as ‘victims’ oppressed by the structures of control. However, Greene (2005) asserts that spaces do exist where reality can be reimagined, and in doing so she calls to mind the words of Emily Dickenson, who wrote “imagination lights the slow fuse of possibility”. Greene (2005) stresses that “it is an honour and a responsibility to be a teacher in such dark times – and to imagine, and to act on what we imagine, what we believe ought at last to be” (p.80). Drawing inference it appears certain that spaces do exist for poetry teachers to act in countering hegemonic practice and in so doing, realising a sense of agency in the reconceptualisation of their professional role.

The possibility of agency

Gleeson & Knights (2006) highlight the emergence of ideological ‘dualism’ within the public sector concerning the identity of professionals in context of neo-liberal reform. This dualism they assert exists between ‘structure’ and ‘agency’. The former denotes “how the professional is conditioned by material changes in working practices, ‘globalisation’, audit, inspection, ‘managerialism’ and institutional hegemony” (p.278). From this perspective the professional is subjected to externally mandated rules and regulation. The latter “focuses on agency in the way professionals construct meaning and identity (e.g. resistance, compliance or creative engagement), in the often asymmetrical conditions of their work” (p.278). Professionals are viewed as agents with the power to define their own conditions of work. The noted dualism between structure and agency is according to Gleeson & Knights;

reflective of wider social science thinking that has generally led to polarised camps of theorists who either subscribe to a deterministic view that elevates structure over action or follow a voluntarist perspective that privileges subjective agency. (p.278)

Advancing on the contested nature of professional construction, however they argue that the reconciliation of dualism in this context is not advantageous as it fails to provide a refined
solution. Instead they propose a ‘rescription’ of professional construction. Such a ‘rescription’ according to Gleeson & Knights;

...resides in forms of democratic governance rather than coming from the imposition of the dead hand of unaccountable audit and managerial cultures, which, as we have identified, lack the embodiment and development legitimacy that would otherwise engage professionals. (p.291)

Essentially Gleeson & Knights contend that reimagining the professional extends beyond the negotiation of existing contentions in professional construction. They suggest that the advancement of the professional requires an ideological shift which transcends the micro politics of neo-liberal debate. From an educational perspective this would imply the necessity for redress not merely at a local level, focusing on the politics of pedagogy, but at a national level, where the ideological basis underlying a teacher’s professional identity may be critically appraised and negotiated. Giroux & McLaren (1986) argue that many of the recently recommended school reforms either evade or neglect the principles underlying education for a democratic citizenship. In addressing this they argue the necessity for action within teacher education.

Teacher Education and Reform

Bloch (1987) proposes a concept of ‘natural law’ wherein “the standpoint of the victims of any society ought to always provide the starting point for the critique of that society” (p.xviii). Therein if teachers are to be viewed as (or perceive themselves as) the victims of a hegemonic culture, they hold a unique perspective, with empirical knowledge of social structure, from which agency may be generated. Hill (2007, p.215) argues that teacher education should enable teachers to develop knowledge and skill to critically examine the ideological nature of teaching and the nature of teachers’ work. It should provide a forum from which teachers can identify and challenge the dominant culture in which they are or will be immersed. Arguing within the politics of possibility, Harris (1994) asserts that “it remains possible for teachers to adopt the function of intellectuals and to resist becoming mere managers of day-to-day activities imposed from beyond the school, and to redefine their role in countering hegemonic practice” (p.115).

Crucially, Hill (2004) cautions that redress at initial teacher education is also necessitated. He argues that teacher education curricula in various contexts have been ‘detheorised’,
‘sanatised’, ‘technicised’ and ‘deintellectualised’ (p.516). Similarly Giroux (2009) cautions that many teacher education programmes are currently lacking in practices and vision which promote critical democracy (p.446). Within this context he argues education has undergone an ideologocial shift in which democracy has lost its dynamic character and faces being reduced to a set of mandated principles and institutional practices that teach students to engage at a superficial level rather than encouraging them to question the basic precepts of society (p.443). Such an ideological shift according to Giroux strips education of a democratic vision (p.433).

The proposals of Wang, Odell, Klecka, Spalding, and Lin (2010) therefore appear pertinent. They argue that if teacher education is central to teaching reform and to the quality of teaching and student learning, greater investment in the conceptual, empirical, systematic, and sustained inquiry about teacher education reform is required. Slee (2010) highlights the importance of critical inquiry about the nature of the curriculum, asserting that at a time when teachers are increasingly estranged from curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, teacher education needs to enter the debate about curriculum rather than merely training teachers to implement it (p.20). Moving from educational patterns of technicism, political acquiescence and inequality requires ideological redress at all levels. Attention to the manner in which educators view the purpose of public schooling is important according to Giroux (2009). He argues that the conceptualisation of schooling needs to move towards a more democratic vision, where schools themselves are regarded as democratic public spheres (p.445). Such a vision for schooling according to Giroux would work contrary to the current view that education which conceptualises schools as extensions of the workplace or “institutions in the corporate battle for international markets”, rather he asserts, schools within this vision are viewed as democratic public spheres which place emphasis on critical inquiry and meaningful dialogue (p.445). Similarly Bartolomé (2009) notes the importance of ideological redress in the advancement of educational practices. He calls for a shift in focus from “a narrow and mechanistic view of instruction to one that is broader in scope and takes into consideration the sociohistorical and political dimensions of education” (p.340). Such assertion is reflective of the calls of Freire (1987) who posits that technical expertise and content knowledge are insufficient to ensure the successful education of students. Bourdieu (cited in Giroux, 2009, p.453) contends that in striving to provide democratic and inclusive education for students, teachers must achieve political clarity, acknowledging and giving priority to the requirements
of students. Within this re-imagined learning environment, the primacy of student experience would be given primacy. The development of the student would prioritise individuality, ingenuity and creativity, in doing so, taking a holistic, student centred approach to pedagogy. According to Bartolomé (2009) acknowledging and using student knowledge is pedagogically advantageous and constitutes a ‘humanising’ experience for students who are traditionally ‘dehumanised’ and disempowered (p.345). Arguing the merits of educational redress she contends:

> Education can be a process in which teacher and students mutually participate in the intellectually exciting undertaking we call learning. Students can become active subjects in their own learning, instead of passive objects waiting to be filled with facts and figures by the teacher. (p.346)

However such a democratic and inclusive vision appears far removed from the current reality of schooling, where learning is often reflective of pedagogical and theoretical disconnect.

**Summary**

The first section of this chapter highlighted the potential of poetry as an art form to act as medium for transcendental inquiry and communication. It also highlighted the capacity of the symbol within the poem to facilitate this translation of experience. The role of poetry in refining the senses, enlarging the imagination through cognitive and affective development was also discussed. Post-primary schooling was advocated as a space where creative approaches to poetry could be used to unlock experience and facilitate exploration into the timeless messages embedded within the form. However a critical review of the literature points towards the relegation of the status of poetry as an art-form within the Leaving Certificate context. A dichotomisation of cognitive and affective development in the poetry classroom is identified where the affective was noted often to be deemed superfluous and ill-fitting within the prevailing academic culture of calculation. The place and status of poetry within the Irish Leaving Certificate classroom was then juxtaposed with a concurrent overview on the place and status of poetry in the New Zealand and English curriculum. This juxtapositioning of contexts highlighted the existence of a transcontextual utilitarian penchant in the poetry classroom. A delineation of the English syllabi in Ireland served to provide context for the subsequent delineation of aims and ethos of the current syllabus. This pointed towards the rejection of didacticism and a move towards a more engaging and pupil centred learning experience. Dixon’s models of English teaching were then outlined and the impact
of these models on current ideology and practice was denoted. The literature noted the desire
to reform the subject through critique of the established models may have ironically resulted
in weakening the ideological foundations of the subject resulting in a sense of professional
dissonance amongst many poetry teachers.

The development of this chapter was integral to the construction of this research as it
provided space to generate a comprehensive overview of research conducted in the field
which thereafter also served to inform and advance the researcher’s theoretical framework
and research objectives. Given the article based nature of this thesis, review of the literature
extends beyond this chapter in an iterative manner, and develops in focus and criticality as
the research progresses.

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Chapter III

Methodology
Introduction
This chapter outlines the methodological approach and theoretical framework employed by the researcher in seeking to explore the experiences of teaching and learning poetry at Leaving Certificate level in Ireland. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section provides an overview of the theoretical research approach. This section provides context by outlining the aims and objectives of the research, as well as a delineation of the research design and a detailed overview of the research tools employed. The second section provides a comprehensive account of the process of investigation adopted within each phase of the research design. In so doing, it presents the research sampling methods and a detailed breakdown of the participating cohorts for each phase of the research. This section concludes with a graphic overview of the research sequence.

Section One: Research Overview

Aim
This research sought to explore the experience of teaching and learning poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland.

This research focused on the experiences of both Leaving Certificate poetry teachers and Leaving Certificate pupils of poetry. Of central concern for the researcher was the identification of areas of significance as identified by both cohorts. In establishing an increased awareness of the experiences generated within this context, the researcher seeks to open up discussion and provoke thought amongst the wider educational community, with the ultimate ambition of influencing and enhancing praxis within the Leaving Certificate poetry classroom.

Objectives
The objectives of this research were to:

1) Explore the experience of teaching poetry at Leaving Certificate level in Ireland from the perspective of the teacher, focusing on areas they deemed as significant.

2) Explore the perspectives of pupils on the experience of studying poetry at Leaving Certificate level in Ireland, focusing on areas they deemed as significant.
Theoretical Framework

The development of the theoretical framework for this research constituted an attempt to interpret and make sense of what is known in the field, as outlined by MacDonald et al. (2002). Inquiry in this research focused on relationship between poetry and the potential of creative pedagogies. The impact of summative examination structures and their impact on this relationship was of significant interest in this framework conceptualisation.

As a consequence of the researcher’s experience of disempowerment in many of my educational experiences, commitment to two key constructs, namely empowerment and dialogue, was established as an underpinning ambition for the conceptualisation and design of this research. Similar to Raz (2001), the researcher believes that such abstract values become meaningful when incorporated into practice. Thus, in striving to reflect a commitment to both empowerment and dialogue within the research, the act of attentive listening and accurate representation of teachers’ and pupils’ perspectives was a central concern. Premised on the conviction that both teachers and pupils are citizens of the social group formed within the poetry classroom and agents of action therein, the researcher considers that they act as co-constructors of knowledge within this context. Moreover, the collective analysis of individual experiences represented the researcher’s non-dualist ontology which suggests that a relationship exists between the person experiencing the phenomenon, in this case teachers and pupils, and the phenomenon being experienced, in this case poetry at Leaving Certificate level in Ireland (Akerlind, 2005). The researcher also believes that knowledge generation is relational. Therefore, context was deemed to be significant in the development of knowledge underpinning this research. This view holds implication for the school as a context for learning. The researcher believes that the values and beliefs translated within the school hold significance for pupils’ appropriation of the nature of knowledge, as reflected and specified in the research objectives. Additionally, the researcher views dialogue, fostered as part of this research, not only as a way of achieving more productive conversations but also as a way of fostering reflectivity in the author, as a researcher and poetry teacher, and also in research cohort (Bohm, 2004).

In addition, as noted by MacDonald et al. (2002), a discussion of theory cannot be divorced from a discussion about paradigms as paradigmatic allegiances can determine theories and perspectives. This research adopted a critical constructivist paradigm. Kincheloe (2005) outlines critical constructivism as a “theoretically grounded form of world-making” (p.11),
where penetrating questions, concerning social structure, power and politics, are explored. Critical constructivism is characterised by an interpretative approach allied with a strong interest in critically disputing taken-for-granted social realities through an emancipatory interest in knowledge (Hearne, 2009, p.120). In adopting a critical constructivist stance, the researcher posits that the world and knowledge generated therein is socially constructed and accommodating of multiple realities. The reconstruction of meaning in this research therefore concentrates on the complexities of pupils’ and teachers’ subjective experiences. It suggests also that spatial and temporal settings shape the nature of the constructions of the world. This construct premises the significance of the context in which poetry is studied, specifically the poetry classroom, as central to pupils’ appropriation of knowledge concerning poetry.

The principles of constructivism, namely that learning is an active process, that learners construct knowledge in relation to their prior knowledge and that knowledge is socially constructed underpin the researcher’s commitment to the earlier outlined principles of empowerment and dialogue (Rovegno and Dolly, 2006, p.242). Moreover, throughout this research process, of central concern to the researcher as a constructivist, was the development of understanding concerning the processes through which certain information becomes validated knowledge and the processes through which certain information is not deemed to be worthy knowledge (ibid). This concern drew heavily on the researcher’s theoretical framework and is threaded through the research. It cumulates with an in depth exploration of this concern in papers one and two.

As a critical constructivist, the researcher sought not to reduce the variables emergent from data collection into simplified and discrete elements but rather to maximise exploration of such variables in an attempt to embed understanding of the phenomenon in a social, political, cultural and pedagogical world. Here, issues of power, equality and inclusion are explored and contextualised in relation to research findings (Rogers, 2004). The explication of this relationship is explored in detail in paper five. In addition, as a critical constructivist, the researcher sought to identify new ways of seeing and viewing the world and attempted to cast light on that which is generally taken for granted (Greene, 2000, MacDonald et al., 2002) in an attempt to advance understanding and therein advance ideology and praxis in the field. In adhering to a critical constructivist paradigm, the researcher aims to challenge the hegemonic practice of espousing a rhetoric of criticality while endorsing practices which conceptualise pupil advancement in a utilitarian and reductionist manner. Furthermore this stance
encourages teachers and pupils alike to recognise the complexity of power relations in education and acknowledge their own agency and critical consciousness in countering hegemonic practice.

This research proposes creative pedagogy as a medium through which the values outlined may be operationalised within the Leaving Certificate classroom. Here a creative approach to poetry pedagogy provides space for the empowerment of pupil and teacher alike, the generation of dialogue, the co-construction of knowledge, the fostering of reflexivity, the recognition of subjectivities and the development of critical thinking.

**Research approach**

The aims and objectives of this research were realised through a ‘mixed methods’ research approach. This combined the use of the positivist and interpretative research paradigms. The positivist research paradigm involves the presentation of general statements and/or questions suitable for statistical analysis, specifically quantitative research, while interpretative research focuses on perspectives of meaning and understanding, specifically qualitative research. The data deriving from both paradigms in this research was treated as ‘mutually illuminating’ (Bryman, 2008), as each paradigm was understood to possess the potential to enhance understanding of the other.

The use of the combined framework is however not without its critics (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.643). The controversy is embedded in the socio-political context of the social sciences, where a methodological hierarchy is often implied, with the positivist paradigm becoming the dominant and the interpretative paradigm being consigned to the lower end of the scale (Howe, 2004). Historical educational research however, illustrates some successful and influential mixed method research, such as the work of Piaget who conducted research into the developmental processes of children in a multi-modal manner employing the use of observations, interviews and experiments. Moreover, many contemporary researchers are now beginning to highlight once again the importance of a mixed method approach in the conduct of research (Berg, 2001; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). Additionally, controversy has surrounded the combined use of positivist and interpretative approaches as it has been argued that the embedded epistemological commitment of each paradigm do not facilitate such integration due to their apparent opposing ideologies.
However, it is also argued that the time has come for mixed methods to be viewed as a paradigm in its own right (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Such advocates highlight the complementary nature (Husén, 1997) of the paradigms whereby quantitative and qualitative research methods are viewed as associated and as ‘capable of being fused’ (Bryman, 2008, p.606). This view, as maintained in this research, acknowledges that each paradigm has its own epistemological and ontological assumptions but recognises that the connections are not fixed and ineluctable (ibid), therein facilitating a mixed methods framework.

Rationale
This study took a pragmatic methodological stance (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005) utilising the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research. The rationale for this approach combines a number of factors. In the first instance, the researcher employed the use of quantitative research to identify areas of statistical significance. However, it was noted that research which examines the perspectives of individuals, such as in this study, is based on subjective realities and quantitative data alone may not be sufficient to explore often deeply embedded individual responses (Dyson, 2006). Qualitative data collection was therefore also employed as part of this research and served to facilitate deeper inquiry in order to achieve what Bryam (2008, p.609) terms completeness in the research. Similarly, as noted by Creemers, Kyriakidēs & Sammons (2010, p.140), a combination of approaches provides greater opportunity for mapping, analysis and interpretation of experience and in doing so, may provide a more holistic understanding of the research area than may be gained if relying on one paradigm alone. Investigating process (Bryam, 2008, p.609) as well as ‘static’ information was also an ambition of the researcher, which was realised through the mixed methods approach employed. The use of qualitative data collection allowed for the research to move beyond the ‘static’ or ‘snap-shot’ picture of teaching and learning gleaned through quantitative data. For example in this research quantitative data analysis revealed a dichotomised sense of professional purpose amongst poetry teachers. As this finding required further attention, the qualitative data process was employed to explore the cause or ‘process’ underpinning this conflict. Therein this approach facilitated also served to facilitate explanation (ibid) of the phenomenon. Additionally, as the purpose of this research was the advancement of praxis in the poetry classroom, the utility (ibid) of research findings for a wide audience was of central concern to the researcher. Bryman (2008) highlights that mixed
methods research is often recommended and preferred by researchers as “it is more likely to generate findings that will have utility” (p.621). In addition, as mixed methods research is underpinned by the principle of triangulation, the employment of a mixed method approach in this research served to enhance the potential validity of the research findings (Miller, Strang and Miller, 2010, p.347). In this manner, mutual validation was established through methodical ‘cross-checking’ of qualitative and quantitative research findings against one another on the grounds that results established by divergent methods are more likely to be more valid than a mono-method approach (ibid). The results of this research provided strong evidence of consistent and convergence data therein resulting in increased confidence in the inquiry inferences established (Greene, 2007, p.100). The researcher was also influenced by the argument of Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004) who asserted that mixed methods research frequently results in improved research compared to a mono-method research approach. Therefore, a mixed method approach was deemed appropriate in effecting the outlined research.

Creswell and Tashakkori (2007) suggest that effective mixed methods research should be well-developed in both quantitative and qualitative components. They also suggest that this approach should offer more than a report of two distinct ‘strands’ of quantitative and qualitative research. Rather, they assert that the findings must integrate, link or connect these ‘strands’ in some way (p.108). This research has sought to address these requirements in a number of ways. First, the researcher ensured that each paradigm held a significant role in the research. This role was seen to hold a purpose distinct from the alternate paradigm. For example, the role of quantitative research in this study was to generate statistical information from a broad and geographically diverse cohort on the teaching and learning of poetry, which would point towards areas of significance for qualitative investigation. Second, in the analysis of the research findings connections were established between the findings in each paradigm and were presented in an integrated manner as illustrative of the ‘bigger picture’. The optimised integration of methods can be seen in the chapter IV - VII delineation of research findings where both sets of findings are connected to extract ‘maximum yield’ from the research (Bryman, 2008, p.675).

**Research Design**

This research follows an explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Clark, 2011) which comprises two distinct phases, both of which reflect a mixed methods approach. The first
phase focuses on the Leaving Certificate poetry teacher and includes both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods in the form of questionnaires and interviews. The second phase focuses on the Leaving Certificate poetry pupil. This phase mirrors the methodological approach of phase one, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative data in the form of interviews and questionnaires. Figure 1 below provides an overview of the research approach:

**Figure 1 Research Overview**

**Quantitative overview**
Both phase one and phase two of the study employed a quantitative element in the form of a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire in phase one was completed by practising teachers, while in phase two Leaving Certificate pupils completed a questionnaire based on the same research design.

**Semi-Structured Questionnaire Rationale**
A semi-structured questionnaire was selected as a research tool as it provides comprehensive statistical information while also providing an initial indication of the underlying perspectives of teachers and pupils (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). In addition, questionnaires prove effective in the production of large scale ‘static’ information. In providing the means to target a wide population, the questionnaire holds the potential to provide valuable descriptive and explanatory information. Moreover the questionnaire, when constructed effectively holds the ability to elicit both opinions and facts from respondents (ibid). This tool was deemed advantageous for this phase of research also as it served to limit ‘social desirability bias’
(Bryman, 2008, p.218). This refers to a tendency amongst some respondents to reply in a manner that will be viewed favorably by others. This tendency results often in the under-reporting of activities that induce anxiety or which are perceived to be sensitive in nature, and the over reporting of activities which are seen to conform to that which is perceived to be good/ socially desirable behaviour. The anonymous and individual completion of questionnaires served to reduce this tendency.

The researcher was also cognisant of the disadvantages of questionnaires. As highlighted by Bryman (2008, p.218), these include the inability to assist if respondents encounter difficulty in completion of the questionnaire (if posted), the necessity to limit questions that may not be salient to the respondent, the necessity to construct only a small number of open questions, greater risk of missing data in the form of ‘skipped’ questions and lower response rates on postal questionnaires. The research aimed to mitigate such disadvantage by ensuring that both the instruction and questions on the tool were clear and concise, taking time to ensure questions were germane to the respective cohorts, limiting the number of questions to encourage full completion and personally distributing the questionnaires for pupil completion, while also developing and maintaining positive relations with the liaison teacher to maximise response rates for teacher questionnaires.

**Design of the Quantitative Research Tools**

The quantitative research tool was designed to reflect a broad overview of areas fundamental to the teaching and learning of poetry as identified by O’ Neill (1998). O’ Neill conducted an in-depth empirical analysis of the teaching of poetry at Junior Certificate Level in Ireland and in so doing provided a categorisation of areas central to the field. Permission was sought and granted by O’ Neill for the adaptation of his research tool. Construction of the research tool was also influenced by Radhakrishna’s (2007) stages of questionnaire design. Radhakrishna proposed a five step approach to effective questionnaire construction. Figure 2 below illustrates the adapted implementation of this framework to facilitate the design of both teacher and pupil questionnaires.
In accordance with this framework the questionnaires for both the pupil and teacher cohorts were developed through the following five steps:

1. **Identify Target Audience**
   - Purpose and Aims
   - Objectives Research
   - Questions Hypothesis
   - **Strategic Planning**

2. **Generate Statements Questions**
   - Knowledge Attitudes
   - Perceptions Opinions
   - **Conceptualisation**

3. **Appropriate Scales of Measurement**
   - Data Analysis Design
   - Questionnaire
   - **Format and Data Analysis**

4. **Mixed Methods Approach**
   - Readability Test
   - Radhakrishna Validity
   - Field
   - **Established Validity**
   - Revisions Readability

5. **Pilot Test Reliability**
   - Run Revision
   - Instrument Ready for Mailing
   - **Established Reliability**
1. **Strategic Planning**
The purpose, objectives and research questions for the proposed study were examined. The instrument for the selection of the research cohort was established. The process of random sampling (Fink, 2006) was selected as congruent with the research objectives.

2. **Questionnaire Conceptualisation**
Statements and questions for the questionnaire were generated. Content from the literature review, syllabus documents and from the design of O’ Neill (1998) was transformed into statements and questions. Adherence was given to the methodological approach being taken at this stage of analysis, as question development acknowledged the need for compliance with the statistical analysis tool SPSS (Pallant, 2007).

3. **Format and Data Analysis**
At this stage statements and questions for the draft questionnaire were finalised. The use of both open and closed questions was deemed necessary to achieve the research objectives in both instances. Many quantitative questions within the questionnaire were based on a Likert Scale (Cohen et al, 2000). The Likert scale was chosen over alternatives such as the Thurstone and Guttman scales as it was deemed less problematic to construct while yielding comparable results in terms of reliability. The questionnaire layout, format, order of questions, font size and proposed data analysis strategies were finalised.

4. **Establishing Validity**
Validity was achieved in a number of ways. The use of mixed method research served to increase the validity of the research. According to Denscombe (2007) “recognising that different methods have their respective strengths and weaknesses, one of the valuable uses of mixing methods is to offset any inherent weakness or bias in a particular method by combining it with a different one that can compensate for this weakness or bias” (p.110). The questionnaires were also subject to self-assessment of Radhadrishna’s (2003) validity assessment which questions:

1. Is the questionnaire valid? In other words, is the questionnaire measuring what it intended to measure?
2. Does it represent the content?
3. Is it appropriate for the sample/population?
4. Is the questionnaire comprehensive enough to collect all the information needed to address the purpose and goals of the study?

Finally the Gunning-Fog Readability Index test (Allan, McGhee, & van Krieken, 2005; Gunning, 1968) was applied to both questionnaires. This test provides an indication of the reading level required for accurate comprehension of a section of text. A Fog Index score of less than twelve is advocated for the distribution of texts to a large cohort (Gunning, 1968). Reliability was established by examining the test retest reliability of both research tools as “a reliable instrument should give more or less the same results each time it is used with the same person or group of people” (Bush, 2002, p.61). Reliability in research concerns itself with the replicability of findings, the belief that a finding would be repeated if another similar sample were to be undertaken (Smith, 2008). Additionally, a computed Cronbach’s alpha level was established for both questionnaires. This formula is used to determine the internal consistency of scale based on the degree of correlation of between the questionnaire items (Boudah, 2010). A result of 0 indicates no reliability and a result of 1 indicates perfect reliability. In most cases a measure of 0.7 or more is preferable.

The adapted questionnaires took a mirrored approach to the exploration of the field in order to maximise the validity of the research results (see appendix A and B). Section one for both questionnaires focused on role conceptualisation and sought to establish teachers’ and pupils’ disposition towards the genre and preferences for engaging with the genre. Here, teachers rated their levels of confidence and enjoyment in teaching poetry. They also conceptualised their perceptions of a successful poetry class. Practices concerning problem solving were identified here, as were perceived positive contributions to the development of the poetry teacher. Pupils too focused on their engagement with the genre in this section, identifying their level of engagement with the genre both at school and at home. They also conceptualised their perceptions of a successful class. Pupils also rated their levels of confidence and enjoyment in studying the genre. In addition, pupils poetic preferences were identified on the basis on a list of poets, drawn from those prescribed within the English syllabuses and from those indicated by respondents in the pilot questionnaire. Practices concerning problem solving were also identified by pupils in this section, as were pupils aspired outcomes from engagement with the genre.

As highlighted earlier, the research objectives for this study highlight the importance context in the development of knowledge therefore, section B for both pupil and teacher
questionnaires focused in on the teaching and learning of poetry at Leaving Certificate level specifically. Areas of focus for both cohorts included preferred poets and themes from the prescribed list, accessibility of poems prescribed, motivation levels, influences for teaching and learning and areas of difficulty within Leaving Certificate poetry studies.

Section C focuses on the Leaving Certificate Syllabus and aimed to ascertain pupils’ and teachers’ perspectives on the prescribed course content. Areas of focus for teachers included familiarity with the syllabus, potential of the syllabus to meet their pupils’ needs, quantity of course content, prescription of poets, alignment with the Junior Certificate syllabus, potential learning outcomes and a comparison with the previous syllabus. For pupils, this section also entailed a focus on the potential of the syllabus to meet their needs as learners concentrating on the themes prescribed, poets prescribed, quantity of course content and prescription of poets.

Section D focused on the use of resources in the poetry classroom. It sought to identify the most commonly utilised resources and the potential of such to meet the needs of pupils. In addition teachers commented on the area of in-service support and the opportunity to ensure their resources for the class are up to date and relevant. Additional desirable resources as conceptualised by both teachers and pupils were also identified here.

Section E sought to establish the pedagogical practices utilised by teachers and their ability to meet the needs of their pupils. Both teachers and pupils responded to the provision of a range of pedagogical approaches, as advocated in the Leaving Certificate English syllabus, in their class. These approaches included; drama-in-education, illustration, oracy, visits by poets, composition, personal interpretation, response journals and creative imitation. The practices of rote learning and the provision of pre-scripted notes were also explored here. Drawing on iterative engagement with the literature throughout the research process, the researcher has also identified a focus on auracy and listening to be of significance in relation to the aforementioned areas. As the area is not engaged with in this research, it stands as an area worthy of further inquiry within the Irish post-primary poetry context.

The final section of both questionnaires centred on the Leaving Certificate examination. In both instances it sought to critically explore pupils’ and teachers’ perspectives on this issue. Areas explored included practices of teaching and learning in preparation for the exam, the potential for representation of understanding in the exam, impact of the exam on pupil and
teacher motivation, alignment with the broader educational goals of the poetry course as outlined in the syllabus and proposed recommendations for the examination.

Developing the questionnaires, the researcher strived to ensure alignment between the construction of questionnaires and the aim of placing emphasis on the subjective experience of teachers and pupils, as identified in the research objectives. From a critical constructivist perspective this aim was central to the establishment of the research goals. It was anticipated that the broad scope of the questionnaires would serve to achieve this aim by placing emphasis on the ‘emic’ or participant view (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). It was decided that a narrow research focus at this point would be preclusive to the research objectives, as such an approach would enhance the potential to omit an area of significance as experienced by pupils or teachers. The broad focus maintained at this stage in the research (where the purpose was the identification of areas of significance) also served to enhance ‘bracketing’ or setting aside of the researcher’s subjective preconceptions on the area of research (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). For this reason also the option of ‘other’ and the opportunity to provide an alternate response was also provided on many of the closed questions in the questionnaires.

**Layout of the Questionnaires**

Oppenheim (2000, p.115) summarises the inherent strength and weaknesses of both forms of questions as follows;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open questions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of the answers</td>
<td>Time consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to probe</td>
<td>In interviews: costly of interviewer time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful for testing hypothesis about ideas or awareness</td>
<td>Coding: very costly and slow to process and may be unreliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demands more effort from respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Closed questions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires little time</td>
<td>Loss of spontaneous responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No extended writing</td>
<td>Bias in answer categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low costs</td>
<td>Sometimes too crude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to process</td>
<td>May irritate respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes group comparisons easy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful for testing specific hypothesis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less interviewer training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seeking to optimise the outlined advantages of both and in so doing, offset their inherent disadvantages, a combination of both open and closed questions were used;

1. Closed questions: These were used to provide specific information based on a selection of themes. Questions constructed as such are proven to be reliable and efficient methods for data collection due to the uniformity of data they provide (Fink, 2006). Both dichotomous and 5 point Likert scale closed questions were utilised. For example:

(a) Response to statements based on the Likert scale
(for example teacher questionnaire: Q9 (a) section C):

*My teaching of poetry has changed significantly since the introduction of the current English Leaving Certificate syllabus.*

| Strongly agree [ ] | Agree [ ] | Unsure [ ] | Disagree [ ] | Strongly disagree [ ] |

(b) Dichotomous closed questions (for example teacher questionnaire: Q1 section C):

1. Have you read in full the current English syllabus?

| Yes [ ] | No [ ] |

2. Open questions: As noted by Parfitt (2005) “successful open questions are generally those which are not open-ended invitations for respondents to ‘tell everything’ but which direct the respondent in a more focused way” (p.78). In the case of this research these were used to provide a more subjective and in-depth account of particular issues related to the teaching and learning of poetry. They afforded the respondent space to provide detailed feedback specific to the question. For example pupil questionnaire: Q5 section A:

5. If you knew someone who had never studied poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland what would you tell them it involves?

__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

The combination of both forms of question ensured that respondents were afforded the opportunity to be articulate on areas of interest or concern to them. It also accommodated the respondent in providing a set of categories to choose from (including the option of ‘other’ with space for elaboration) where questions were more likely to have a set number of
responses. This method is advantageous as it maintains respondent motivation while also providing subjective detail on areas of significant interest. For the researcher, this was also advantageous as according to Parfitt (2005), “verbatim comments of what was actually said can bring to life otherwise turgid pages of cross-tabulations” (p.91).

A number of distinct strategies were also employed in order to create a sense of progression for the respondent and also to ensure the respondent would not be laboured with excessive amounts of writing:

1) Where possible the use of closed questions was used to encourage participation. Open ended questions were used only when essential to avoid participants being required to write excessive amounts. It was decided that more detailed information, where necessary, would be explored in the ensuing interviews.

2) Each section was clearly titled and numbered to ensure a sense of progression for the respondent. The end of each section was also clearly defined to motivate continued engagement.

3) Questions were concise and avoided long statements for ease of completion. In many cases, where a limited number or ‘set’ of responses may be obtained, a list was provided for the respondent to choose from or to add to.

To view the research questionnaires please see appendix D and E.

**Piloting the Questionnaires**

According to Cohen et al., (2007) “To ensure validity a pilot must have been conducted to ensure that the observational categories themselves are appropriate, exhaustive, discrete, unambiguous and effectively operationalise the purposes of the research” (p.159). In order to achieve this aim, several iterations of both questionnaires were drafted and redrafted based on pilot research feedback. Feedback was obtained from pilot participants in two ways. Firstly, following analysis of questionnaire completion, ‘problematic areas’ (Cohen et al., 2007) were identified and amended. Secondly, feedback was sought from pilot participants on the process of completing the questionnaire in an attached feedback sheet (see appendix F and G). Feedback was sought on the following areas as advocated by Bell (2005):
- Clarity of cover letter
- Clarity of questionnaire
- Length of questionnaire
- Questionnaire layout
- Topics investigated or omitted
- Any other comments

**Administration of the Questionnaires**

In phase one the teacher questionnaires were posted to schools. This method has been posited as advantageous in educational research by Cohen et al. (2007) as it often proves more viable than alternate methods, such as researcher distribution, when sampling large cohorts from a wide geographical distribution. In addition, Faarup, Hansen, & Hansen (2010) note postal questionnaires to be gainful as respondents can complete them at a time most convenient to them, possibility leading to more considered responses. The researcher was aware however, of the disadvantages incurred in pursuing this approach, namely the possibility of a lower response rate and the inability to clarify any arising confusion. In order to counter the extent of any arising ambiguity at the time of questionnaire completion, the researcher piloted the instrument prior to implementation and also applied a readability test to the instrument. In order to increase response rates, considerable time was given to developing a positive rapport with the liaison teacher in each school, who would take charge of the distribution, collection and postage of questionnaires, and to developing their understanding of the research project and its aim. Follow up telephone calls were made also where necessary in order to maximise returns.

For phase two of the research, pupil questionnaires were distributed by the researcher as it was deemed possible to achieve a representative sample cohort within a distance accessible to the researcher. This approach held the added advantage of the researcher being present to answer any queries during completion, a factor more significant for this phase of the research rather than phase one where respondents were practising teachers and therefore considered more adept in the field. The poetry teacher left the classroom during pupil completion of the questionnaire, which was anticipated to limit any potential anxiety incurred for the pupil when detailing their attitude towards their teacher and their pedagogical approach in the
questionnaire. Full details of the sampling process for both pupil and teacher cohorts is detailed in section two of this chapter.

**Analysis of Data**

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analysed with the use of one of the most widely used suite of programmes for statistical analysis in the social sciences, SPSS (Bryman & Cramer, 2005; Cohen et al., 2007). The questionnaire was constructed with consideration given to this methodological approach. Guidance was obtained on effective questionnaire construction in accordance with SPSS upon consultation with two SPSS specialists, one within the Department of Education and Professional Studies in the University of Limerick and one within the Statistical Consultancy Unit in the same university.

Responses to open-ended questions, was categorised based on emergent themes. These categories were identified following an overview of responses presented by participants. Each of these categories was allocated a numerical code and entered into a codebook. The codebook used provided a summary of the information gleaned from the questionnaire and its conversion into numerical code for entry into SPSS (Pallant, 2007). Following entry into the codebook the number was then entered into SPSS.

For example within the teacher questionnaire, question 6 section F: *Please outline one change or recommendation you would have for the Leaving Certificate examination.* A diversity of responses was obtained and were categorised as follows (1) = more contemporary poets, (2) = less course content, (3) = inclusion of more humour, etc. The above translations were stored in the codebook and the numeric code for example, (1) for more contemporary poets was entered into SPSS. This codifying of data becomes significant when assessing frequency at a later stage in the research.

Following input into SPSS, data were screened for input errors which would have the potential to distort results. Any ‘outliers’ (Pallant, 2007) were identified and deleted in order to ensure a clean, error-free data set for analysis. When analysing quantitative data, given the structure and nature of the questionnaire, analysis using simple descriptive statistics was required in the main.
Qualitative overview

In order to analyse the lived experience of teachers and pupils working with Leaving Certificate level poetry, it was deemed essential that individual interviews were conducted with a representative cohort in order to obtain in-depth and detailed information on the perspectives of both poetry teachers and pupils. Gerson & Horowitz (2002, p.201) note that individual interviews are useful in unravelling the complexities and intricacies of individual lives as they provide the opportunity to examine how social actions are experienced and interpreted (p.201). Consequently, interviews were held with 10% of both teacher and pupil cohorts.

Rationale for the Selection of Semi-Structured Interviews

In semi-structured interviewing, the interviewer constructs a list of topics to be discussed, but the interviewee may expand or re-direct focus as they please. The list of topics may be called upon where necessary to maintain a flow in the interview. This format was deemed conducive to the research goals as it facilitated both probing of areas of significance emergent from the questionnaires and also afforded space for expansion of ideas. In essence, it afforded the collection of data in a discursive, flexible and ‘emergent’ manner (Charmaz, 2003). The use of semi-structured interviews was also deemed more advantageous in gathering data on the more intangible aspects of lived experience, specifically values, assumptions and beliefs (Cohen et al., 2007). This chosen approach, according to Marshall and Rossman (2010), places appropriate emphasis on the ‘emic’ perspective (participant perspective) and in doing so successfully subverts the ‘etic’ perspective (researcher perspective) thereby limiting researcher bias as much as possible. As noted by Marshall & Rossman (2010) “this method in fact, is based on an assumption fundamental to qualitative research: The participant’s perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it” (p.144).

Choosing an emic perspective furthermore served to further enhance the reliability of the research tool. Use of the semi-structured interview affords the participant ample opportunity to outline their inherent emic view, which due to its intrinsic origins may well be replicated if researched in an alternative similar study in the same context.
Piloting the Interviews

Pilot interviews afforded the researcher the opportunity to glean an estimation of the time allocation necessary for the proposed interviews. In addition, they served to highlight the necessity of appropriate pacing and sequential focus within the interview (Gillham, 2000). They also served to identify areas of interconnectivity within the key issues to prompt focused discourse in the ensuing interviews. In addition, the pilot interviews afforded the researcher experience in possible paths of discourse within the interviews in order to identify certain ‘unscheduled probes’ (Berg, 2009) that may have been necessary during the interview.

Feedback was sought from pilot participants for both teacher and pupil interviews on the process and amendments were made to ensure accordingly. It was highlighted that in an attempt to ascertain the views of the interviewee on an extensive number of topics (in both instances), the interviews became excessively lengthy. The focus for both teacher (n=8) and pupil (n=24) interviews was therefore amended to centre on a discreet number of topics which would be identified as subjectively significant by the individual interviewee. The resulting interviews took the form of ‘deep’ and ‘open’ conversational partnerships in which the interviewer assisted the process of reflection on aspects of subjective priority relating to the teaching and learning in the poetry classroom, through open-ended questioning and empathetic listening (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Booth, 1997).

Conducting the Interviews

Interviews for both phase one and phase two of the research took an inductive approach focused on the emic perspective. A comprehensive breakdown of the procedures employed for interviews conducted in both phases is outlined in section two.

Interview Analysis

As noted by Berg (2009) “good qualitative research, like good quantitative research, is based on calculated strategies and methodological rigour” (p.114). In both instances the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Heritage (1984) suggests that the process of recording and transcribing interviews “helps to correct the natural limitations of our memories and of the intuitive glosses that we might place on what people say in interviews” (p.238). Additionally, it all allows for more thorough examination of dialogue and permits
repeated examination of the interviewees’ answers. It also opens up data to public scrutiny by other researchers, who can evaluate the analysis that is carried out by the original researchers of the data and in so doing, helps to counter claims of researcher biases in analysis.

Data analysis for the purpose of this research took the form of inductive thematic analysis. In order to ensure a salient approach to the analysis of transcripts and classification of themes, it was decided to integrate Ryan & Bernard’s (2003) categories for thematic identification and Creswell’s (2009) steps for systematic analysis of texts. Combining both models, the research followed the ensuing methodological approach for both phase one and two;

**Step one:** The researcher read through all transcripts in detail. This step served to provide the researcher with a ‘general sense’ of the information contained. Initial notes on the data were made at this time indicating general thoughts on the transcript information.

**Step two:** Four transcripts were then selected at random. These transcripts were re-read in greater detail. Notes on the emergent topics in each transcript were made. Emergent topics were identified through attention to *inter alia*;

- *Repetitions* or the recurrence of distinct categories. For example, the pressures exerted by the terminal examination.

- *Indigenous typologies or categories*: namely colloquialisms that were either unknown to the researcher or were used in an unusual way. For example, in this research, many teachers referred to the need to cover the ‘curriculum’, however from probing of the issue, it emerged that exam content was in fact the issue at hand. The curriculum was therein seen to be used to define exam content by many participants.

- *Similarities and differences*: exploring the possibility of differences in how interviewees discuss a topic. For example, emergent from questionnaires was the limited use of ICT in the poetry class. When explored further in interviews the research found that some teachers posited regret, others indifference and more posited a sense of victimisation in the face of the exam, where they asserted a desire to utilise the resource more but felt unable to.

- *Unanticipated views or practices*: exploring the emergence of surprising findings. For example when discussing methods of study, one pupil reported consulting with friends in other English classes to get their teachers’ notes on poems studied in addition to those from their own teacher, in order to ‘understand the poem better’.

- *Theoretical perspective*: Issues that address a larger theoretical perspective. For example when discussing their engagement with poetry, a number of pupils discussed a sense of exam utility alone. This was deemed to be indicative of a product based conceptualisation of the genre.
**Step three:** A list of all preliminary emergent topics was compiled. Similar topics were then clustered together at which point those with fewer categories were deemed less significant and removed.

**Step four:** Topics were then abbreviated or codified (for example, teacher enthusiasm became Tea.Enth) and brought back to the original transcripts. All transcripts were then analysed using the topics identified. The codes were then written beside appropriate segments of text. Any topics emergent that were not included in the original list were then included, codified and applied to the data.

**Step five:** Topics were then analysed again to identify any overlap and cluster accordingly. Subsequently the remaining topics were explored in depth to determine the most suitable wording to encapsulate the inherent meaning. The established phrase was then deemed a ‘theme’. The list of topics within each theme were identified as ‘sub-themes’.

Each theme comprised circa three/four subthemes. For example within the pupil data an emergent theme of epistemological position was identified based on the repetition of a number of aligned subthemes. Within this theme the subthemes of ‘encourages multiple answers and opinions’, ‘encourages subjective opinion’, ‘doesn’t try to influence your opinion’ and ‘avoids rote learning practices’ were observed. The data were then represented in a matrix which displays cases and variables. For example using the instance of the theme of epistemological position as delineated above, the following matrix serves as an abridged example of the extended matrix developed;
Table 3 Abridged Matrix for Thematic Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Encourages multiple answers and opinions</th>
<th>Encourages subjective opinion</th>
<th>Doesn’t try to influence your opinion</th>
<th>Avoids rote learning practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘She will give her opinion but at the end of the day she doesn’t try to influence us.’ (p5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 3</td>
<td>‘She says ‘what do you think’, ‘why do you think she used these images’. She asks all of us.’ (p8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 4</td>
<td>‘He tells us poetry is subjective and just because I think one thing and somebody else thinks another doesn’t mean I’m wrong’ (p8)</td>
<td>‘My answer is always accepted as long as I have a valid point to back it up.’ (p9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in the sample matrix above, each subtheme is presented under the individual theme and excerpts of data representing that theme are placed in the appropriate cell according to case/interviewee. The matrix also specifies the transcript location for each excerpt (for example, p8, indicating page eight of the respective school transcripts) as advocated by Ritchie, Spencer & O’Connor (2003). This system afforded the researcher prompt access to specific qualitative data serving to enhance insights into issues emergent in the questionnaires. This system also served to validate the qualitative analysis conducted as it provided clear evidence linking the interview transcripts with the final study report. This ‘paper trail’ provided a transparent path through which it is possible to retrace the steps of analysis based on coded transcripts, together with a description of the development of the themes and rationale for interpretations (Smith, 2008).
Ethics

Simons (1995) defines ethics as a “search for rules of conduct that enable us to operate defensibly in the contexts in which we have to conduct educational research” (p.436). Conducting this research in an ethically sound manner was integral to the research conceptualisation, design, implementation and analysis. This research is guided by the six ethical principles of Parahoo (2008). Each of these principles was acknowledged with recognition given to each principle as follows;

- **Beneficence:** This principle entails that research should benefit the participants and contribute positively to human knowledge. Participants of this research may have benefited from their participation by being afforded the opportunity to reflect on their teaching philosophies and methodologies in a supportive environment. Results of the research were also made available to participants once published.

- **Non-maleficence:** Non-maleficence entails a duty to ensure that no harm either physical or psychological should befall the participants. Before, during, and after the interview, the researcher asked participants if they were comfortable with the research questions being asked and were not pressed to divulge any information if they felt uncomfortable.

- **Fidelity and Justice:** Fidelity concerns the issue of trust with participants and the responsibility of the researcher to place the interests of the participants above that of the research. Justice concerns the researcher’s responsibility to act fairly and to endeavour to ensure that power relations are not introduced, or failing this, minimised in the research process. The participants were informed by an information sheet relating the purpose of this research and informed consent was agreed upon without any threat or inducement (Hewitt, 2007). They were also free at any stage to withdraw from the research without prejudice.

- **Veracity:** This principle entails an obligation for the researcher to act with complete honesty with the participants and volunteer all of the necessary information about the project and hold nothing back from the participants. The transcripts and audio files have been made available to all participants of this research. Dissemination of any publications arising from this research will also be forwarded to all participants.

- **Confidentiality:** Finally confidentiality concerns the responsibility of the researcher to respect the information gathered from the participants and not reveal information about the participants that they may wish to remain confidential. At no stage has any
participant, school or name mentioned by participants been identified. All information concerning those participating has been encoded and locked in a secure location.

In addition, Graziano & Raulin (2010) identified six ‘ethical checks’ (p.62) to be conducted once the research design is established. Adherence to these checks was prioritised;

1) The informational value of the research was confirmed in a number of ways prior to implementation. First through consultation with literature. This highlighted a dearth of research in the field indicating the need for action. Second, consultation with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Education Officer for English and the Second Level Support Service (SLSS) English Education Officer provided feedback confirming the value of the research. Additionally, the research was awarded a bursary to assist in the implementation of the design from the Teaching Council of Ireland, who in doing so highlighted its value for the educational community.

2) The research posed no significant risks of physical or psychological harm to the participants. A minor risk to the relationship of teacher and pupil participants was identified wherein pupils were requested to discuss their perceptions of their poetry teacher’s effectiveness. The identification of this risk lead to the implementation of a number of confidentiality measures being implemented as described in the following step.

3) Following from the risk identified in step two, the necessity of maintaining a strong stance on confidentiality and anonymity was established. First, the researcher alone was present when pupils completed their questionnaires. Questionnaires were completed anonymously and handed straight to the researcher once completed, thus ensuring confidentiality at this stage of the research process. Second, interviews with pupils were conducted in an unused classroom or library away from occupied classrooms. Third, the pupil was made aware of their freedom not to respond to questions they may feel uncomfortable with, or to withdraw from the research entirely if desired.

4) Provision was made for obtaining informed consent from each research participant. For teachers, an information sheet accompanied each questionnaire. This delineated in detail the nature and requirements of the research. Teachers participating in interviews
were contacted by telephone, at which time this second stage of the research was explained. Informed consent was established in advance of each interview. For the pupil research customised parent and pupil information sheets were made available to the prospective cohort, to which a consent form was attached. Only when informed consent sheets were returned by both parent and pupil was each pupil eligible to participate. Again for pupil interviews customised parent and pupil information and consent sheets were distributed by the teacher (sent in the post by the researcher). Pupils were again only deemed eligible for interview once both informed consent sheets were returned.

5) Participants were informed that the research would be published in journal and thesis format. All participants were invited to contact the researcher for access to the results in journal or thesis format if they desired. One school requested this information and the researcher travelled to the school with her ‘transfer thesis’ and discussed the research with the principal of the school.

6) The researcher acknowledged their responsibility in full for the ethical and safe treatment of all participants. This was established in a number of ways, inter alia the construction of detailed information sheets and consent sheet, the establishment of suitable research environments (researcher present only for pupil questionnaire completion, use of a vacant room, removed from disturbances for both teacher and pupil interviews), the confirmation of freedom to withdraw, the safe-keeping of research documentation and the maintenance of anonymity in research outputs.

Full ethical approval was sought and subsequently granted for the research by the University of Limerick Education and Health Sciences Ethics Committee on the 3rd of October 2008 (see appendix H).
Section Two: Research Implementation

Sample population
While poetry is offered at three levels; higher level, ordinary level and foundation level, within the established Leaving Certificate (LCE) programme in Ireland, it was determined early in the research that teachers and pupils working within the higher level poetry class would be the focus of attention. This decision was made on the basis of pilot interviews with poetry teachers and an extensive review of literature in the area. The teaching and learning of poetry at higher level was deemed by poetry teachers as a significantly more contentious area. Owing to the concerns voiced by teachers at initial pilot stages, in conjunction with the well documented pressure placed on pupils at this stage of education (Government of Ireland, 1999), this level of study was regarded as requiring more immediate attention.

Phase one of the research initially employed the use of teacher questionnaires. Data collected within this stage comprised of a range of topics central to the teaching of poetry at Leaving Certificate level. Two hundred questionnaires were disseminated to fifty post-primary schools across the Republic of Ireland. Eighty questionnaires were returned (yielding a school response rate of 58%) and deemed valid for analysis. Subsequent to the completion of the questionnaires, interviews were conducted with 10% of participating teachers resulting in a total of eight interviews.

Reflective of the approach taken in phase one with the poetry teachers, phase two of the research also began by employing the use of pupil questionnaires. Data collected within this stage comprised of a range of topics central to the experience of learning poetry at Leaving Certificate level. Two hundred questionnaires were disseminated, returned and deemed valid for analysis. Subsequently, to the completion of questionnaires, the research involved the implementation of pupil interviews. Twenty-four pupil semi-structured interviews were conducted.
Phase One: Teacher Research

Quantitative Inquiry

Instrument Design
For teachers, a self-administered postal questionnaire was employed. This instrument consisted of sixty-seven items. A Gunning-Fog index of 10.17 was established for the questionnaire indicating a high level of readability. Reliability was established by examining the test-retest reliability of the tool. The test was conducted with 8 teachers spanning a two week interval period prior to the distribution of the postal questionnaire. A retest coefficient of 0.82 on the teacher questionnaire was achieved, indicating a strong degree of stability in the research tools. Additionally, a computed Cronbach’s alpha level of 0.76 for the teacher questionnaire was established, indicating a satisfactory level of internal reliability.

Piloting the Instrument
The teacher questionnaire was then piloted formally in one post-primary school with five Leaving Certificate English teachers. The results of the pilot study highlighted a number of areas requiring attention. A number of questions were noted to be somewhat ambiguous and therein presented confusion. These were amended following reference to the literature and discussions with the research supervisor. The questionnaire was also found to be lengthy and time consuming, potentially having a negative impact on the motivation of participants involved (Porter, 2004). In order to rectify this problem the questionnaire was re-evaluated, at which time areas of overlap were identified and removed. This served to achieve a more concise questionnaire that retained depth of inquiry.

The re-drafted questionnaires were then distributed to two lecturers within the University of Limerick who had previously taught English at Leaving Certificate Level, a PhD graduate currently working as the Head of Education in another Irish third level institution, two postgraduate research students, the national co-ordinator for English with the SLSS (Second Level Support Service), and a member of the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment). The wide distribution of contexts and experience of these participants served to provide informed multi-perspective feedback on the proposed questionnaire.
**Teacher Questionnaire Sampling**

Based on an approximation of four English teachers working in each post-primary school in the Republic of Ireland, it was decided to distribute the teacher questionnaire to fifty schools in order to reach the target cohort for research saturation (n=200 poetry teachers). A probability sampling method as outlined by Scott and Morrison (2006) was employed. Schools to be contacted for this phase were selected via a process of simple random sampling (Fink, 2006). All schools included on the Irish Department of Education post-primary school list (n=730) were randomly allocated a number between 0 and 1 in Microsoft Excel using the code =RAND(). The schools were then reordered according to their assigned number from lowest to highest. The top one hundred schools from this newly formulated list were then selected for contact. Once consent was obtained from fifty schools the phase one stage one cohort was established. This cohort (as illustrated in table 4) also formed the sample from which the stage two participants would be chosen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4 Teacher Questionnaires: Participating Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SSB*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Single sex boys' school ** Single sex girl's school *** Mixed group school

Postal questionnaires often have a low response rate (Fink, 2006), therefore careful advance preparation in conjunction with extensive work on the questionnaire was undertaken prior to their distribution. Following a process of random sampling, initial telephone contact was made with schools from the established list (as outlined above). This contact sought approval from both the principal of the school and the head of English in relation to questionnaire distribution and the possibility of interviews being held within the school. Permission from fifty schools from the list was obtained. The head of English in each school became the liaison for the purpose of this research. In ensuring the researcher had direct contact with one of the teachers in each school it was expected that a higher rate of response would be achieved than in the individual distribution of questionnaires to candidates who have not spoken to the researcher.
Distribution of the Teacher Questionnaire

Questionnaire packs containing individually sealed questionnaires for each teacher of Leaving Certificate poetry in the school were distributed in the post. A liaison teacher, usually the Head of English, was identified in each school. The liaison teacher was responsible for the subsequent distribution and collection of individually sealed questionnaires within each school. An instruction sheet was provided for each liaison teacher (see appendix P). Attached to each questionnaire was an information letter detailing the purpose of the research and indicating the anonymous nature of the questionnaires (see appendix O). Consent to participate was acknowledged in the completion and return of the questionnaires as a signature would invalidate the anonymity of the individual respondent. As an additional incentive for participation, advocated by Fink (2006), respondents were advised of their full access to the results of the research once published in journal or thesis form and were provided with information on how to obtain this. The liaison teacher was provided with an additional instruction sheet detailing the requirements of their role and also a stamped addressed envelope for the return of the completed questionnaires. All liaison teachers were contacted four weeks after the distribution of the questionnaires to ensure there were no problems with the school’s participation in the research and to clarify any questions they may have had (for example: return address if the original envelope had been mislaid). A response rate of 58% was achieved.

Qualitative Inquiry

Teacher Interview Sampling

It was decided that stratification of the questionnaire research cohort would need to be undertaken in advance of obtaining a sample cohort for stage two, as according to Hanratty (2008) and Pike (2000), a teacher’s experience of teaching poetry is undoubtedly influenced by the gender of the group being taught. Schools for stratification were selected according to researcher accessibility. The selected cohort from phase one was then sub divided into strata according to single-sex boys schools (SSB), single-sex girls schools (SSG), and mixed grouping schools (MG). This method of sampling is more precise than simple random sampling as it homogenises the groups, allowing for an even distribution of school types within the research cohort (Fink, 2006). Stratified random sampling was then applied in the same manner as per stage one to elicit the research cohort for stage two. The cohort (n=8) comprised two poetry teachers from the SSB and SSG cohorts respectively and four teachers
from the MG cohort. The selected cohort size was n=10% of research cohort one, a size appropriate to ‘exploratory’ rather than ‘definitive’ study (Silverman, 2005). An eclectic range of responses was anticipated as each interviewee taught poetry at a different school to the next.

At the time of questionnaire completion, preliminary consent was obtained from the liaison teacher, to hold interviews in the school should the researcher contact them at a later stage. This was dependant on the subsequent provision of consent by individual interviewees. Phone contact was made with the liaison teacher from stage one for the selected schools. Principles and procedures of the proposed interview were outlined to the liaison teacher including details of anonymity and also recording of the interviews for purposes of transcription. At this stage, where the liaison teacher was willing to participate in an interview, consent to participate was obtained. Alternatively, where this was not possible, the liaison established a link with another suitable candidate (also a phase one respondent).

**Teacher Interviews**

Each interview (n=8) lasted approximately forty-five minutes with two interviews extending to seventy-five minutes. These interviews were held over a nine week period between the 3rd of March 2009 and the 6th of May 2009. Interviews were held in each interviewee’s school, in an empty room away from any major distractions, at times which best suited the research participants, in order to facilitate interviews which were comfortable and without interruption. Eight teacher interviews were conducted.

**Phase Two: Pupil Research**

**Quantitative Inquiry**

**Instrument Design**

For pupils, a self-administered, researcher disseminated, sixty-six item questionnaire was decided upon. Following construction of the questionnaire a readability test was applied. This resulted in a Fog index of 10.14 for the pupil questionnaire, indicating a high level of readability. Reliability was established through a test-retest analysis. The test was conducted with 5 pupils spanning a two week interval period. A retest coefficient of 0.86 on the pupil questionnaire was achieved, indicating a strong degree of stability in the research tools.
Additionally a computed Cronbach’s alpha level of 0.72 for the pupil questionnaire was observed, indicating a satisfactory level of internal reliability.

**Piloting the Instrument**

The pupil questionnaire was piloted in one post-primary school with twenty-four pupils. Concerns expressed in relation to the questionnaire by the cohort included: the lengthy nature of the document. The questionnaire was duly amended by identifying any questions that were deemed surplus and removing them. In addition, open questions which were deemed to require too lengthy a response were removed for use at the interview stage. A number of commonly emerging responses were identified in the category of ‘other’ and were added to the list of possible responses to reduce writing for respondents and improve efficiency of analysis for the researcher. A number of terms used in the questionnaire such as ‘drama-in-education’ and ‘creative imitation’ were found to be new to pupils. Accordingly, an explanatory footnote or alternate synonym was duly provided.

**Pupil Questionnaire Sampling**

In order to limit potential problems with pupil data collection, the presence of the researcher at the time of questionnaire completion was deemed important. Researcher dissemination of the tool also served to minimise any potential risk to the pupil teacher relationship by ensuring the researcher alone was present at the time of completion. In addition, it provided the researcher with the opportunity to clarify any terms and answer any questions for pupils if necessitated. For this reason also it was anticipated that researcher dissemination of questionnaires would limit the number of uncompleted questions. Therefore post-primary schools within commuting distance of the researcher were selected as the target cohort. A process of stratified random sampling (Kothari, 2008) was used to ensure the emergence of a representative sample. Kothari (2008, p.62) notes that stratified sampling often results in more reliable and detailed information than other forms of data collection. The prospective population was purposively formed into sub-populations or ‘strata’ based on type and location. These stratum were, as a result, individually more homogenous than the entire sample. Schools from each stratum were thereafter selected via simple random sampling to constitute the research cohort. In essence the final phase two, stage one cohort (as illustrated in table 5 below) constituted the successive application of purposive and simple random
sampling methods. This resulted in eight representative schools and two hundred pupils. The breakdown of school type, location and participant numbers is illustrated in table 5.

Table 5 Pupil Questionnaire Participating Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>SSB*</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>SSB</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>SSG**</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>SSG</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>MG***</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>MG</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>MG</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>MG</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Single sex boys' school       **Single sex girls' school         ***MG Mixed group school

Distribution of Pupil Questionnaires

Once permission was granted by the principal and co-operating class English teacher, detailed information packs were posted to each school. Each pack contained an information sheet for the co-operating English teacher. This pack also contained information sheets and consent sheets for parents of the prospective pupil respondents and for the pupils themselves (see appendices I-N). Each information sheet detailed the research objective and method employed. It also explained the ethical position that each pupil had the right to decline the research prior to the submission of questionnaires (once submitted, questionnaire could not be withdrawn as all were completed anonymously). The signed forms were collected on the day of questionnaire distribution in advance of questionnaire completion. Consent forms were collected and stored separately from the questionnaire in order to preserve anonymity.

The researcher travelled to each school and was allocated a time period of forty minutes with each cohort for data collection. Once consent forms (parent and pupil) were collected, the researcher disseminated the questionnaires. The poetry teacher was not present for the completion of questionnaires in order to ease any anxiety surrounding the completion of questions in relation to the teacher and their pedagogy. The researcher made herself available to answer any questions that participants had throughout the questionnaire completion period. A response rate of 100% was achieved for phase two (n=200).
Qualitative Inquiry

Pupil Interview Sampling

Schools for pupil interviews (n=4) were drawn from the questionnaire research cohort. This sample was then stratified according to single-sex boys schools (SSB), single-sex girls schools (SSG), and mixed grouping schools (MG). One SSG, one SSB and two MG schools were chosen via simple random sampling for participation. Once consent was established, the poetry teacher in each school was requested to select a sample cohort representative of a range of academic abilities and interest levels in the field. The final cohort comprised twenty-four Leaving Certificate students (twelve male and eleven female) from four post-primary schools in the south of Ireland. Upon analysis of the data however one pupil interview was deemed invalid and removed from the sample due to concerns regarding the integrity of responses provided.

Pupil Interviews

Initial contact with each school from phase one secured preliminary consent for interviews to be held with pupils in the school if requested. Phone contact was again made with the liaison teacher from phase one for the selected schools. The principles and procedures of the proposed interview were outlined to the liaison teacher. Once consent was obtained from the liaison teacher an information pack was posted to the school. The information pack contained one comprehensive information sheet (containing all necessary details on the research as well as ethical approval and freedom to withdraw information. It also included details of the scheduled date and time of the interview) for each pupil and another for the parents/guardians of each participating pupil, along with two respective consent sheets (see appendices I-N).

Each interview (n=24) lasted approximately thirteen minutes. The interviews were held over a three week period between the 3\textsuperscript{rd} and the 15\textsuperscript{th} of December 2010. One to one interviews were held in the library of two schools and in a vacant classroom in the other two during their allocated English class period, at the consent of the respective teacher (who in three cases was the phase two liaison teacher for the research). In total twenty four interviews were conducted for phase two.


**Research Timeline**

The research was conducted over a four year period between 2007 and 2011. The chart below provides the timeline for the research conducted, identifying the distinct research elements and the sequence of their implementation;

![Research Timeline](image)

**Figure 3 Research Timeline**

**Graphic Overview**

The research employed a mixed methods approach, combining the use of positivist and interpretative research paradigms in the form of questionnaires and interviews. The research centred on Leaving Certificate poetry teachers and pupils and explored issues deemed as most significant in their lived experience. In total eighty Leaving Certificate poetry teachers and two hundred Leaving Certificate pupils partook in this research projects. Figure 3 overleaf provides a graphic overview of the research construct;
Figure 4 Graphic Overview of Research Design
The research yielded insightful data which served to illuminate the research objectives well. The insights gained will be delineated in the following chapters.

References


Hearne, L. (2009) Towards an understanding of the measurement of individual progression in adult guidance, unpublished thesis (PhD), Waterford Institute of Technology.


**Paper Rationale**

The following five chapters take the form of papers either published in peer review journals (three), currently in review (one) or in construction (one). Each paper has a specific focus and is directly linked to distinct sections of the research development. The order in which they are presented is the order in which the research findings emerged and consequently are also in chronological order of publication.

The development of a vision and focus in research is a long-term, ongoing process that is advanced and refined throughout one’s career (Ennis 1999, p.132). The process of topic selection for paper publication in this research was addressed in tandem with the researchers’ developing conceptualisation of their theoretical framework. The papers included here represent the organic and incremental focus of the research which was underpinned by iterative engagement with the literature in the field. It was envisaged that such focus would avoid a preclusive approach to data collection whereby emergent issues of significance to the research cohort may be overlooked in seeking to explore a pre-defined research variable. This focus also operationalises the researchers’ theoretical framework through a commitment to the ‘emic’ perspective (Marshall & Rossmann, 2010).

The paper are incremental in nature, therein evidencing the researcher’s deepening understanding of the literature in the field. The first two papers serve to report on current practices in the field providing a framework for enhanced critical engagement in the subsequent three papers. These papers evidence the emerging coherence and application of the researcher’s theoretical framework. They results of these papers draw together the key concepts of critical theory, teacher agency and English pedagogy.

The ‘network of understandings’ (Ennis 1999, p.133) that were created for the researcher by the theoretical framework and underpinned by the principles of power and dialogue served to inform the construction on paper one. Here, the researcher, aiming to establish a focused understanding of the field and the significance of the relationships within undertook an investigation into the positioning of knowledge within the poetry class. The epistemological values identified therein served to enhance the focus of the research and the theoretical frame. It also provided early identification of the relationship between the summative examination and its impact on pedagogy and knowledge production within the poetry class.
Drawing from the findings on epistemic practices in paper one and directed by the research questions, paper two sought to explore the impact of the relationship between summative assessment structures and pedagogy on the espoused educational values of poetry teachers. It also identified the artificial separation of the domains of educational achievement as an outcome of this relationship, therein contributing the body of knowledge required to answer the outlined research questions, while maintaining a focus on the emic perspective as integral to the methodological design.

The synthesisation of the cumulative body of knowledge acquired from research paper one and two both informed and demanded the development of paper three in order to articulate the wider dimensions of concern pertaining to the research. The publication of this paper, with its focus on the politics, social structure and power enabled the early development of a lens of criticality in the research focus. The development of the interpretative research approach combined with a significant focus on the critique of social reality served to further actualise the researcher’s fundamental emancipatory objectives.

As outlined in chapter one, the overarching ambition of advancing understanding and praxis within the Leaving Certificate poetry classroom was central to the construction of the research questions. Subsequent to the illumination of taken for granted social realities in paper three which delineated the wider variables impacting on the relationship established between pedagogical and examination practices, paper four sought to identify the spaces within such social realities for pedagogical advancement. With a strong focus on the theoretical and methodological frameworks, the researcher sought to establish pupils’ conceptions of effective poetry teaching, therein advancing knowledge in the field of research.

Adhering to the principles of the outlined theoretical framework, the researcher took a pronounced critical constructivist approach in the construction of the final paper which served to provide a cumulative critical understanding of the research field to date in response to the research questions. It sought to provide a path for the further advancement of research in this field, highlighting both the malign and positive variables and constructs on the teaching and learning of poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland. This paper seeks to generate critical thinking and discourse on a previously marginalised field of research.
References


Chapter IV

Paper 1
Poetry and Pedagogy: Exploring the opportunity for epistemological and affective development within the classroom

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Abstract

This paper provides a review of the priority afforded to the development of pupils’ affective and epistemic development within the contemporary poetry class. The paper reports on the findings of a research project which explored the experience of teaching and learning within the post-primary Leaving Certificate programme in Ireland. The research includes interview and questionnaire data obtained over a three year period from 2007-2010 from 80 post-primary teachers of Leaving Certificate poetry and 200 post-primary Leaving Certificate pupils. The paper highlights the malign impact of summative assessment on teachers’ pedagogical aspirations, identifying widespread professional dissonance amongst the cohort. Resultantly, empirical data highlights the reduced opportunity for epistemic and affective development within the poetry class and its impact on pupils’ learning experiences. Recommendations for pedagogical redress focus on the necessity for enhanced contemplative, critical and subjective inquiry within the poetry classroom.

Introduction

The pressures entailed in meeting the increasingly diverse range of demands imposed on the contemporary teacher are significant [1]. Hargreaves, cautions that teachers’ work is becoming increasingly intensified, with teachers expected to respond to greater pressures under “conditions that are at best stable and at worst deteriorating” [2]. Central to this concern for teachers is the task of negotiating tensions arising between the contrasting dominant ideologies of neo-conservatism and instrumentalism within contemporary curriculum policy and discourse [3]. Underlining the instrumentalist ideology is the philosophy of education for economic expansion. Consequently, of secondary concern within this value system is the holistic development of the individual. From this perspective education, the curriculum and even knowledge itself becomes a means to an end, not an end in themselves [3]. For neo-conservatives, the canon of English literature and traditional school subjects define the essence of the curriculum. Those opposing neo-conservative ideologies argue that it does not afford recognition to the social and historical nature of knowledge [4]. So closely aligned are neo-conservative and cultural heritage values that the weight of expectation for the poetry teacher to reflect such values in their pedagogy is significant, given the historical dominance of the cultural heritage model of English education [5]. Followers of the cultural heritage tradition widely endorsed the power of poetry as a means towards cultural elevation, emphasising the responsibility of schools to
lead children to an appreciation of those works of literature that have been widely regarded as amongst the finest in the language [6].

Good poetry does undoubtedly tend to form the soul and character; it tends to beget a love of beauty and truth in alliance together, it suggests, however indirectly, high and noble principles of action, and it inspires the emotion so helpful in making principles operative. [7]

While the more problematic elitist and exclusionary virtues enshrined within the cultural heritage model are now widely rejected, allegiance to some elements of the tradition remain within English education discourse [8]. In an attempt to mediate between these contrasting educational ideologies and provide students with a broad and wide-ranging poetry foundation it is asserted that the contemporary English teacher tends to “occupy the middle ground” [9], recognizing the importance of offering students the opportunity to experience the canonical texts and “literary greats”, in addition to acknowledging the more pragmatic duties of English teaching. From an epistemological perspective, this stance would strongly suggest a position of multiplicity on the part of the teacher [10], where it is felt that students should be taught to believe that information is neither absolute nor externally controlled and where pupils are encouraged to have different perspectives on texts, in an environment where “everyone has a right to his own opinion” [11]. However, in an education system which has been increasingly directed toward economic instrumentality [4], as is evident within the Irish context [12], tensions arising from this mediated stance within the teaching of English are widely acknowledged with the “delegated gatekeepers of both linguistic and critical literacies, facing new questions about the purposes and priorities of their discipline” [13]. The impact of globalisation has resulted in instrumentalism and technical rationalism emerging as the dominant traditions of thought within contemporary schooling structures;

The role and function of education are undergoing dramatic changes in response to these economic imperatives. The notion of a broad liberal education is struggling for its very survival in a context of instrumentalism and technocratic rationality where the catchwords are “vocationalism”, “skill formation”, “privatization”, “commodification,” and “managerialism” [14].

Responding to economic demands, performativity, rather than constantivity has come to characterise educational policy [15]. Target setting, testing and assessment have become synonymous with the process of learning [16] in what Eisner describes as the development of an technicised cognitive culture [17]. Within this cultural framework it is asserted that the
conditions required for intuitive insight are quite different than the subsequent dispassionate, logical testing of it [18]. Consequently, subjects of affective and subjective orientation such as poetry are severely challenged to withstand the patterns of standardisation evident across the curriculum. In addition, given that instrumentalism is charged with the marginalisation of the aesthetic in education [19], the challenge of holding ‘the middle ground’ for many poetry teachers is proving increasingly difficult. Within this culture, epistemological dualism [10] within the poetry classroom becomes a pedagogical concern. Outlining the emergence of what she terms a ‘damaging epistemological shift’, Marshall [20] cautions;

Something very odd is happening to school English. There has been a subtle and barely perceptible shift, whereby what was once the lifeblood of the subject is in danger of being drained from it, leaving it devoid of the spirit it once contained.

**The necessity for an interconnected approach to poetry pedagogy**

Pepin [21] suggests teachers’ beliefs and conceptions are manifested in their practices and can be traced back to, amongst other constructions, their epistemological positions. In addition Trigwell et al., [22] have shown that approaches to teaching are directly related to approaches to learning. The value systems espoused by teachers’ through their pedagogies therefore afford the potential to significantly influence pupils’ learning experiences. The importance then of providing an educational experience espouses a critical approach to learning and encourages pupils’ to achieve a mature epistemological understanding cannot be underemphasised.

Kuhn et al., [23] assert that an orderly progression in levels of epistemological understanding can be observed and the attainment of mature epistemological understanding is based upon the synchronization of the subjective and objective dimensions of knowing. Acknowledging this, the importance of incorporating both the subjective and objective, the cognitive and affective and the emotional and intellectual concurrently within the poetry classroom becomes evident. Pike [24] too attests that the relationship between the emotional and intellectual is something which cannot be ignored if teaching in the arts is to be truly aesthetic. Drawing on the writings of Iser and Eliot, who assert that the highest of all teaching is essentially aesthetic in character, Pike argues for an ‘aesthetic approach’ to the teaching of aesthetic subjects such as poetry where the development of personal growth supersedes the transmission of knowledge.
Context
Post-primary education in Ireland generally begins at the age of twelve and continues for six years. A common programme which aims to build on the education received at primary school, termed the Junior Cycle, is followed by students for the first three years leading to the Junior Certificate examinations. This is followed by an optional year, entitled Transition Year which aims to advance the personal, social, educational and vocational development of pupils. Subsequently, the Senior Cycle, (more commonly referred to as the Leaving Certificate years) spans two years and concludes with a summative Leaving Certificate examination. This research focuses on poetry teachers and pupils working within the Senior Cycle or Leaving Certificate years.

The following section of this paper details initial findings from a longitudinal research study which began in 2007 and is currently being conducted on the teaching and learning of poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland. The purpose of this research is to conduct an exploration into the poetry teachers’ and pupils’ perspectives on a range of pedagogical topics and ideological values. Claims outlined previously in this paper which summarise contemporary research in this field are supported by the initial findings of this on-going research study.

Methodology
This research uses the combined theoretical framework of the positivist and interpretative educational research paradigms in doing so this study takes a ‘pragmatic research approach’ [25]. The study comprised two key phases completed by both Leaving Certificate teachers and pupils.

Phase one was quantitative in nature and consisted of the completion of a self-administered questionnaire. The key objective for this stage of the research was to obtain preliminary findings on a number of central research questions from a broad range of geographical and culturally diverse schools. This data served to highlight areas of interest and relevance for phase two. Statistical analysis was performed using PASW (Predictive Analytics Software) Statistics v.17, while open responses were categorised based on emergent themes. Each category was codified and entered into the PASW. When analysing the data, simple descriptive analysis was required and utilised to provide an account of the practices and espoused views of the teachers and pupils involved. The teacher questionnaire was sent via
postal distribution to 50 post-primary schools throughout the Republic of Ireland, while the pupil questionnaire was disseminated in 8 schools by the researcher.

Phase two was qualitative in nature and consisted of detailed semi-structured interviews with 10% of both research cohorts in a gender stratified sample of phase one participants. The interviews were semi-structured in nature to enable to collection of data pertaining to specific beliefs while also affording teachers and pupils the opportunity to discuss issues of particular relevance to them. The purpose of this phase was to conduct an in-depth inquiry into the issues emergent from phase one. Phase two data were analysed via thematic content analysis.

**Research findings**

The teacher questionnaire (phase one) elicited a 58% response rate from the schools contacted, resulting in the phase one participation of 80 post-primary teachers of English. 10% of the phase one research cohort partook in phase two interviews (n = 8 post-primary English teachers). Table 6 illustrates the gender distribution of the research cohort for both teacher research phases.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>P1</strong></td>
<td>7 9%</td>
<td>12 15%</td>
<td>19 24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSB*</td>
<td>3 4%</td>
<td>17 21%</td>
<td>20 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSG*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>41 51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M*</td>
<td></td>
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<td>55 68%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>25 32%</td>
<td>55 68%</td>
<td>80 100%</td>
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</table>

*Single sex boys' school (SSB) *Single sex girls' school (SSG)  
* Mixed school (M)

Two hundred Leaving Certificate pupils from 8 post-primary schools took part in phase one of the pupil research. Twenty four pupils were then chosen at random from these schools to participate in phase two of the research. Table 7 illustrates the gender distribution of the research cohort for both pupil research phases.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Male</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>P2</strong></td>
<td>1 0%</td>
<td>2 2%</td>
<td>3 6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSB*</td>
<td>1 2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSG*</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 2%</td>
<td>6 75%</td>
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<td>M*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8 100%</td>
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</table>

*Single sex boys' school (SSB) *Single sex girls' school (SSG)  
* Mixed school (M)
While establishing English teachers’ perceptions of their role within the poetry class research participants were not limited to the identification of a singular purpose or role. Sixty per cent of poetry teachers asserted their role as the development of aesthetic appreciation amongst their pupils; “My purpose is to help pupils appreciate poetry as an artistic, aesthetic medium which they can relate to.”, “To open students to the pleasure of cracking open and appreciating a form which they may think is difficult.”, “I want to encourage a passionate engagement with poetry amongst my pupils.”, “To inspire a lifelong love of poetry amongst my pupils”. In addition 42.5% of teachers felt their purpose as a Leaving Certificate poetry teacher was to explain poems to their class and to help pupils pass their Leaving Certificate exam; “to deal with and prepare pupils for the Leaving Certificate exam.”, “to provide various notes and questions on selected poems.”, “to help students understand themes, structure and imagery to prepare for the exam.”, “to educate, to prepare for the Leaving Certificate”. However, this technical focus was noted by teachers to have a subversive effect on the accomplishment of their primary espoused ambition of aesthetic appreciation. As outlined by one teacher in relation to this dichotomy of ambition, “When it comes down to it we’re working within the confines of the exam”. Teachers’ primary aims of inculcating an aesthetic pedagogy into the classroom were relegated to an aspirational or secondary ambition rather than an objective as outlined by another participant who noted; “My purpose is to prepare pupils for the exam and hopefully give them some love of poetry along the way”.

Poetry teachers were unlikely to ask pupils to illustrate poems through an alternate expressive art form with over half (59%) of teachers rarely (26%) or never (33%) using this teaching strategy. Seventy five per cent of poetry teachers surveyed ‘never’ (33%) or ‘rarely’ (42%) use drama-in-education when teaching, yet drama-in-education provides a highly accessible

### Table 7 Leaving Certificate English pupil participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SSB</th>
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<td><strong>Phase 1</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>61%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Single sex boys' school (SSB) *Single sex girls' school (SSG)
* Mixed school (M)
medium through which the affective domain via personal and social development can be catered for [26]. The use of response journals has been advocated as instrumental in the affective development of pupils [27], however 66% of poetry teachers who partook in this research stated they do not use response journals in their class. Composition is noted within the syllabus as a “vital necessity” [28] for Leaving Certificate pupils. Within the poetry class, composition provides rich terrain for the affective development of pupils [29], yet this activity also appears underutilised within the Leaving Certificate context. Sixty seven per cent of poetry teachers in this study stated ‘sometimes/rarely’ encouraging their pupils to write poetry and a further 17% of teachers asserting they ‘never’ ask pupils to write their own poetry.

The Leaving Certificate English syllabus in Ireland notes that students must “develop an awareness of their own responses, affective, imaginative, and intellectual, to aesthetic texts” [28] in order to foster an aesthetic pedagogy in the classroom. Congruent to achieving this ambition in the teaching of poetry is a focus on the subjective response of the pupil to a poem. To this end teachers were asked to list the most frequently occurring pedagogical activities in their poetry class. ‘Teacher questioning and class response’ emerged as the most frequently utilised pedagogical strategy in the classroom with 88% of teachers citing the frequent use of this approach in the teaching of poetry. ‘Teacher clarification’ of poetry emerged as the second most frequently cited pedagogical approach with 77% of teachers noting the regular occurrence of this method in their class. The teacher centred nature of the poetry classroom was too reflected in pupils’ responses where 54% of pupils asserted never personally analysing poetry in class in advance of their teacher’s ‘poetry clarification’. In addition, difficulties in terms of pupil self-efficacy and encouraging a subjective pupil response encountered by teachers in the teaching of poetry were also reflected upon in phase two of the research. Teachers discussed at length how many of their pupils sought to establish the ‘correct’ meaning to a poem thereby continually undervaluing their subjective interpretation of texts. Pupils highlighted their sense of frustration with what they perceived as the ambiguous nature of poetry with 71% of pupils asserting the ‘problem with poetry is that you can never be sure you are ‘correct’ in your understanding of a poem. Evident too was a sense of dependency on the part of both poetry teacher and pupil for pre-scripted responses to questions on poetry, with exam pressure and time constraints being cited as the main instigating factors in this trend. As noted by one interviewee; “An awful lot of students now want to be spoon fed with notes and you have this ridiculous situation then where pupils are
learning off essays by heart for the leaving cert which is crazy. Where is the originality going to come in?”  Indeed while confidence levels pertaining towards the study of poetry amongst pupils emerged as positive, with 58% of pupils asserting themselves as ‘confident’ in their understanding of poetry, the primary reason cited for this sense of self-confidence amongst respondents was ownership of ‘good notes’. Support for the use of traditional resources was also evident in pupil responses with pupils’ citing teacher notes (53%), the poetry textbook (42%), notes accessible on the internet (29%) and books of poetry notes (24%) as the four most effective class resources for enhancing their understanding.

Discussion

The data highlights a pattern of professional dissonance amongst teachers of poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland, who identified a feeling of discomfort arising from the conflict between professional values and expected or required job tasks [30]. While for many teachers in this research, altruistic and intrinsic motivations may have provided the grounds for becoming a teacher, such motivations were felt to be far removed from the realities of teaching within a context that endorses curriculum uniformity, test scores, competitive individualism, league tables and extrinsic rewards [17, 31]. As is evident from the findings of this research, teachers are increasingly being required to set aside personal beliefs and values and live ‘an existence of calculation’ [32]. Working within a framework in which ‘value’ appears to replace ‘values’ [32] the tensions between teachers’ sense of professional purpose and sense of performative purpose resonated clearly in this research. For the majority of teachers in this research altruistic ambition defined their role conceptualisation. Discussions focusing on the role of the poetry teacher without reference to contextual constraints or situational limitations invariably centred on conceptions of developing aesthetic appreciation, encouraging engagement and enjoyment, inspiring a love of poetry within pupils; “I want to open the minds of students to the potential of poetry to communicate on issues of significance”, “I want to enrich my pupils’ lives and help then to discover the escapism of poetry.”, “I want to encourage and enthuse my pupils and make learning fun and enjoyable for them”. However, teaching in the manner aspired to here, is fraught with both promise and peril [33]. The perennial constraints of instrumentalism posited by teachers in this research highlight the perils of altruistic ambition within the poetry classroom and gives credence to the long standing notion of the ‘say/do’ dichotomy of Irish life [34]. Teachers in this research were vocal in their criticism of the impact of summative examination on their pedagogical
aspirations, relegating the ‘ideal’ to the ‘aspirational’ as “everything is influenced by the dreaded exam paper”. Despite calls for the teaching of poetry to reflect a poem’s overall aesthetic unity [35, 36], practice appears dominated by a deep-rooted standardised approach to poetry analysis in which the transmission of dualism, the lowest level of epistemic development, appears to be well situated.

The relegation of teachers’ espoused values in the face of pressures of standardisation and performativity was seen from this research to significantly impact on the potential to develop pupils’ affective, subjective and epistemic sensibilities. The relegation of the affective and subjective in the teaching of poetry in order to meet the requirements of summative assessment emerged as a key theme. While it is widely acknowledged that enthusiastic teaching predicated on the deployment of a wide range of teaching and learning strategies, holds the key to successfully engaging pupils’ in poetry lessons [35], the predominance of a ‘traditionalist’ approach to teaching poetry was openly conceded by research participants, who felt that the nature of curriculum assessment failed to provide space for a more aesthetic approach to the teaching of poetry. The use of illustration of poetry, drama-in-education techniques and poetic composition, all holding the potential to enhance pupils’ subjective understanding remain a negated feature of the Leaving Certificate poetry classroom. Additionally, the use of response journals to track subjective poetic reflection was also marginalised within the participating teachers’ pedagogies. Cognisant of the necessity for the coordination of the objective and subjective dimensions of knowing in the development of epistemological understanding [23], it is to be noted that the malign impact of negation of the affective and subjective within the Leaving Certificate poetry class is multifaceted.

Teachers’ pedagogies as reported on in this research highlight the predominance of a dualistic approach to the teaching and learning of poetry resulting in students increasingly conceptualising reasoning and analysis as distinct from academic achievement. The predominance of this model of teaching is evident through the central role played by teacher questioning, teacher clarification, passive pupil assimilation and recited response within the poetry class structure as outlined by respondents. The widespread provision of notes from teacher to pupil as reported upon by pupils in this research evidences the pervasiveness of dualism within the Leaving Certificate poetry class. The provision of notes can be seen to scaffold the conceptualisation of knowledge as absolute and the promotion of correct or incorrect responses to poetry. Highlighting the detrimental impact of such conceptualisations, Paulsen and Feldman [37] note that students with the naïve belief that the structure of
knowledge is simple are less likely to have an intrinsic goal orientation, to appreciate the value of learning tasks, to perceive an internal control over learning, and to feel efficacious about their capacity to learn. The experience of learning poetry at Leaving Certificate Level as reported upon by students in this research consolidates the notion of the pervasive and accepted influence of dualism within the poetry classroom. Over half of the pupils in this research reported never personally analysing a poem, rather waiting for the teacher to ‘clarify’ the ‘meaning’ of the poem for them, as time spent analysing from the pupil’s perspective was seen as wasteful; “We don’t want to waste time figuring out the meaning.” Pupils reported frustration with the ‘wasteful’ ambiguous nature of poetry which prevented expedient access to the ‘meaning’ or ‘solution’ of the poem. Moreover, pupils’ highlighted support for a teacher centred, notes and textbook based class in which meaning is transparent and clearly defined. Within this value system, pupils defined achievement and ‘meaningfulness’ as correlated with knowledge retention rather than understanding; “I don’t want to lose time analysing that could be spent learning something meaningful”.

Conclusions: Finding a balance

The research highlights the existence of an aesthetic vision for poetry pedagogy amongst post-primary English teachers which embraces the affective and subjective and encourages elevated levels of critical engagement. Emergent also from the research is the complexity of effecting pedagogical ambition in a world of instrumentalism and widespread professional dissonance. In ‘Dream Deferred’ [38] Langston Hughes poses the question: what happens to a dream deferred?

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up?
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore -
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over -
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?
Deliberating the likely outcomes for a deferred dream, Hughes refuses to engage with the possibility of the dream dispelling. Hope and the concept of persistence resonate quietly within the poem. This research identifies the significant challenges facing teachers of poetry. It highlights the need to support teachers in their attempts to foster enhanced potential for epistemological and affective development within the classroom. Addressing the malign impact of absolutism, it has been asserted that this conventional epistemology “hands us a dangerous counterfeit in truth’s place, one that may pass for truth, but in fact is partial and impoverished [18]. Indeed Pike [24] cautions against the very real dangers inherent in the virtual obsession with explicitness in teaching, especially in disciplines, such as poetry which seek to nurture aesthetic experience. The importance of encouraging honest subjective engagement and multiple meanings therefore remains a central concern for the poetry class. It is asserted that “to counter the dominant view of knowledge as neutral and capable of ‘speaking for itself,’ knowledge must be approached as problematic in its social construction” [39]. In striving to develop enhanced epistemological engagement reasoned argument provides a most productive path to knowledge [23], therefore acknowledgement of the benefits of ‘sustained uncertainty’ and ‘contemplative inquiry’ within the poetry class is central to achieving this ambition [18].

Whelan [40] discusses the value of achieving balance when engaging with poetry and the arts, arguing that balance should be sought between ‘filiation’ (that to which we are born) and ‘affiliation’ (that to which we aspire) in order to truly understand, create and engage with works of art, such as poetry. Drawing on the work of Whelan, it can be asserted that effective engagement with poetry in the classroom must acknowledge both a poem’s affective and analytical attributes. Stevens [41] too argues the necessity for the coordination of subjectivity and objectivity where both should be treated as mutually beneficial rather than mutually exclusive. This notion of balance resonates deftly in the poem ‘Lightenings viii’ where Heaney compares the work of a crewman to that of a poet;
The annals say: when the monks of Clonmacnoise
Were all at prayers inside the oratory
A ship appeared above them in the air.

The anchor dragged along behind so deep
It hooked itself into the altar rails
And then, as the big hull rocked to a standstill,

A crewman shinned and grappled down a rope
And struggled to release it. But in vain.
‘This man can't bear our life here and will drown,’

The abbot said, ‘Unless we help him’. So
They did, the freed ship sailed and the man climbed back
Out of the marvellous as he had known it.

- Seamus Heaney [42]

This poem provides an exposition of the challenges facing a poet, challenges which resonate powerfully for the teacher of poetry also. It details the ‘marvellous’ of experiencing and creating poetry which is somewhat suspended above everyday experience but yet which does not lose itself in aesthetic qualities. Heaney himself commented on this poem:

I was devoted to this poem because the crewman who appears is situated: between the ground of everyday experience and the arier realm of an imagined world. An essential thing- whether you’re the poet or the crewman – is to be able to move resourcefully between these two realms, not get yourself bogged down in quotidian, yet not to lose your head in the fantastic. [43]

The challenge for teachers of poetry in achieving enhanced affective and epistemic development while working in a context of standardisation and uniformity is great. “Poetry and its rewards can be elusive” [35], however the benefits to be gleaned in the redress of poetry pedagogy hold promise. In the words of Seamus Heaney:

I can’t think of a case where poems have changed the world, but what they do is they change people’s understanding of what’s going on in the world. [42]
References


Chapter V

Paper 2
“The points, the points, the points”: Exploring the impact of performance oriented education on the espoused values of Senior Cycle poetry teachers in Ireland.

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Abstract

Teachers of English experience significant pressure in attempting to meet the requirements of the national examination system while also seeking to uphold their own ideological and philosophical perspectives on the value of poetry. Drawing on a mixed method study into the teaching of poetry at post-primary level in Ireland conducted between 2007 and 2010; this paper examines current methodological trends in poetry pedagogy. The research identifies a marked imbalance in the prioritisation of pupil development, with many teachers privileging the cognitive development of pupils’ poetic understanding over the affective. The paper also suggests limited attention to the interwoven dimensions of the affective and cognitive domains in the teaching of poetry at senior cycle level in Irish schools. This paper advocates the need to support teachers to develop an integrated pedagogy for teaching poetry in second level schools which engages both the critical and the creative in a meaningful manner.

The taxonomy of educational objectives, inclusive of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains as developed by Bloom (1956) continues to hold significant influence in teacher education, remaining as one of the most widely applied texts in education (Schoen, 2008; Fisher, 2005). In the last number of years, however, technical rationalism and measurability have become prevalent in post-primary educational provision (Eisner, 2003; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Gleeson & O’Donnabhain, 2009). This ideological shift in educative ethos challenges attempts to provide balanced development in pupils’ psychomotor, affective and cognitive domains, as prioritised in directives for successful pedagogy (Ediger & Bhaskara Rao, 2006).

It has been argued that the artificial separation of the domains in the construction of Blooms’ taxonomy has led to the perception of the affective domain as non-cognitive and thus requiring limited mental engagement (Efland, 2002). Whereas it is asserted that the cognitive and psychomotor domains lend themselves more easily to measurement and specification and thus are awarded higher levels of privilege and recognition among educationalists (Efland, 2002; Eisner, 2002). Given the difficulty of measurability associated with the affective domain combined with its inherently subjective nature, questions regarding the value of the affective domain have emerged across the disciplines (Jensen, 2001; Sinclair, 2009; Alsop, 2005) with the rational/emotional debate featuring strongly in educational discourse (Beard, Clegg, & Smith, 2007; Crawford, 2007; Robinson, 2001). This debate centres on the role of emotion in education and the prioritization of the cognitive and affective domains. The influence of the enlightenment with its focus on empiricism, scientific rigor, and
reductionism, has meant that the emotional realm is perceived by those who uphold such values as inappropriate territory (Porter, 2001; Fitzpatrick, Jones, Knellwolf, McCalman, 2004). Indeed Kant regarded prioritisation of the emotional realm as malign to the ambitions of a successful education (Beard, 2005). However, recognition of the importance of achieving balance between the affective and cognitive domains in education has grown in recent decades with, amongst others, Dewey (1948) advocating the interconnectivity of lived-experience. Dewey (1934) advocated the aesthetic and intellectual as inherently interwoven, asserting that one could not be successfully separated from the other. Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, (1964) also expressed hesitancy with regard to the artificial separation of the affective and cognitive domains and indicate that “nearly all cognitive objectives have an affective component if we search for it” (p.48). The contributions of Dewey and Krathwohl et al. have led to an increasing recognition of the importance of a pedagogical space which allows “the exploration, expression and acceptance of emotions and feelings of self and others in ways that contribute to learning” (Beard et al., 2007, p. 240). Balancing the cognitive, psychomotor, affective and indeed the aesthetic dimensions of learning holds significant benefits for students. There is need to dispel the common perception that poetry is estranged from any developmental cognitive process (Best, 1992) as young people who regularly participate in the arts have been found to learn better and to perform better in creativity, fluency, originality and elaboration than their counterparts (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999). Pupils in “arts–intensive” settings were also found to be strong in their abilities to express thoughts and ideas, exercise their imaginations and take risks in learning (Catterall et al., 1999).

Acknowledging the interconnectivity of the domains through a domain sensitive pedagogy holds the potential to provide enhanced learning and developmental opportunities within the poetry class. Research into the conceptualization of creativity has been gaining momentum over the last decade, in an attempt to construct a comprehensive theory of creativity (Russ, 2003; McWilliam & Haukka, 2008). As a result a more refined knowledge base and sophisticated understanding of the field of creativity is emergent (Mumford, 2003). Treffinger (1980) and Treffinger, Isaksen, and Firestein (1983) developed a “model of creative learning” comprising three levels: divergent functions, complex thinking and feeling processes, and involvement in real challenges. What is particularly noteworthy about this model is the presence of both cognitive and affective domains at each level of creative learning. The synergy of domains is seen within this model to be inherent in the
establishment of creativity. Creativity is consequently considered both a cognitive and affective endeavour (Fasko, 2001; Runco & Chand, 1995; Houtz and Krug, 1995; Claxton, Pannells, & Rhoads, 2005). However, the development of an integrated pedagogy which affords space for the development of creativity is not without its challenges, particularly in the current culture of technical, rational, scientific and points oriented education (Pike, 2004; Government of Ireland, 1999). Mission and Sumara (2005) argue that meeting the demands of an increasingly “product” driven educational system, has led to the emergence of a technicised model of educational pedagogy that relegates affective development to that of decorative functionality. For the teaching of poetry this in effect means that poetic analysis tends now to be dominated by technical deconstruction (Meehan, 1999; NCCA, 2009) and time given to poetic inquiry is challenged by the focus upon exam “achievement” (Eisner, 2003). The aesthetic endeavour in poetry teaching, according to Fowler and Wilson (2001) and McCracken and McCracken (2001), is now frequently displaced by prosaic standardisation.

The power of poetry as an art form to develop the cognitive domain of the pupil is widely acknowledged (Bresler, 2007; Davis, 2008; Efland, 2004). When contrasted with other genres of English studies, the study of poetry emerges favourably vis-à-vis the cognitive development of students. Students find poetry to be more cognitively challenging and emotionally engaging than prose and frequently spend longer periods of time analysing and contemplating “the poem” rather than prose (Peskin, 2007). Engaging in the process of poetry composition can act as an effective medium for the development of the cognitive domain (Dymoke, 2003). In crafting poetry pupils are challenged, inter alia, to transform knowledge in alternate form, to analyse effective thematic exposition, to cogitate on semantics and syntactics, to synthesis meaning, to investigate sound and to construct form, structure and cohesion (Ruurs, 2002; Tompkins, 2008; Jordan, Jensen, & Greenleaf, 2001; Wilson, 2007). As a tool of cognition poetry challenges us to “pare down our reality to its linguistic essentials, whose interplay, be it clash or fusion, yields epiphany or revelation, and because it exploits the rhythmic and euphonic properties of the language that in themselves are revelatory” (Brodsky, 1995, p. 208). It is therefore generally accepted, given the widely documented value of poetry, that this art form has a key role to play in the cognitive development of students. Perhaps less widely valued within the current educational framework is the importance of its contribution to the development of the affective domain for students. This research, sought to explore these issues focusing on the teaching of English
poetry in Irish schools, as similar to Lynch (2001), the authors suggest that individualistic and expressive emotional output is important for the contemporary adolescent. Poetry can have a significant role to play in the education or refinement of affect (Carr, 2005) and poetic exploration can cultivate subjective knowing and act as a catalyst in the development of complex emotional expression (Stewart, 2002; Collins, 2008). It offers a cathartic medium through which individuals can engage with the full range of human emotion and experience by providing what Motion (2001) terms a ‘meditative space’;

Poetry makes a kind of singing sense out of confusing experience. Through words, it is possible to shape and articulate our most joyous and troubling moments. When we write of loneliness, even of what may feel like despair, even of what may be despair, we discover that there is in language itself a kind of resilience, a surging, hopeful energy that is redemptive and reassuring. (Kennelly, 1999, p. 184)

**Irish Educational Context**

Post-primary education in Ireland is comprised of two distinct but interconnected “cycles”. Students enter post-primary education at the age of 12 or 13 years and immediately enter the Junior Cycle. This programme spans three years building on the education received at primary level and culminates in the Junior Certificate Examination. Following the completion of the Junior Cycle, students at the age of 15-17 years enter the Senior Cycle, more commonly referred to as the Leaving Certificate years, the name of which derives from the final exam at the end of this two year cycle. The Senior Cycle builds on the Junior Cycle and culminates with a summative examination entitled the Leaving Certificate Examination. A strong transdisciplinary emphasis on the summative examination exists at Senior Cycle level (Government of Ireland, 1999) as eligibility for university placement is governed by points attained in this examination. Thus, the Leaving Certificate years form a distinctly pressurised time for student and teacher alike. The Points Commission Report (1999) conducted to review Ireland’s system of matriculation, highlights a number of damaging effects attributed to this points system. Issues raised included negative impact on students' personal development; a narrowing of the curriculum arising from the tendency to teach to the examination rather than to the aims of the curriculum; and an undue focus on the attainment of examination results. The prevailing measurement-driven and performance oriented model dominant in Irish education (Glatter, 2003) has a significant impact on the pedagogical methodologies drawn on by the poetry teacher within the classroom. The dominant influence of the points system has lead to a teaching to the exam ideology (Government of Ireland,
within post-primary schooling, the effects of which are explored in this paper with a specific focus on the provision of an integrated pedagogical experience within the poetry class.

**METHODOLOGY**

*Theoretical framework*

This research uses the combined theoretical framework of the positivist and interpretative paradigms. In doing so this study takes a pragmatic research approach (Yardley & Bishop, 2008) as the aim of the research was not to seek a truth independent from human experience, but to enhance experience through the attentive exploration of socio-cultural values and practices (Maxcy, 2003). The research employed the use of questionnaires in phase one, to facilitate the collection of data from a wide distribution of post-primary schools. However, this research also focuses on subjective realities, therefore quantitative data alone was not deemed sufficient to explore often deeply embedded individual attitudes (Dyson, 2006). Interviews were employed to explore in greater detail emergent areas of interest from phase one.

*Phase one*

Following a review of the literature, a questionnaire developed by O’Neill (1998) was selected as suitable for adaptation using the questionnaire development framework of Radhakrishna (2007). O’Neill’s questionnaire sought to establish the perspectives of poetry teachers working within the Junior Cycle (the pre-requisite to the Senior Cycle or Leaving Certificate years) in relation to their professional role. Permission to adapt the instrument was granted by O’Neill. An analysis of the adapted questionnaire using the Gunning-Fog Index formula demonstrated a high level of readability, with a score of 10.17 being accorded to the instrument. Reliability was established by examining the test-retest reliability of the questionnaire. Over a two week interval period, a test-retest correlation coefficient of 0.82 (p=>0.001; n=8) was achieved. A pilot of the adapted instrument was then carried out to obviate the occurrence of glitches incurred in the questionnaire adaptation. The pilot was administered to two third level teacher educators, both of whom previously held poetry teaching positions at post-primary level; two researchers in the field from alternate third-level institutions, two members of a support service body for English teachers and nine Senior Cycle post-primary poetry teachers. The finalised instrument comprised sixty-seven semi-structured questions focusing on the areas of: the role of the poetry teacher, poetry studies,
the Leaving Certificate syllabus, classroom resources, pedagogy and the Leaving Certificate assessment (Table 8). This paper reports on section one, role conceptualization and section five of the teacher questionnaire. Closed questions, both dichotomous and 5 point Likert Scale were used to provide specific information based on a prescribed range of responses. Questions constructed in this form act as reliable and efficient methods for data collection due to the uniformity of data they provide (Fink, 2006). Open questions were used to explore more complex subjective teacher responses and to afford enhanced investigation into areas of significance for interviewees.

Table 8 Phase one research areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key research area</th>
<th>Embedded issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of the teacher</td>
<td>Role conceptualisation, actualisation of self-perception, self-confidence, levels of enjoyment, perception of success within the poetry class, sources of reference, challenges. Perceived importance, frequently used poets, use of poetry beyond examination prescription, pupils' abstract thinking ability, pupil motivation, poetry selection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry Studies</td>
<td>Familiarity, pupils' interests, thematic diversity, course content, prescription of poets, linkage to the Junior Leaving Certificate Syllabus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving Certificate</td>
<td>Cycle, cognitive and affective development, recommendations for improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllabus</td>
<td>Departmental resources, ICT, in-service, availability of resources, acquisition of resources, proposed resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Class frequency, illustration, response journals, creative imitation, drama in education techniques, oracy, poet visits, memorisation, pupil engagement,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Alignment with the syllabus, benefits, influence on pupils, cognitive and affective development, recommendations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving Certificate</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on an approximation of 4 English teachers working in each post-primary school in Ireland, it was decided to distribute the questionnaire to 50 post-primary schools across the country to reach a cohort of 200 teachers. The research cohort for this phase was selected using a probability sampling method (Scott & Morrison, 2006), with schools selected via a process of simple random sampling (Fink, 2006). All schools included on the Irish Department of Education post-primary school list (n=730) were accorded a randomly allocated number between 0 and 1 in Microsoft Excel using the code =RAND(). The schools were then reordered according to their number from lowest to highest. The top one hundred schools from this list were selected for contact. Once consent was obtained from 50 schools
the research cohort was established. A response rate of 58% (n=29 schools; n=80 teachers) was achieved.

Descriptive statistical analysis was applied using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 13.0. As questionnaires were completed anonymously, responses are coded Q.1 (Questionnaire 1) / Q.2 (Questionnaire 2) etc. for data dissemination.

**Phase two**

Phase two served to deepen exploration into the emergent issues arising from phase one through a series of teacher interviews. It aimed to provide teachers with the opportunity to detail their individual pedagogy rationale, without the constraints of a set schedule of invariant questions (Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood, & Son, 2004). The use of semi-structured interview was employed to gather data on the more intangible aspects of school culture i.e. values, assumptions and beliefs (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Given that a teacher’s experience of poetry education is influenced by the gender of the group being taught (Pike, 2000; Hanratty, 2008), school stratification was employed. The selected cohort from phase one was stratified according to single-sex boys schools (SSB), single- sex girls schools (SSG), and mixed grouping schools (MG). Stratified random sampling was used to identify the research cohort of phase two. Due to the in-depth nature of the interviews, data drawn from interviews with 10% of the research cohort (n=8 teachers) was determined to be satisfactory for this exploratory study (Silverman, 2005). Pilot interviews (n=2) enabled the researcher to identify certain “unscheduled probes” that would be necessary in the subsequent interviews (Berg, 2001). Interviews were conducted with two poetry teachers from the SSB and SSG cohorts respectively and with four poetry teachers from the MG cohort. An eclectic range of perspectives was emergent from this research phase as only one interviewee per participating school was called upon. Each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes with two interviews extending to seventy-five minutes. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of data representation. The interviews focused on both key emergent themes from phase one and also on issues of importance for the interviewees. Data analysis for the purpose of this research was conducted deductively, based on the research questions posed in phase one and inductively, based on the emergence of new themes (Aneshensel, 2002). In order to maintain interviewee anonymity, data for this phase of the research is reported upon in the form of I.1 (Interview 1) /I.2 (Interview 2) etc.
**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was sought from and granted by the University of Limerick Department of Education and Professional Studies Research Ethics Committee. Participation in the research was entirely voluntary and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any stage. Participants were assured that data were treated as confidential information at all stages of the research process and that requirements of the Data Protection Act (1998) were observed.

**Research Findings**

*Dichotomised aspirations*

Poetry teachers were asked to provide a subjective definition of their “purpose” as a Leaving Certificate poetry teacher. Given the complex nature of teaching, research participants were not limited to the identification of a single aim. The development of aesthetic appreciation amongst pupils emerged as the most frequently cited aim; with 60% of poetry teachers in phase one noting the development of this attribute as inherent to their role conceptualization.

The interview provided greater insight on this issue:

> I associate poetry with almost like music. I consider poetry touching that extra dimension in a person’s life. The aesthetics. It’s a gift they’re going to take with them for life. I think it should be treated differently to all other elements of the English course, being almost like a gift that you can give them (I.8).

> I want them to look at a poem and I want them to get excited by this poem. I want them to be enthused by poetry to the extent that I am. I would love to breathe more enthusiasm into the students because it’s very personal, it’s from the soul and I want them to see that (I.3).

The benefit of fostering an aesthetic appreciation amongst students was outlined by teachers to be twofold in purpose. It was noted that the development of poetic appreciation amongst pupils during their formative years would assist in nurturing continued positive engagement with poetry subsequent to their post-primary schooling. “I want to inspire my students so that they will develop a lifelong love/relationship with poetry” (Q.17), “My primary purpose is to stimulate an interest in poetry itself. I’d like them to leave the school having, like myself, one or two favourite poets themselves (Q.42). “To stimulate an interest in poetry for poetry’s sake” (Q.63). It was also noted by teachers that pupil appreciation of the genre assists in fostering a more positive attitude in relation to the Leaving Certificate exam. “With the Leaving Certificate if they have a positive attitude towards poetry they don’t see the exam as a huge mountain to climb” (I.2), “If I can get them to appreciate a poet and understand where
they are coming from they will be much better equipped for the exam” (I.5). However, the challenge of fostering an aesthetic appreciation of poetry amongst pupils was noted by one teacher who asserted “moderation” to be the key to successfully engaging pupils;

It’s hard to convince a seventeen year old fella that poems have aesthetic pleasure. It’s a nice idea and it would be something you would try to covertly bring in. It wouldn’t be something as overt as aren’t poems lovely. Moderation is probably a good thing (I.2).

While acknowledging the value of experiencing poetry as an aesthetic art form, teachers noted that this educational ambition is quite often relegated to that of an aspiration owing to the obligations of an exam-oriented educational framework;

It is very exam orientated and you just have to make sure you’ve covered the poems for the exam (I.7).

I suppose ideally I’d like them to like poetry and maybe even read poetry when school is over but I have a feeling that for some of my students once they finish English that is it for the poetry (I.6).

Forty-three per cent of questionnaire respondents highlighted a more technicised self-conceptualization, asserting their role as a Leaving Certificate poetry teacher in terms of developing lower order cognitive capacity through detailed poetic explanation, rote learning assessment and exam preparation. “To introduce and analyse the poetry of selected poets. Also to provide various notes and questions on those poems” (Q.34), “On a day to day basis my purpose is to explain any difficulties in content and language” (Q.27), “To provide students with an overview of each poet on the course paying attention to theme, language and style” (Q18), “To teach the students how to access a poem for exam purposes” (Q.45), “To deconstruct poems for my students” (Q.62). The technicised demands perceived by teachers to be exacted upon them by the pressures of the Leaving Certificate exam were reported by many respondents have a subversive effect on their aim to promote aesthetic appreciation. As noted by one teacher;

When it comes down to it we’re working within the confines of the exam and basically students have to know their poetry thematically and the language used by the poets. That tends to be my purpose in teaching poetry, unfortunately I suppose but that is the way it is (I.5).

One teacher offered an alternate perspective from their experience of teaching poetry on a concurrent Senior Cycle programme, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). This programme caters for less academically oriented students and therefore is not as driven by summative
assessment as the Established Leaving Certificate programme (Smyth, McCoy, Darmody, & Dunne, 2008).

If you compare the teaching to that of English in LCA – for me as an English teacher of LCA I have no constraints whatsoever. I can do whatever I like and my teaching is completely different. In LCA it’s great fun, we could be studying the lyrics of a modern song. We have covered a lot of Coldplay’s music. I ask them what is their favourite song, they bring in their favourite song and we get the lyrics off it then and work from there creating poetry (I.3)

Developing pupil voice

Sixty-seven per cent of Senior Cycle poetry teachers in the questionnaire identified that they “sometimes”/“rarely” encourage their pupils to compose poetry and a further 17% of teachers asserted they “never” ask pupils to write their own poems. The challenges of encouraging student composition were discussed during interview;

We don’t really have the time (for poetry writing) which is a pity I suppose because that’s where you should be encouraging the creative juices to begin (I.5).

This is a major problem. Unfortunately I’ll admit straight out I don’t do it at Leaving Cert. It’s because of time constraints. They want to be doing what’s on the course and I’m afraid that’s what we have to give them unfortunately. It would be an awful lot more value to them if we did get them to write poetry (I.8).

No we don’t. I don’t have time and I feel embarrassed to tell you that but no. It’s something I should do more often but I’m concentrating so much on the syllabus, the curriculum, the curriculum and I’m so obsessed with it that I’m forgetting; I’m leaving out very important details like getting student to compose themselves (I.3).

One teacher suggested that the pressure to work solely within the remit of “examinable material” came also from students when he suggested that pupils approach the Leaving Certificate years “like a machine” (I.4). Discussing his failed attempts to develop his pupils’ poetry writing skills he asserted; “I’ve tried before (to develop pupils poetry writing skills) but students say this isn’t relevant…the points, the points, the points”. The questionnaire data reiterates this trend with just 16% of teachers surveyed asserting they “always”/ “often” work on the development of pupils’ poetry writing skills within the poetry class.

While the development of students’ affective and subjective responses to prescribed poetry appeared more positive with over half (52%) of teachers asserting that they “always” ask pupils for a personal interpretation of a poem and a further 41% “often” asking pupils for a personal response, the interviews revealed a high level of superficiality in the development of pupils’ subjective responses to poetry. Teachers discussed at length the reluctance of pupils to
contribute their subjective interpretations of a poem and also to embrace the notion of multiple meanings in poetry;

I think the students would prefer if the teacher would just say what the poem meant but I do say it’s not like a maths problem where there’s one right answer, there’s many ways of looking at the line but if I go on with it, they’re saying well which one is it? I think they prefer something more definite at the end to finally come to a conclusion (I.7).

Interviewees suggested a sense of dependency on the part of both poetry teacher and pupil for pre-scripted responses or “notes” on individual poems;

Leaving Cert pupils are waiting for notes and they don’t want to think (I.6).

Youngsters are getting lazy and just waiting for the notes and others are lacking in confidence and they would think whatever they write down wouldn’t be as good as what they would learn off by heart (I.8).

They think if they have these notes and they regurgitate them that they will do better. You will always have the few who will work away with you but more and more you’re getting the students who are waiting for the notes (I.1).

I know teachers who give reams and reams and reams of pages of their own notes to students (I.3).

While outlining their attempts to obtain a personal response from pupils on the poetry studied, teachers frequently suggested that their attempts were often thwarted by demands for detailed notes and conclusive meanings. This impact on teacher motivation is reflected on by one interviewee who asserted;

I’m fighting against this and some of them are just sitting back passively you know ones who are very bright. They’re just not engaging because they know they’re going to learn these (notes) off. Then when you give them a question some of them regurgitate the notes without even twisting them to answer the question. I find that very disheartening (I.1).

In contrast, interviewee 4 suggested the provision of notes to be an uncontested and habitual feature of their class;

The bulk of my methodology, the bulk of how I impart my knowledge to them is note taking. We don’t spend too long on each poem before I move onto the next one. I certainly would give them a good idea of what the poem is about before I move onto the next one. (I.4)

The potential impact of this style of poetry teaching on pupil enjoyment was highlighted by one interviewee who asserted “an awful lot of those students that are forced with all their notes, after their Leaving Cert they will never ever open a poetry book again.” (I.8).

Interviewee 4 highlights the influence of performance accountability on classroom practice;
I think some teachers give them out ‘cause they want their pupils to do well. They’re afraid it will reflect on them if their pupils don’t do well and that they won’t do well if they don’t have all these phrases (I.7).

Pedagogical regression did not go unnoticed by interviewee 1 who remarked; “It’s ironic in some cases that we’re back to the rote learning which we’ve been trying for the last fifty years to get away from”.

Over half (59%) of the teachers in this research stated that they “rarely” (26%) or “never” (33%) ask pupils to illustrate poetry through an alternate art form e.g., drawing. Reasons for this included; pupils’ perceptions of the activity according to their teachers, “They would consider it childish” (I.1), teachers’ conflicting perceptions of the purpose of this activity and the purpose of poetry teaching at Leaving Certificate Level; “It’s not an art exam” (I.2) and finally, time constraints as noted by interviewee 8; “The problem is it is very difficult with the time constraints. I know if you asked me straight out what I should do – that (illustration of poems) is what I should do. It helps the pupils to empathise with the poet themselves”.

Drama is also prioritised in the Leaving Certificate English program (NCCA, 2010a) yet, 75% of poetry teachers surveyed stated that they “never” (33%) or “rarely” (42%) use drama in education methods in their Leaving Certificate class. Again teachers’ perceptions of pupils’ response was cited by many as a primary inhibiting factor;

It’s very hard to get a group of seventeen year old fellas to stand up and do a freeze frame of Elizabeth Bishop. I think you’re making a lot of people self-conscious about poetry that don’t need to be self conscious about poetry. Then what happens is you spend five minutes cajoling someone to go up and do something, then when they’re up there they feel uncomfortable about doing it and they look at you and think, I’m not two anymore (I.2).

I just couldn’t see myself winning over a class group with it (I.7).

Discussion
The data suggest a tension between teachers’ altruistic ambitions and the pressure to meet the requirements of summative assessment. While fostering an aesthetic appreciation of poetry, which engages pupils affectively and creatively, emerged as central to teachers’ perception of their professional role, in practice this was limited. The impact of a prevailing technical rationalist culture in which exam achievement is afforded priority over a broader appropriation of academic accomplishment was posited as particularly challenging by teachers in this research. “Teaching to the exam” also emerged as a significant theme. This
theme permeated not only teachers’ pedagogical philosophies, but also held influence over their methodological approaches. A widespread reductionist approach to the teaching of poetry was acknowledged by participants.

The findings highlight also the existence of a trend towards pupil passivity. The dominance of a traditionalist, lower order and teacher centred approach to poetry teaching was acknowledged by research participants, who posited that the current curriculum framework which contextualizes their everyday classroom pedagogies is failing to provide the necessary space for a more aesthetic, creative and engaging student centred approach to the teaching of poetry. While the development of student voice and of the affective domain is asserted as a primary ambition of the Leaving Certificate English syllabus (NCCA, 2010b), it appears challenged within the poetry classroom. It appears that the potential for affective development via poetry composition remains negligible at Leaving Certificate Level as this research points to the majority of poetry teachers choosing not to embark on poetry composition with their pupils. While respondents noted the benefits of poetry composition within the class, they also noted a sense of pressure to work solely within the remit of “examinable material”, thus rendering poetic composition and the development of its affective merits, a largely utopian aspiration. Meeting the demands not only of a system privileging technicism and exam performance, but also the coexisting demands of students who subscribe to a reductionist model of study was posited to afford little room for pedagogical creativity. Notwithstanding the subordination of affective development through poetic composition, this research suggests that the relegation of pupils’ subjective responses to poetry is occurring due to the pressure of achieving standardisation and measurable output for the purpose of examination. The Leaving Certificate English Syllabus asserts that students must “develop an awareness of their own responses, affective, imaginative, and intellectual, to aesthetic texts” (NCCA, 2010c p. 14). Development of pupils’ subjective and affective responses to poetry texts is significant in achieving this aim. However, disparity is evidenced by teachers in this research between the development of pupils’ “subjective voice” for the purpose of the exam and the more affective oriented development of pupils’ voice, serving to enhance pupils’ sense of self-efficacy and cultural awareness within the genre. As a result of this dichotomy, difficulties in striving to foster pupils’ own voice emerge within the poetry class, with pupils frequently attempting to discover the “correct” or “set” meaning of a poem, a trend which is exacerbated by the use of pre-scripted notes at Leaving Certificate Level.
This prescription potentially facilitates the undervaluing of poetry and contributes to a failure to appreciate the value of subjective interpretation within the genre.

Differentiated modes of representation play an important role in advancing pupils’ affective development, skills of comprehension and literacy and enjoyment (Kendrick, 2004; Cowan & Albers, 2006; Buckelew, 2003; McDonald & Fisher, 2006). One of the most widely espoused forms of differentiated representation in the poetry class remains the poetic representation through visual illustration. It is asserted that the succinctness of poetry can focus pupils’ minds on their affective responses and that the visual imagery of poetry consequently lends itself to illustration (Hope, 2008). This research indicates reticence amongst teachers to provide space for differentiated representation in the form of illustration within the poetry classroom. In addition while drama-in-education as an alternate form of representation provides a highly accessible medium through which the affective domain via personal and social development can be catered for (Cramer, Ortlieb, & Cheek, 2007; Wright, 2006), the research suggests negation of this methodology.

**Identifying Conceptual Boundaries**

A number of conceptual boundaries for the teaching of poetry studies at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland emerged from this research. The data suggest that teachers grappled with fear of “getting it wrong”. In an educational system which places value and status on “getting it right” and “knowing the correct answer” it appears that teachers may be reluctant to move into unfamiliar terrain both pedagogically and philosophically. The pressure exerted by summative examination can arguably be charged with limiting the ambitions of both pupil and teacher and placing a dependence on the “known” and the “unambiguous answers” (Dymoke, 2003). The findings of this research are not in isolation but are reflective of research emerging within the wider educational community which appears to mirror this pedagogical trend (Benton, 2000; McNess, Broadfoot, & Osborn 2003; Dymoke, 2002).

Time constraints were also asserted to be a significant factor for many teachers of poetry. The quantity of course content and limitations of time were viewed by the teachers in this research as barriers to change and experimentation. On the topic of poetry writing one teacher noted:

>This is a major problem. Unfortunately I’ll admit straight out I don’t do it at Leaving Cert. It’s because of time constraints. It’s terrible you see that an awful lot of us buy into the idea that students want notes. They want to be doing what’s on the course and I’m
afraid that’s what we have to give them unfortunately. It would be an awful lot more value to them if we did get them to write poetry (I.6).

From a broader perspective, meeting the demands of a top down accountability system in an era of left brained dominance (Pink, 2006) is seen as a pedagogical barrier by the majority of teachers in this research. Over the last decade researchers have pointed to the damaging impact of “cognitive culture” (Eisner, 2003) on creativity and innovation, an occurrence charged with separating intelligence from feeling (Robinson, 2001). Eisner (2002) asserts that we are “creating an industrial culture in our schools, one whose values are brittle and whose conception of what’s important narrow” (p.3). Consequently students have become experts at consuming knowledge rather than producing it (Sawyer, 2005). Indeed, societal acquiescence within the realm of this cultural circumstance is highlighted by Flutter and Ruddock (2004) who claim that “the public have been captivated by the language and style of this winner-takes-it-all culture” (p.1).

**Finding a Balance**

In a world beset with conflicts, internal as well as external, isn’t it of equal if not greater importance to balance the sharpening of our intellects with the systematic cultivation of our hearts? (Zajonc, 2006, p. 1)

Contemporary society and consequently education, prizes rationality, logic and cognitive exposition so much so that critics of a technical approach to schooling have charged it with “freezing people’s imaginative thinking” (Greene, 2000, p. 124). Such a technicised emphasis contrasts greatly with the innovative and aesthetic roots of poetry. Poetic analysis has consequently become synonymous with technical deconstruction (Meehan, 1999; NCCA, 2009); poetic inquiry replaced by exam “achievement” (Eisner, 2003) and aesthetic endeavour, frequently displaced by prosaic standardization (Fowler & Wilson, 2001; McCracken & McCracken, 2001). Kind, Irwin, Grauer, & Cosson (2005) advocate the need for a different type of educative focus;

Education is longing for a deeper more connected, more inclusive, and more aware way of knowing. One that connects heart and hand and head and does not split knowledge into dualities of thought and being, mind, and body, emotion and intellect (p.33).

Clearly teachers of poetry face challenges in terms of their professional aspirations and the reality of their classroom practice. Teachers need to be supported in order to remain true to their pedagogical aims, particularly in educative cultures where common practice may differ significantly from these aims. Pink (2006) argues that the demands of society have surpassed technical knowledge and now call for the development a conceptual era, an era in which
advancement is inexorably linked with imagination, creativity and innovation. Inherent in the development of such aptitudes is the inculcation of an integrated pedagogy into the classroom which takes a holistic approach to pupil development. An integrated pedagogy recognises and celebrates the interconnectivity of “lived experience” (Dewey, 1948) through both the cognitive and affective domains and in doing so creates a learning environment in which pupils are enabled to develop as both creative and critical thinkers. One of the key missions of the schools must be to educate for creativity (Sawyer, 2005). Creativity should hold a fundamental role in the English classroom (NCCA, 2010a) which is affirmed and celebrated.

Moreover, acknowledging this necessity calls for an awareness of the reality that creativity is not necessarily comfortable (Mission & Sumara, 2005). From an educational context it involves posing questions, testing new methods, re-orienting relationships and at times “getting it wrong”. It involves the subversion of pre-existing beliefs. Stepping outside traditional conceptual boundaries can facilitate an enhanced understanding of self-imposed limitations and also potentially serves to highlights pathways for transcending such limitations. Lieberman and Miller (2005) advocate the necessity for educators to embrace a “cosmopolitan rejoinder” in the face of educational change. This means commitment to an educational ethos which supports enablement rather than prescription of good practice and which prioritises the tacit knowledge and teacher creativity. In the case of the poetry teacher, the adoption of an integrated pedagogy which provides opportunities for more connected and inclusive ways of knowing (Kind et al., 2005) holds the possibility to recalibrate current pedagogical disequilibrium. Drawing meaningful value from poetry within the contemporary classroom is neither an elusive or utopian task, it is a pedagogic necessity. In the development of a resourceful and innovative society, the provision of an integrated pedagogy which recognises both the cognitive and the affective has much to offer. The development of pupils as both critically engaged and creative thinkers is now more than ever an educational imperative.
References


Chapter VI

Paper 3
Packaging poetry? Pupils’ perspectives of their learning experience within the post-primary poetry classroom

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Abstract

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 (Sumner 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
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 9.
Table 9 Participating Schools

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*Single sex boys' school       **Single sex girls' school         ***MG Mixed gender school

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 5th year pupils and 89 (44.5%) were 6th 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.
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 6 Differentiated Responses](image)

As shown in Figure 5, 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.

![Figure 7 Leaving Certificate Examination Preparation](image-url)
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 7, pupils’ educational aspirations outside the remit of the examination appear
nominal.

Figure 8 Importance and Benefit of Poetry
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 8). 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.

![Figure 9 Pupils’ Extra-Curricular Poetry Engagement](image-url)
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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Chapter VII

Paper 4
“What rough beast?” Conceptualising the poetry teacher in Ireland through the eyes of the pupil

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Abstract

Predicated on the conviction that listening to pupil voice enables teachers to gain a deeper understanding into teaching and learning processes, this study explores pupils’ conceptions of effective poetry teaching. Taking a phenomenographic approach, this study draws on interviews conducted with twenty-three senior cycle pupils in Ireland. Set against a widespread educational backdrop of pupil apathy and disengagement in the poetry classroom, this study identifies five significant categories of learning for pre-service teachers aiming to optimise student engagement within the poetry classroom.

Introduction

Borrowing from Yeats, Scholes (1999) poses the question, “What rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches toward graduate school to become an English teacher?” (p.69). Taking a transcontextual overview of teacher identity, Wright (2005) contends that whether in post or in training, the desire to improve performance is ‘a condition’ of being an English teacher (p.1). Scholes (1999) argues;

We stand, I believe, for something far deeper than our particular curricular or institutional settings. We stand for whatever dignity this language can afford the human beings who find expression in and through it. We stand, above all, for sharing the powers and pleasures of this language with one another and with all those who seek our guidance in attaining those powers and pleasures (p.71).

Much has been written on desirable competencies and attributes for English teachers. Yet, what actually constitutes ‘good practice’ in English teaching is not fixed and never has been (Davison & Dowson, 2003, p.xviii). The most salient recommendations reflecting current desirable practice are often to be found within National Curriculum guidelines. The National Curriculum in England stresses that teachers should develop pupils’ competence, creativity, cultural understanding and critical understanding within the English classroom (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, 2011). In Ireland, the aims of the Leaving Certificate English syllabus highlight the necessity for teachers to develop in pupils a mature and critical literacy, a respect and appreciation for language and an awareness of the value of literature (NCCA, 1999). Similarly, within the New Zealand curriculum, it is emphasised that teachers of English should strive to develop their students’ competencies in using and responding to the English language through reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and presenting; responding personally to and thinking critically about a range of texts and understanding and appreciating the heritages of New Zealand through experiencing a broad range of texts.
(Ministry of Education, 2007). In these countries, the centrality of holistic student development predicated on critical and meaningful encounters with poetry texts is emphasised. However, current research in each country reflects poorly on the effective implementation of the aforementioned aims (Fuller, 2010; Hennessy, Hinchion, & Mannix McNamara, 2010; O'Neill, 2006). There exists a patent transcontextual “gap between espoused policy – that value the arts within education – and the actual ‘in school’ practices, that tend to fall significantly below the lofty aims existing in policy” (Bamford, 2006, p.24). Teachers are often ‘held accountable for results but not for the methods employed unless the results are unsatisfactory’ (Bennett, 1995, p.48). Accordingly, it appears that exam performance rather than student centred pedagogy dominates within poetry classrooms (Fuller, 2010, p.157). The consequences of this dissonance are significant. As anxiety surrounding test performance increases, teachers often become less sensitive to student needs, resulting in enhanced exam performance coinciding with diminished student commitment to learning (Hargreaves, 2003, p.11).

**Experiencing poetry: England and N. Ireland, New Zealand and Ireland**

Reporting on the findings of an extensive examination of poetry teaching in schools in England from 2006-2007, the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills [Ofsted] (2007) noted that poetry was notably weaker than other aspects of English inspected, suggesting that by comparison poetry was underdeveloped in many of the schools surveyed. The report highlighted a strong focus on imitation in pupils’ responses which was reducing pupils’ opportunities to write independently in response to poetry (p.4). Owing to the ‘low priority’ (Dymoke, 2003, p.18) and status afforded to poetry within this context, Benton (2000) concludes that in England, “when poetry is introduced it is primarily with the examination in mind” (p.86). Noting the perils of teacher prioritisation of exam performativity, Fuller (2010) cautions against the pressing danger of ‘mechanistic’ response and argues that teachers who encourage mechanistic response are in danger of “preventing children from saying what it is they want to say” (p.157).

Unsurprisingly then, recent research conducted by Hanratty (2010) reports that the vast majority of pupils, both male and female, studying GCSE English, dislike the study of poetry (p.8). In New Zealand too it has been noted that “all is not well with poetry” (Locke, 2010 p.367). The low prioritisation of poetry in New Zealand schools poses cause for concern.
according to O’ Neil (2006), who describes the place of poetry within the curriculum as ‘peripheral’ and notes the existence of a serious ‘cycle of deprivation’ (p.114) in teaching poetry. O’ Neil (2006 p.44) found that 29% of teachers in New Zealand rated their pupils’ attitude towards poetry as between hostile and uninterested, 63% between uninterested and reasonably interested and 6% between interested and enthusiastic. Cause for concern is also warranted in Irish post-primary schools. Similar to the case of schooling in England, tensions between teachers’ sense of performative purpose and professional purpose at post-primary level in Ireland are significant (Hennessy, Hinchion, & Mannix McNamara, 2011). Within the Irish context, such tensions have resulted in the constriction of pupil learning and the prevalence of a ‘traditional’ approach to poetry pedagogy (O’Neill, 1998). As a result, for many pupils, achievement and meaningful engagement with poetry is often associated with the retention of knowledge over understanding (Hennessy et al., 2010). In many cases the repetitious use of teacher centred methods within the poetry classroom in Ireland has led to widespread passivity and disengagement on the part of the student (Government of Ireland, 2007, p.31).

The need for enhanced poetic engagement

In the current “era of left brain dominance”, the place and status of arts based subjects such as poetry are often relegated (Pink, 2006). As a result, there exists a growing perception amongst pupils that artistic, creative and aesthetic skills are of less importance and thus less valued than the more ‘easily accessed’ cognitive, linguistic and mathematical skills (Pink, 2006). Current research into student disengagement within the poetry classroom suggests cause for concern for future poetry teachers who will need to challenge the disconnect between their own enthusiasm for poetry and the ‘lack of reciprocity’ on the part of the pupil (Dias, 2010, p.22).

Advancing on traditional pedagogies which, at best, have paid ‘lip service’ to creative teaching, English pedagogy guidelines, aiming to reconceptualise the notion of ‘good teaching’ are now calling for energising, purposeful and imaginative learning experiences (Cremin, 2009). A considerable body of literature exists on conceptions of being a ‘good’ English teacher (Davison & Dowson, 2003; Evans, Midgley, Rigby, Warham, & Woolnough, 2009; Gill, 2001; Smoot, 2010; Wright, 2005). Less evident surprisingly is the availability of research on pupils’ perceptions of effective poetry teaching. Given that pupils’ views of their
In reviewing, teachers can influence motivation and interest in schooling, as well as their approach to learning (Strikwerda-Brown, Oliver, Hodgson, Palmer, & Watts, 2008), the importance of listening to pupils' perspectives in striving toward the reawakening of passion amongst pupils of poetry cannot be underestimated. Accordingly, this research explores pupils' conceptions of effective poetry teaching at Leaving Certificate level in Ireland.

**Methodology**
Variations in pupils' conceptions of effective teaching were investigated using a phenomenographic approach. This approach was based on that of Ballantyne, Thompson and Taylor (1998) who sought to establish principals' conceptions of competent beginning teachers, in Central and South-East Queensland. This research method, established by Marton (1981), was developed as a means of understanding learning from the pupils' point of view. Phenomenographic research focuses on individual's subjective views of the world and their ways of creating meaning of the world around them (Sommer, Samuelsson, & Hundeide, 2010 p.165). In so doing, it aims for a collective analysis of individual experiences (Akerlind, 2005). This non-dualist ontology suggests a relationship between the person experiencing, i.e. the pupil, and the phenomenon being experienced, i.e. poetry at Leaving Certificate Level. In employing this research approach it was necessary to apply methods for data collection where pupils could think, reflect and in different ways, share their 'world of experience' (Sommer, et al., 2010 p.164).

For the purposes of this study, twenty-three Leaving Certificate students (twelve male and eleven female) from four post-primary schools in the south of Ireland (one single-sex girls, one single sex boys and two mixed schools) were interviewed. 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. Interviewee selection was carried out by the class teacher. Teachers were asked to select pupils who were representative of a range of academic abilities and interest levels in the field. Interviewees are referred to by gender (M/F), number and school pseudonym throughout the paper to ensure anonymity. Each interview took the form of a ‘deep’ and ‘open’ conversational partnership in which the interviewer assisted the process of reflection on conceptions of teaching and learning in the poetry classroom through open-ended questioning and empathetic listening (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Booth, 1997). The open-ended questions focused on four central areas; the
pupil; the course; approaches to teaching poetry and the exam. It is to be noted that while question structure was planned in advance, in order to approach the phenomenon in question from the four outlined perspectives, the interviews were conducted in an ‘open’ manner following unexpected lines of reasoning that often lead to new reflections. In addition the researchers considered the interviews to be ‘deep’ as all lines of discussion were followed until they were exhausted and both interviewee and researcher were assured of mutual understanding (Booth, 1997).

**Data Analysis**

The researchers were cognisant of the need to ‘bracket’ and to set aside subjective preconceptions in order to fully register the student’s point of view and in doing so actualise the phenomenographical goal of producing categories of description (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). Several steps were used to minimize researcher subjectivity, as advocated by Harris (2008). First; analysis was conducted from the second-order perspective (Marton, 1981). The researcher was committed to recording and interpreting the data from the participants’ perspectives. While data were compared with other participant data, it was not judged against the researcher’s ideals or existing knowledge. Additionally, no codes, premises or categories were generated prior to data analysis; all were developed from participants’ transcripts.

The set of categories that resulted from the analysis were not determined in advance, but ‘emerged’ instead from the data (Akerlind, 2005). In the initial screening of the transcripts, meaningful data segments were identified and isolated from the source data to form, what Marton (1986) terms, *pools of meaning*. The data in these pools of meaning were then analysed a second time along with other data in the pool to compare meanings, and thus criteria were formed in association with each pool. Following this, pools with several related criteria were combined, while others were divided as finer distinctions between the data became apparent. The quotes were then given preliminarily labels and placed back in their original contexts with their associated labels to ascertain whether the established labels matched the overall meanings. At the same time they were compared to other transcripts, until the key aspects that differentiated the various ways of experiencing poetry at this level were identified (Pang & Marton, 2005). Once criteria were established for each pool and the meanings stabilised, the collective meaning of the pool was abstracted to form a *category of description* (Marton, 1981). These categories of description were organised in order of
emerging frequency into what Marton (1981) terms an *outcome space*, representing all the possible ways the population under study experienced the phenomenon (Akerlind, 2002). The whole process was a strongly iterative and comparative one, involving the continual sorting and resorting of data, in addition to continuous comparisons between the data and the developing categories of description, as well as between the categories themselves (Akerlind, 2005).

**Findings**

Five distinct yet interconnected hierarchical categories emerged from the data. As the research was concerned with understanding pupils’ conceptions of effective teaching, the categories established are presented as statements of competency here:

1. an effective poetry teacher reflects a mature epistemological position
2. an effective poetry teacher encourages critical thinking and understanding
3. an effective poetry teacher holds a positive attitude towards poetry
4. an effective poetry teacher encourages poetic composition
5. an effective poetry teacher reflects and promotes creativity

Table 1 presents a graphic representation of the development of the *outcome space* for this study. It provides a structured summary of pupils’ beliefs concerning the nature of effective poetry teaching. Aligned with each established belief set is the corresponding conception premise (or *label* – as noted previously) as constructed by the authors. Each conception (or *category of description*) is aligned with the pool of meaning (containing the labels for each beliefs set) from which it developed.
Table 10 Effective poetry teachers - Analysis of pupils' conceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conception</th>
<th>Pupils’ beliefs</th>
<th>Conception premise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mature epistemological position</td>
<td>Poetry is not about rote learning</td>
<td>Poetry is subjective</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A good teacher listens to our opinions</td>
<td>Poems are representative of multiple meanings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A good teacher asks everyone for their opinions</td>
<td>Discussion promotes learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>All opinions should be accepted once ‘backed up’ with reference to the poem</td>
<td>Multiple perspectives can be legitimate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rote learning essays is 'just being a parrot'.</td>
<td>A transmission approach constrains learning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is no learning in it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you write what someone else tells you, at times you don’t understand what you are writing about</td>
<td>Personal engagement is required for understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking and understanding</td>
<td>A good teacher teaches 'what we need to know' but also focuses on understanding</td>
<td>Understanding poetry transcends exam preparation and utilitarianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you understand the poem you will have more to write about</td>
<td>Clarity of interpretation leads to enhanced reflections</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If I don’t understand a poem it’s like a brick wall</td>
<td>Lack of understanding inhibits the potential engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We get so many notes and don’t know what to do with them. We don’t understand them</td>
<td>Reliance on the rote learning of notes inhibits understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class discussion gets you thinking</td>
<td>Facilitating alternate perspectives is a positive learning strategy</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She explains where I went wrong so I understand</td>
<td>Feedback promotes understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive attitude</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When the teacher is enthusiastic about a poem we are too</td>
<td>A positive attitude towards poetry engenders positive reactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They’re doing it not because it’s on the course, but because they want to</td>
<td>A positive approach should transcend exam requirements</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Poetic composition</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry writing helps you express your feelings</td>
<td>Poetry writing is cathartic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It gives you your own ways of looking at things</td>
<td>Poetry writing encourages individualist self-expression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It can help you learn techniques and structures</td>
<td>Poetry writing provides insight into the process of composition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once you do things yourself you understand what other people are doing themselves</td>
<td>A practical and engaged approach to learning is beneficial for understanding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflects and promotes creativity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading and writing alone is boring. We would like projects or group work</td>
<td>A variety of teaching strategies is necessary to maintain student motivation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity in teaching would be nice</td>
<td>Creative teaching strategies stimulate student interest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A bland approach to poetry makes it difficult to express yourself and be creative</td>
<td>Creative approaches to poetry engender creative responses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An effective poetry teacher reflects a mature epistemological position

Conception overview:
The importance of encouraging a variety of responses to works of poetry emerged strongly from interviews. Pupils remarked on the enhanced enjoyment and learning fostered within a class where group discussion was facilitated and multiple perspectives were not alone heard, but acknowledged by peers and the class teacher. Rote learning was viewed as counterproductive as it failed to generate views on poetry outside those provided by the textbook or teacher. Pupils who experienced this approach to learning noted the lack of personal and class engagement to be detrimental to their learning. A ‘mature’ or complex epistemological disposition implies engaging critical thinking and upholding a willingness to take a stance and defend it with reasoned argument (Elen & Verburgh, 2008; Kuhn & Weinstock, 2002). In the case of this study, the data revealed that pupils placed considerable emphasis on the importance of a teacher practising and advocating a mature epistemological stance.

Pupils’ beliefs and conception premise:
Pupils’ identified the importance of the teacher allowing space for varied interpretation of poems. Those teachers who reflected epistemological positions of multiplicity or relativism in their teaching were commended;

She usually tells us poetry is subjective and just because I think one thing it doesn’t necessarily mean it’s right or wrong. (M2, St Brigids)

I like that you can have your own opinion and there’s no right or wrong answer. If you feel the poet is trying to say something and the person beside you doesn’t find that in it, it’s alright because you can write what you feel he/she is trying to tell you. (F1, Glenmead)

My opinion is accepted so long as it has valid point referring to the poem. (M2, St Marys)

Learning environments which fail to recognise multiple and often variant poetic interpretations, relying instead on standardised and rote approaches to learning were viewed negatively by pupils;

You learn off poems and throw out what you’ve learned off on the day. It’s not really showing your ability. All you have to do is memorise it. Anybody can do that. It should be more focused on the student. (M4, St Brigids)
The other classes seem to rote learn essays in the hope it will come up. That’s not really learning it. It’s just being a parrot. That’s not what poetry is about. (M4, Middlefield)

They tell you what to do and you look at the poem and pick out what lines you want to learn, and then it’s like if you learn the notes from the teacher, you’ll just cough it back up and write it in the exam. Sometimes you don’t even know what you’re writing. (F1, Glenmead)

Teachers who fail to acknowledge the subjective nature of poetry by discouraging personal response were negatively highlighted;

I don’t like teachers who don’t listen to the students. Someone who comes in and just literally opens the book and reads out the notes from the book that you could have sitting in front of you anyway and makes you take it down and then corrects your tests as ‘well I told you to say this, so you should have said that rather than giving your own opinion’. (F1, Glenmead)

Discussing a sense of ‘fear’ associated with contributing a personal response in class, owing to standardised performative pressure, one student noted:

There was a cold feeling towards it in the upper class. A lot of people really don’t enjoy English there. You feel a lot more pressure to do well. Our class was quiet when it came to questions. I feel the higher the level the class you’re in the quieter things tend to be. You think there is a definite right or wrong and you’re frightened to put up your hand in case they say ‘ok you can go down to the lower class now’. There is a distinct difference in the feel and the atmosphere of the classes. (F3, St. Marys)

Interviewees noted the benefits of learning from a teacher who actively encourages genuine personal response, pointing towards enhanced enjoyment and engagement within an inclusive learning environment;

She’ll give her personal opinion but at the end of the day she doesn’t try to influence us. I think it’s easier for me to get into the poem because it’s easier for you to learn from someone like that. (M1, St Bigids)

I like teachers who understand students and get where you’re coming from and don’t try to push you into liking something when you don’t like it. If you try to push people into liking them it won’t work. You need to be able to listen to students and understand. (F1, Glenmead)
An effective poetry teacher encourages critical thinking and understanding

Conception overview:
Advocacy of deep engagement with poetry was seen by pupils as central to the role of the poetry teacher. Practices which encouraged authentic exploration into poetry were commended. Understanding the poem was seen to align with the ability to provide effective written responses. The dissemination of study notes without adequate poetic analysis was seen to greatly impede understanding and learning.

Pupils’ beliefs and conception premise:
Pupils’ perceived an effective poetry teacher to be one who encourages in-depth understanding of poems through the promotion of critical thinking. Pupils were positively disposed to teachers who used alternate approaches to poetry teaching, such as the use of audio to enhance understanding. They also noted the necessity of understanding for writing personal responses to poetry;

My teacher seems to teach us what we need to know but also tries to help us understand it. She’s trying to teach us about poetry. (M4, Middlefield)

I like a poetry teacher who knows what they’re talking about and understands that it isn’t just writing an essay off notes. It has to be that we understand as well as she does. (M1, St. Brigids)

In addition, a palpable sense of frustration was evident amongst pupils discussing learning within an environment where understanding was not prioritised;

If you don’t understand what the poem is about or what the message is it’s like a brick wall. You can’t work it out. Then when you start the questions you can’t understand them. (F4, St. Marys)

I think she tries to cram it all in and when we go home were like, ‘ok she’s just given us all these notes, what are we to do with them’. You don’t understand the poem properly then. (F4, Glenmead)

Pupils noted enhanced enjoyment, interest and understanding in classes where teachers encouraged critical thinking around the poems being studied;
Miss X has made us more interested in it because we’re encouraged to know more about it rather than just knowing what we need to know. (M4 Middlefield)

She compares things to other things. She gets us to think actively about what’s going on in the poem. It makes it more enjoyable for the class. (M3, Middlefield)

An effective poetry teacher holds a positive attitude towards poetry

Conception overview:

Passion and enthusiasm on the part of the teacher was seen by pupils as fundamental to effective poetry teaching. Teachers who illustrated these qualities were more likely to foster positive attitudes towards poetry amongst their pupils according to interviewees. Conversely, pupils noted lack of enthusiasm on the part of the poetry teacher to be ‘absolutely awful’ (F3, St. Marys), often serving to foster a sense of apathy within the respective class cohort.

Pupils’ beliefs and conception premise:

Enthusiasm was seen as most desirable by pupils. Enthusiastic poetry teachers were perceived to generate enthusiasm amongst the class, and in doing so foster a ‘fun’ learning environment for pupils, as noted in the following extracts;

I like poetry teachers who are really enthusiastic about the subject because then everyone gets enthusiastic and were not just sitting there bored. It’s actually fun to be in the class. (F2, Middlefield)

Someone who’s enthusiastic about it and not just doing it because it’s on the course and who does want to do it. You can see that coming through, whether they want to do it or whether it’s just for the sake of it. (M5, St. Marys)

In addition to being enthusiastic, pupils noted the importance of teachers’ personal attitudes towards poetry. Teachers who are passionate about poetry and display their love for poetry were commended by pupils;

She’s really passionate about English. Our whole class is interested when she talks as opposed to a teacher who doesn’t care what they’re doing. Everyone listens and everyone understands when she talks. (F2, Middlefield)

You know she has a love for poetry the way she teaches it. It does impact on how I feel about poetry. If we had a teacher that didn’t like poetry then we wouldn’t like it. We wouldn’t be as interested and they wouldn’t try to persuade us to like it. Our teacher is great; she does her best to help us to enjoy it. (M3, St. Brigids)
Lack of enthusiasm on the part of the poetry teacher was noted in many cases to have a negative impact on pupils’ engagement with poetry. Additionally, it was noted in a number of cases to result in fatigue and stress for the pupil;

There’s nothing worse than having a teacher who hates what they do. If a person doesn’t enjoy what they’re doing it’s absolutely awful. (F3, St. Marys)

Generally if it’s a poet she doesn’t like she says ‘we’ll get through this, it’s fine’ and we’ll just go with it, but by the end of it everyone is getting tired. It does have a certain impact when you’re studying it. I think it affects your opinion. (F3, Glenmead)

She’s always complaining about the amount you need to know so it’s kind of just rushing through the course. It stresses you out even more because she’s like ‘ok girls, we need to have this one done by Friday’. We’re not getting to enjoy learning poetry. (F5, Glenmead)

An effective poetry teacher encourages poetic composition

Conception overview:
Encouraging and facilitating poetry composition was seen as an integral to the role of an effective poetry teacher by many interviewees. A significant number of pupils commented critically on the lack of space for poetry writing within their classes. Pupils noted poetry writing as important in developing awareness of poetic technique and also acting as an outlet for cathartic reflection, self-exploration and self-expression.

Pupils’ beliefs and conception premise:
Pupils outlined the benefits of poetry writing from both a personal and scholastic learning perspective. Focusing on the development of self, pupils noted the benefits of poetic composition in relation to self-discovery and self-expression;

We don’t do poetry writing and I personally would like to. It gets you to give your own ways of looking at things. (M4, St. Brigid’s)

I personally would love to write poetry in class. It would be great. It doesn’t matter that it’s not in the exam because I enjoy it. It would be a chance for me to share my poetry and see what other people think about it which you don’t normally get the opportunity to do. I think it would be nice. Poetry says an awful lot about a person and it would be pretty cool to see what people come up with. (F3, St. Marys)
From a scholastic perspective, pupils’ noted the process of poetry writing to be advantageous in developing enhanced understanding of poetic form and technique;

I think it’s beneficial because you’d learn poetic techniques more and you would understand how to write and how they would be writing it and you would understand the metaphorical aspect of it because you would be writing it thinking ‘yes there is something behind this’. Once you do things yourself you understand what other people are doing themselves. (F4, Glenmead)

The cathartic potential of poetry writing was also noted;

I think poetry writing is really important because it helps you see different ways of expressing your feelings. A lot of people don’t do that. They don’t know how to express their feelings. If people had an idea of how to put down feelings on paper, not even in very long poems or words, it could help a lot. (F3, St. Marys)

An effective poetry teacher reflects and promotes creativity

Conception overview:

The importance of a creative approach to poetry pedagogy was emphasised by pupils. Group work was frequently commended, as were class discussions and project work. Within this conception a ‘bland’ approach to the teaching of poetry was strongly criticised and noted to be detrimental to the development of creativity.

Pupils’ beliefs and conception premise:

The importance of engaging pupils in poetry through the use of creative pedagogy was identified by many pupils. This was predicated on the belief that creative approaches to teaching foster enhanced enjoyment, in addition to improved learning;

There should be a more enjoyable way of learning poetry. Maybe like group work or doing projects on poetry rather than it just being this kind of reading, writing thing. (F3, St. Marys)

I think it’s a bit bland, just because it’s all in the book and then she writes on the board and you’re either reading or writing the whole time during the class and there’s not even that much time for discussion so I think it’s hard to express yourself and be creative. (F4, St. Marys)
Discussion

The analysis of responses reveals that pupils in this study held clear understandings of the complex nature of poetry as a genre. Many of the conception premises identified suggest that pupils were aware of the nature of teaching and learning and additionally that they held clear ideas on the manner in which they wished to be taught poetry. Given the advanced nature of pupils’ understanding in relation to teaching and learning within the poetry class, listening to pupils’ perspectives is an important step in developing more responsive, student centered poetry teaching. Davison, Moss and Daly (2011) advocate that “becoming an English teacher is to become a teacher who works with the subjectivities of students themselves” (p.20). The perspectives of these pupils provide valuable feedback for teacher educators of poetry. In attempting to address the rising apathy, and in many cases, antipathy of pupils towards poetry (Hanratty, 2010; Hennessy et al., 2010; O'Neil, 2006), pupil voice provides an essential perspective for the pre-service teacher (Harrison et al., 1990). The data evidence that pupils articulated their thoughts on effective and ineffective poetry teachers clearly and discussed these beliefs with palpable conviction. Pupils outlined a clear picture of how they like to be taught, how they learn best and the type of teacher that best facilities this learning. Initial teacher education needs to listen attentively and take initiative on teacher training in order to respond effectively to pupils’ needs.

The importance of understanding how pupils learn best should exist as a central theme in any teacher preparation course (Youens & Hall, 2006). Within this study pupils identified a desire for enhanced creativity, critical engagement, authentic analysis and personal response within the poetry class, in preference to the current pervasive culture of standardisation, conformity and exam performativity (Ball, 2003; Hennessy et al., 2011; Smyth, 2006). In many cases pupils’ aspirations for their poetry learning experiences were reflective of syllabus guidelines, with a strong desire for understanding, space for personal response and the provision of a more holistic learning experience. Teacher educators need to prioritise practices which encourage pedagogical exploration, critique and development rather than the maintenance of practices which foster patterns of standardisation and exam performativity.

Enhancing pre-service poetry teachers’ confidence concerning the creative opportunities provided for within the curriculum is essential in order to support them in transcending many of the ‘conceptual pedagogic boundaries’ (Hennessy et al., 2011) they may face within the poetry classroom. This may also contribute towards countering what many teachers perceive
as imposed pedagogical pragmatism due to the dominance of summative assessment pressures, as in the case of Irish post-primary schooling (Breathnach, 2000). Teachers individually and collectively have agency to legitimate or delegitimate what Hill (2007) terms as the “current hegemonic project of liberalising capital” (p.208). Therefore, inculcating an understanding of teacher agency as potentially transformative at pre-service level is crucial. It is to be noted that the effective contestation of standardisation and didacticism within this field requires attention at both post-primary and higher level. Lortie (1975) suggests that pupils’ observations of their teachers generate powerful beliefs about teaching and learning from an early age. He argues that beliefs about teaching which are generated through an ‘apprenticeship of observation’ often serve to perpetuate traditional teaching methods at the expense of more informed and critical pedagogies. Challenging the often problematic beliefs developed within an ‘apprenticeship of observation’ amongst pre-service teachers requires the provision of alternative learning experiences at third level. Developing pre-service teachers’ professional role identities at third level necessitates engagement which actively encourages, demonstrates and provides the space to explore practices of critical reflectivity and critical pedagogy (Bryan & Tippins, 2005; Miller, Lambeth, & Nicholas, 2008). Encouraging critical thinking and challenging dissonance in negotiating professional identity development should be central to the role of the teacher educator (Alsup, 2006). Such an approach holds the potential to reveal the possibilities of new ways of constructing thought and action which transcend current reality (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009). Active opposition of the charge that teacher education (and arguably post-primary education) now operates as a desiderata and a sine qua non of capitalism (Hill, 2007 p. 215) requires the collective appropriation of agency.

**Conclusion**

Enabling and supporting pre-service teachers to transcend pragmatism in post-primary education and in so doing to embrace an active role in the counter-hegemonic struggle is now imperative. As noted by Owens (2008), “never before has the need been so great for classroom teachers to become agents of change” (p.1). If poetry is to be taught in the way that best serves the needs of pupils, as conceptualised by participants in this study and outlined in English syllabi, then enhanced pedagogical practice drawing from a renewed philosophical understanding of the value of poetry both at post-primary and third level is now called for. This is not an insurmountable challenge. Teacher education is uniquely positioned to promote
reflexive critical pedagogy for its pre-service teachers. In so doing it may contribute in no small measure to challenging the ontological ambiguity dominant in performance based and exam driven schooling. Facilitating the development of an empowering teacher agency at pre-service level can, in no small part, encourage teachers to provide the space required for pupils to engage critically and creatively with poetry, thus providing more creative and empowering classroom experiences for pupils.

References


Chapter VIII

Paper 5

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(Paper in preparation)
Introduction

Eisner (2004a) proposes that “the kind of minds we develop are profoundly influenced by the opportunities to learn that the school provides” (p.13). The provision of apposite learning experiences is essential in the development of minds which are creative, critical, passionate, and engaged. Central to the establishment of such educational experiences is the commitment of teachers. Exploring the identity of a teaching community committed to democratic and liberating education, Greene (2009) contends;

I would like to think of teachers moving the young into their own interpretations of their lives and their lived worlds, opening wider and wider perspectives as they do so. I would like to see teachers ardent in their efforts to make the range of symbol systems available to the young for the ordering of experience, even as they maintain regard for their vernaculars. I would like to see teachers tapping the spectrum of intelligences, encouraging multiple readings of written texts and readings of the world. (p.95)

Yet such educational experiences, as envisaged by Eisner and Greene, may appear aspirational. According to Hill (2007) the cultural meaning of schooling is changing; now more explicitly geared to performance, results and efficiency (p. 210). Performativity, it appears, has emerged as a dominant goalpost in modern schooling, often at the cost of more critical educational encounters. Within this performance driven approach to schooling, value appears to replace values (Ball, 2003, p.217). Not impervious to the growing pressure of performativity on educational ideology and pedagogy, the poetry classroom has too become a host for the growth of performative practice and the narrowing of critical educational experiences. The pressures of standardisation and bureaucratic accountability are acutely felt. A growing body of evidence suggests that for some the poetry classroom is no longer a forum for ontological and epistemological exploration and discussion, but rather has emerged as a monomodal site of repression, conformity and disengagement (Gordon, 2008b; Hanratty, 2010; Hill, 2007). Thus, calls for the reconceptualisation of current practice informed and advanced by a commitment to critical pedagogy are unsurprising, facilitating a move ‘beyond the methods fetish toward a humanising pedagogy’ (Bartolomé, 2009).

Globalisation and the growth of Neoliberalism in Education

Giddens (1990) defines globalisation as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distinct localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events
occurring many miles away” (p.64). According to Sen (2002), globalisation advances neo-
liberal values and also impacts positively on human rights;

Globalisation has contributed to the progress of the world, through travel, trade, migration, spread of cultural influences, and dissemination of knowledge and understanding (including science and technology). To have stopped globalisation would have caused irreparable harm to the progress of humanity. (p.11)

Those attempting to draw reference to the social problems incurred in the wake of globalisation are often marginalised in the context of ‘tacit obedience’ to the emergent neo-liberal social contract (Biraimah, Gaudelli, & Zajda, 2008). As education has become central to work, economic capacity, global competitiveness and national identity, it is an important site of policy development (Marginson, 2005). Fortified by the argument that market forces operate in the best interests of the majority, accumulating wealth equates with the good life, and that education must support these ends, neo-liberal ideology has consequently emerged largely uncontested within society (Biraimah et al., 2008). Schools then, as sites of social production and reproduction, have not escaped the influence of neo-liberal policy. Ostensibly acting as sites for deep and democratic critical inquiry and holistic development, schools are now often more focused on human capital development than their foundational goals (Hill, 2007). Pressure to conform to the dictates of neo-liberalism and corporate hegemony has resulted in a narrow and politicised realisation of education enforced through surveillance and the imposition of tightly monitored testing of ‘chunks’ of knowledge deemed as suitable and conservative enough to advance the dominant culture (Hill, 2007, p.207)

The Place of Critical Pedagogy
Critical pedagogy is a philosophy of education guided by passion and principle. This philosophy is committed to the development and enactment of a culture of schooling that supports the empowerment of marginalised and disenfranchised students to help them develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009; Giroux, 2010). Advancing on this definition McLaren & Kincheloe (2007) define critical pedagogy as “a state of becoming, a way of being in the world and with the world – a never ending process that involves struggle and pain but also hope and joy shaped and maintained by a humanising pedagogy” (p.394). Central to this philosophy is the encouragement of students to engage with the world in all its complexity in order to reveal
new ways of constructing thought and action beyond how it currently exists (Darder et al., 2009, p. 11). In keeping with the perspective of knowledge as socially constructed, McLaren (2009) notes the importance of questioning, whose interest does school knowledge serve? Who is excluded as a result? And who is marginalised? (p.63). Such questions appear fitting, now more than ever, at a time when the whole cultural meaning of schooling is changing (Hill, 2007, p.210).

Yet critical approaches to schooling are, in the main, notable by their absence. Signaling the impact of cultures of performativity on this trend at post-primary level, Boxley (2003) notes that teachers are aware that the manner in which they relate to their students is being constrained by the expectations of performativity. However, for McLaren (2000) this dissonance is more circumvent, as he argues that the major purpose of education now is to promote globalisation and capitalism (p.196). This critical principle makes explicit hegemonic processes in schooling, where structures established serve to perpetuate the economic and cultural marginalisation of subordinate groups leading to a scenario where freethinking and oppositional thinking have been curtailed and circumscribed (Darder et al., 2009, p.12; Hill, 2004, p.515). Within the hegemonic capitalist agenda in education, established through what Apple (2004) describes as an ‘audit culture’, increased standardisation, accountability and measurability is widespread. Hill (2004, p.210) argues that schooling is now explicitly geared to performance, results and efficiency. Precluding the space for a critical approach to learning, a ‘teaching to the test’ ideology has emerged globally within education.

**The rise of exam-driven schooling: U.S.A and the United Kingdom**

Striving to meet the demands of rapid globalisation and increasing educational marketisation, performativity and creativity have been central to global educational policy developments and reform agendas over the past decade (Burnard & White, 2008). However, as accountability and surveillance, in the form of high stakes testing and school evaluation increases for members of the educational community concurrent to marketplace demands, the pressure to perform intensifies for those involved. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the goals of performativity are simultaneously monitored. However, Burnard & White (2008) suggest that no attempts are being made to show how and in what ways teachers accommodate creativity and performativity in their practice (p.668). As a result, in many
schools, bureaucratic accountability yields a concerted focus on exam performativity, rather than recognising and utilising a broader conceptualisation of educational performativity (Gleeson & O Donnabháin, 2009).

An analysis of educational policies in a variety of contexts, including that of the United Kingdom and the United States of America by Scoppio (2000), identified common trends of standardization, testing and performance-based funding. Au (2008) notes that standardized testing as the principal tool for educational reform and accountability has been implemented with notable intensity in the United States and the United Kingdom. It is not surprising then that accountability has become most controversial in US education (Suspitsyna, 2010). The United States is now in its third decade of exam-driven education reform (Kornhaber, 2004). Hursh (2005) argues that this reform agenda has been characterised by efforts to standardise the curriculum and implement standardised tests in order to hold students, teachers, and schools accountable. In so doing, it is argued that the state has devised a system in which it can govern schools from afar through policies which promote testing and accountability, in a move which Ball (1994, p.54) describes as ‘steering at a distance’. Thus, business rhetoric in educational policy is increasingly evident as performance standards and efficiency have become synonymous with the redefinition of education to serve the labour market (Lipman, 2000).

Accountability emerged as one of the defining principles underlying the development of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) programme in America, which was legislatively enacted in 2002. This programme resulted in a radical restructuring of public schooling across America making standardised testing the primary measure of school quality (Ravitch, 2010, p.15). NCLB primarily aims to accomplish this goal by requiring that ninety-five per cent of students be assessed through standardized tests aligned with ‘challenging academic achievement standards’ (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Due to the pressure to raise test scores under this regime however, Hursh (2007, p.506) argues that teachers are now compelled to teach the skills and knowledge that will be tested, often neglecting more complex aspects of the subject. As a result the discourse of creativity within the performativity agenda rarely moves beyond rhetoric (Burnard & White, 2008). The foundations of this dichotomy are delineated by Olsen & Sexton (2009) who identify the impediment of standards discourse to successful teaching as evident in the comments of one of their interviewees;
I feel the hair on my back of my neck raise when I’m doing *To Kill A Mockingbird* with my accelerated class and the department chair asks me, “Well, what standard are you teaching to with that?” I’m like, “Oh my god, what standard am I not covering?!” *To Kill a Mockingbird* is one of the greatest pieces of literature. They’re learning about dialect, and they’re learning about theme and character as well as the world. (p.22)

The fortitude of poetry as a creative and ‘complex’ genre, to withstand the same pressures of standardisation and relegation is potentially limited. As critically noted by Eisner (2004b) “the kinds of meaning one secures from poetry are not the kinds of meaning one secures from propositional signs” (p. 302).

In the United Kingdom too the propensity of teachers to value and foster creativity in their classrooms is questionable due to a dominance of performative culture (Burnard & White, 2008). In an effort to raise standards, stringent curriculum requirements have been developed here. Subject-area tests are required at several stages. The national curriculum is ‘to occupy some 70 percent of school time in state schools’ and is accompanied by standard assessment tasks (SATs) to be implemented at four key stages (Tomlinson, 2001, p.56). In addition, according to Alexander, Rose & Woodhead (1992) not only is the content of the curriculum prescribed, so too is the pedagogy, through the insistence on a subject rather than topic-based interdisciplinary primary curriculum in schools. Critiquing the agenda of such requirements and regulation, Hill (2004) argues that “education has been increasingly – and increasingly nakedly- subordinated, not just to the general requirements of capital, but also to the specific demands made of governments by the capitalist class” (p. 506). These requirements and demands, according to Hill, operate according to neo-liberal ideology on the production of labour-power for capitalist enterprise. Notably, the practice of teaching under these reforms, according to McNeil (2000) shifts away from intellectual activity towards dispensing fragments of information sent from an upper level of bureaucracy (p.4). Commenting on the impact of such regulation, Fielding (1999) questions “how many teachers of young children are now able to listen attentively in a non-instrumental way without feeling guilty about the absence of criteria or the insistence of a target tugging at their sleeve?” (p.280). Thus, creativity holds an ambiguous place in the United Kingdom, particularly within schooling (Marshall, 2001). There exists a notable uncertainty as to its value in this context spurred on by “the notion that standards have been sacrificed on the altar of the personal growth of the child” (Marshall, 2001, p.1). If held in apparent and ill grounded opposition to the
development of standards, in an era of standardisation, the perceived value of poetry in this context appears nominal.

The case of Ireland

In order to sustain Ireland’s position within the emerging knowledge society, a significant reform agenda has been put in place here, in which the quality of the teaching force has emerged as a key concern (MacRuairc & Harford, 2008, p.502). As a result, a growing culture of performativity has emerged in schools in the Republic of Ireland over recent years (MacRuairc & Harford, 2008). This growth has been strongly influenced by theories of human capital formation as evidenced in the ubiquity of business values emergent within this education system (Dunne, 2002; Gleeson & O Donnabháin, 2009). A resultant emphasis on liberal functionalism, technicist outputs and pragmatic thinking has evolved according to Gleeson & O’ Donnabháin (2009), at the expense of learning processes. The emergence of such a utilitarian emphasis runs counter to the rhetoric to build more inclusive schooling, which is inherently problematised by the issue of narrowly defined ‘standards’ (Dyson et al, 2003).

A ‘Commission on the Points System’ was established by the then Minister for Education in Ireland, Micheál Martin, in October 1997. The brief of this commission was to review the system of selection and entry to higher education in this country. Amongst its findings, the commission reported a narrowing of the curriculum due to a strong tendency to teach to the examination at Leaving Certificate level, rather than to the aims of the curriculum. It also noted an undue focus, at this level, on the attainment of examination results (Government of Ireland, 1999). Within this highly competitive system, where points and attainment levels are prioritised, the pressure on schools and teachers to produce results has led to a culture of cramming, the commodification of knowledge and arguably the commodification of children (Hennessy & Mannix McNamara, 2011b; MacRuairc & Harford, 2008; Press & Woodrow, 2005). McDermott, Henchy & Golden (2007) note that “in a performance-oriented culture, there is a pressure on individuals, organisations and sectors to engage in work that is visible and measurable, work that can be exteriorised and translated into results, so that one set of results can be measured and compared to another (p.248). However, poetry is rarely measurable, and concurrent pupil development is oft transcendental. This poses tensions for the teacher of poetry in the Irish classroom. Due to the largely ineffable nature of poetry, the
technicised demands exacted upon teachers by the pressures of the Leaving Certificate exam often have a subversive effect on student engagement and the development of creative and aesthetic appreciation in the poetry class (Hennessy, Hinchion, & Mannix McNamara, 2011). Commenting critically on the ill fitting relationship between the nature of the arts and the current dominance of technical rationalism in Irish schools, former Director of the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) in Dublin, Sheridan (2002) noted “many of the great artists were only comprehensible long after they died; you [students] however, have to be comprehensible by June” (p.5). The tensions highlighted by Sheridan emulate the dichotomised aspirations of poetry teaching in the current measurement driven Irish education system. As observed by Sternberg (2006, p.2), many governments say they want creativity, but their actions belie their words. This sentiment appears true in the case of the Irish context.

The implications of performativity
Eisner (2004b) argues that as we focus unremittingly on standards, rubrics and measurement, the deeper problems of schooling, such as the quality of conversations being generated in classrooms, go unattended (p.299). Such conversation is all too rare in schools according to Eisner. Hennessy et al. (2011) note a lack of higher order engagement and critical thinking in conjunction with a marked subordination of subjective engagement in the poetry class. They contend that the demands of meeting the requirements of a system privileging technicism and exam performance fails to provide the space necessary for critical encounters with poetry (p.191). It appears then, that as test scores increase, the value of what we are testing, and the educational challenge presented therein may be concurrently in decline.

A narrowing of curriculum is also evident within the poetry class owing to the dominance of a ‘teach to the test’ ideology. Dymoke (2001) argues that poetry has become “solely, even deadningly, linked with written critical response on terminal examination papers” (p.39). Noting the reticence of teachers to engage in poetry writing classes, she highlights the case of the 1998 NEAB chief examiner’s report as point in case. Here students were reported to have “clearly limited their own personal achievement” by responding in poetic form to an exam question. Again, Sternberg’s (2006, p.2) assertions in relation to the paradoxical demands of government concerning creativity and performativity ring true here. Gordon (2008a) highlights the problem of an underdeveloped phonic understanding of poetry in the
He argues that the semiotic resource of sound is undervalued in the classroom due to an “increased tendency to codification of curricular elements and to the explicitly utilitarian (i.e. efferent, not poetic) purposes of reading, writing, speaking and listening (p.228)”. Moreover while working within the narrowed parameters of exam prescription as outlined here, Eisner (2004b) warns that the message we send to our students is that test scores are what matters in education (p.300). Piirto (2004) provides a stark illustration of this assertion in her account of a Colorado principal who responded to the No Child Left Behind programme, announcing ‘creativity is not permitted’ in the curriculum and advocated that the teachers in his school should focus on teaching students to be successful in tests. The realisation of this message, whether inferred or explicitly stated, appears dominant in poetry classrooms globally. Driven by reductive outcome measures, which fail to provide space for creativity, it appears that education has lost sight of the needs of students and is failing to recognise the broad range of capacities inherent in the increasingly diverse student population (Slee, 2010).

Within cultures of performativity, where knowledge is perceived as measurable and often explicitly defined, the propensity to question, challenge and critically evaluate knowledge is arguably limited. In fact, Eisner (2004b, p.299) argues that district policies make it clear that what is tested is what is to be taught. Accordingly Ball (2003) notes that “the ethics of competition and performance are very different from the older ethics of professional judgment and co-operation” (p.218). As a result “students find ways to cut corners – as some teachers do” (Eisner, 2004b, p.300). Darling-Hammond (1985) articulates in detail the existence of this trend over twenty years ago, drawing on the results of a study of teachers’ views of the effect of educational policies on their classroom practices. She notes;

We learned from teachers that in response to policies that prescribe teaching practices and outcomes, they spend less time on untested subjects, such as science and social studies; they use less writing in their classrooms in order to gear assignments to the format of standardized tests; they resort to lectures rather than classroom discussions in order to cover the prescribed behavioral objectives without getting ‘off the track’; they are precluded from teaching materials that are not on prescribed textbook lists, even when they think these materials are essential to meet the needs of their students; and they feel constrained from following up on expressed student interests that lie outside of the bounds of mandated curricula. (p209)

Yet, despite the widespread recognition of this trend, little has changed in relation to classroom practice over the last two decades. Within the contemporary poetry class this trend
of ‘corner cutting’ is most evident in the pervasive use of prescripted responses or ‘notes’ within the poetry class, evidence of a mass predisposition towards standardisation and rote learning and away from critical thinking and inquiry. Signaling in many cases, the suppression of subjective response, passive assimilation and the negation of critical engagement (Hennessy, Hinchion, & Mannix-McNamara, 2010; Zwaagstra, Clifton, & Long, 2010), the ineffectual use of this resource on the part of both the teacher and pupil is arguably one of the most significant threats to creativity and critical thinking in the poetry classroom. Dias (2010) also notes the ideological dangers posed to the genre by this process arguing that “poetry cannot matter when the reader’s response is filtered through or directed by the teacher’s directive questions or comments” (p.23).

The good life?
Trant (1998) defines curriculum as ‘the story we tell our children about the good life’. Drawing on this concept it would appear that the story generated within the poetry class is one narrowly defined by competitive individualism and depersonalisation, where “freethinking, and oppositional thinking, have been chopped, curtailed, circumscribed” (Hill, 2004, p.515). An overt focus on measurement and testing education has also resulted in the emergence of an affective/effective divide, where focus on the affective is perceived to compromise effectiveness in education (McNess, Broadfoot, & Osborn, 2003). As a result, Mission and Sumara (2005) note that meeting the demands of an increasingly product driven educational system has resulted in affective development being relegated to that of decorative functionality. Aesthetic endeavour in education is frequently displaced in favour of prosaic standardisation (Fowler, 2001; McCracken & McCracken, 2001). Yet, despite the widespread relegation of affective development in the poetry class, cognitive development has failed to experience an inversely proportionate advancement. Focus on cognitive development within the poetry class has been severely impeded with the onset of cultures of performativity. The acts of analytical thinking, critical questioning and reflection required in the advancement of cognitive development have been sidelined within the poetry classroom. This development has had a notable impact on pupil agency and voice according to Greene (2005) who argues that in this context teachers “identify their students by grades and test scores; they categorise them in accord with a bell curve; they impose extrinsic standards, depriving the young of a sense of agency or the chance to think for themselves” (p.77). Problematising this development, it is to be noted that such ‘compression and suppression’ of critical space is
now all too evident within education (Hill, 2004), a practice which ultimately gives way to the perpetuation of status quo and reification of hegemonic practices.

**Cultural Reproduction**

McLaren (2003) comments that “the dominant curriculum separates knowledge from the issue of power and treats it in an unabashedly technical manner; knowledge is seen in overwhelmingly instrumental terms as something to be mastered (p.72)”. Furthermore, he argues that while knowledge is always an ideological construction linked to particular interests and social relations, this conception of knowledge generally receives little consideration in education programmes” (p.72). With this in mind, little seems to have changed since Cubberley’s (1916) illustration of schooling, which likens the school to a production line:

> Our schools are in a sense factories, in which the raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life. The specifications for manufacturing come from the demands of twentieth-century civilisation, and it is the business of school to build its pupils according to specifications laid down. (p.338)

Such assertion draws parallel to the findings of Leitch & Mitchell (2007) who, in an article entitled ‘Caged birds and cloning machines’, explore pupils’ and head teachers’ views on schooling through visual image. Among the images drawn by pupils to represent school experience were ‘an input-output processor’, ‘a monster’, factories, birds in cages, prisons, mazes and a ‘conveyor belt’. Here, pupils noted the ‘facade’ of school structures, ostensibly appealing but which conceal the reality of repressed pupils ‘locked’ within. Performance and achievement, aligned with conformity and regulation were noted to be predominant in pupils’ conceptualisation of schooling (Leitch & Mitchell, 2007). The emphasis placed on conformity and entrapment by pupils in this study reinforces the perspective of schooling as a forum for social reproduction. From this perspective “schools reproduce the structures of social life through the colonization (socialisation) of student subjectivities and by establishing social practices characteristic of the wider society” (McLaren, 2003, p.77). Within the poetry classroom, evidence of this process is clear through the repression and compression of pupil voice and subjective response aligned with standardising practices such as note taking and rote learning (Banaji, Cranmer, & Perrotta, 2010, p.8; Hennessy et al., 2011). The pressures exerted by high-stakes testing (the Leaving Certificate examination in Ireland for example)
operate as a relay in the reproduction of dominant social relations in education (Au, 2008). According to Hursh (2005, p.5), as calls for the advancement of economic productivity and employability heighten, education becomes less concerned with developing well-rounded liberally educated individuals and more concerned with the development of skills required to become an economically productive member of society. In a move charged with ‘bordering on Philistinism’ by Adams (2011), the economic goals of education appear to have sidelined social, societal and community goals (Hill, 2004 p.509). In addition to the narrowing of the skill set being developed within current education structures, Au (2008) notes that high-stakes tests, through the structuring of knowledge, actively selects and regulates student identities, and thus contribute to the selection and regulation of students’ educational success. The concept of excellence within this environment ignores social differentiation and its requirements, while providing ‘political symbols’ to assert credibility on a system based on inequality and selection (Popkewitz, 1985). Therefore, while a minority of pupils who become successfully tuned to testing regimes are successful, according to Doddington & Hilton (2007), “many of the remainder starved of interest and pleasure in learning, languish in an atmosphere of anxiety and disaffection (p.ix).” Such negative impact according to McNeil (2009) fall most heavily on marginalised students whose entire schooling experience becomes dominated by the attempt to raise their test scores at any cost (p.394). Thus, McNeil contends, standardisation and performativity pressures shape a system of widespread discrimination (p.394).

**Hegemonic naturalisation**

Perhaps one of the greatest achievements of current neoliberal movement is its largely uncontested dominance. This is achieved, in the main through the ostensible transfer of responsibility from the government to the individual (Hursh & Martina, 2003). Neoliberalists attempting to legitimate the movement argue that neoliberalism frees the individual from the oppressive intrusion of the state therein allowing each person to realize their own personal autonomy (Baez, 2007). They argue that as individuals within neoliberalism are rational, autonomous agents (Lemke, 2001), they will act in a way which reflects equality and social justice. In the classroom this translates to the ostensible use of student-centred and democratic pedagogic practices. Neo-liberalism thus presents itself as ‘self-evident’ as if no alternative exists (Bourdieu, 1999, p.29). When presented in this manner the often ‘brutal’ ‘delegitimization of the delegitimizers’ ensues (Hill, 2004, p.514) whereby those who seek to
contest hegemonic practice are frequently discredited due to their apparent contestation of absolute practice. Thus any possible contestation against the naturalisation of a singular truth or ideology is silenced. This holds true within the Irish poetry classroom, where those who seek to contest the pressures mounted on poetry teachers and the emergent patterns of educational inequality, are silenced by reports of the ‘legendary autonomy’ (OECD, 1991) held by Irish teachers for example. Such reports are therein used to place responsibility for educational failings solely on individual teachers. Noting the development of hegemonic naturalisation in schools, Hill (2004) argues that “truth is what people can be conditioned to believe” (p.514). According to Baez (2007) the expansion of economic rationality into cultural, political, and social spheres and the promotion of a meritocratic society is the most distinctive aspect of neoliberalism and one of its most powerful ideological tools. According to Bourdieu & Passeron (1990) meritocratic ideology is very attractive to the dominant classes, as it not alone justifies their privileged position in society, on the basis of their natural “giftedness” but it also helps to gain acceptance for this system from the underprivileged. Accordingly, attributing success or failure solely to an individual’s ability, in effect absolves the state and wider society of any responsibility for inequality in the education system (Considine & Dukelow, 2009).

The deprofessionalisation of teachers in neo-liberal education

Hursh (2000) notes that “the efforts to impose standards, assessments, and accountability has been devastating for teachers and students”. Emphasis on a performance-orientated, managerially effective model of teaching has caused many teachers to struggle with the development of wider educational goals (McNess et al., 2003). Dewey (1986/1922) argues that imposing an alleged uniform method for everyone breeds mediocrity in all but the very exceptional. As a result teachers often find their values challenged or displaced by the pervasive ‘terrors of performativity’ (Ball, 2003, p.216). Cognisant that standardisation reduces the quality and quantity of what is taught and learned in schools (McNeil, 2009), teachers are faced with the dilemma of conformity or rebellion in praxis. For many teachers submission to school conservatism prevails in an effort to enable their pupils to achieve the ever increasing academic targets being set in national testing (Greene, 2005; McNess et al., 2003). Yet, it is to be acknowledged that, “if you create a culture of schooling in which a narrow means/ends orientation is promoted, that culture can undermine the development of intellectual dispositions” (Eisner, 2004b, p.300). Teacher acquiescence to neo-liberal agendas
can therefore be seen to exist at the expense of critical pupil development. Such acquiescence and removal of autonomy is not without ideological contention on the part of the teacher however. Hennessy et al. (2011a) evidence considerable tension between poetry teachers’ inherent and often altruistic values, and the practice required to meet the demands of high stakes testing. This tension, termed by Ball (2003) as a form of ‘values schizophrenia’, and by McNess (2003) as ‘fragmented identity’ (p. 248), occurs where “commitment, judgment and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance” (Ball, 2003, p.221). However, Hill (2004) contends this tension can be ironically alleviated somewhat through the ‘discourse of professionalism’. This discourse constructs teachers as committed to self-improvement, the upgrading of their skills and strategically orientated to the effectiveness of their work (p.512). Such discourse according to Hill “institutes a mentality of self-regulation by which the teachers themselves become the mechanism for legitimising the surveillance, marketisation and codification of their work practices” (p.512). Within this process a ‘corrosion of character’ (Sennett, 1998) is all too evident amongst teachers who experience a loss of professional independence and often have to set personal values and beliefs aside in meeting the targets set down within audit cultures (Perryman, Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2011)

**Reasserting the role of the Poetry Teacher**

Feed imagination food that invigorates.
Whatever it is, do it with all your might.
Never do to another what you would not wish done to yourself.
Say to yourself, “I will be responsible”.

(Moore, 1963)

Hargreaves (2003p, xvii) argues that we are at a major crossroads in education where teachers may ‘become the clones and drones of policy makers’ and spend their time teaching to the test, maintaining order, and rigidly adhering to standardised curriculum scripts. Alternatively, he suggests, they may “reach far beyond the technical tasks of producing acceptable test results, to pursuing teaching as a life-shaping, world-changing social mission” (p. xvii) in which creativity and ingenuity is generated among students by experiencing such qualities in the classroom. Exploring the issue of choice, Greene (2005) notes that “to think of making choices and of acting on those choices takes us into the domain of ethics, unless we are among those clinging to notions of absolute right and wrong” (p.79). In exploring the
concept of ethicity for the teacher of poetry ontological and ideological role exploration is necessitated.

Exploring the ethicity of pedagogical choices made by the teacher, attention to the purpose of the genre is warranted. Dias (2010) challenges the passive acceptance of poetry as part of school curricula, questioning “How and why does poetry matter?”. He argues that teachers need to urgently address this question, determining the true value of poetry for pupils. For Langer (1966) the purpose of poetry as an art form is the objectification of feeling;

> The arts objectify subjective reality, and subjectify outward experience of nature. Art education is the education of feeling, and a society that neglects it gives itself up to formless emotion. Bad art is corruption of feeling. (p.12)

Langer (1953) asserts that “the entire qualification one must have for understanding art is responsiveness” (p.396). Dias (2010) too contends that “if the poem is to matter, the reader(s) must be engaged by the poem, actively involved in remaking that poem” (p.23). The realisation of poetry as a creative act is enabled therefore “when one is reading for oneself, registering whatever feelings, associations, and memories the poems evoke, and is not inhibited by the guiding questions of the teacher or by the anticipated pattern of questions to follow” (p.24). In addition, the importance of poetry as an arts based subject in developing pupil agency is noted by Eisner (2004a) who argues “the arts teach students to act and to judge in the absence of rule, to rely on feel, to pay attention to nuance, to act and appraise the consequences of one’s choices, and to revise and then make other choices” (p.9). Such development is only achieved according to Eisner when form and content are considered and treated as ‘inseparable’ (p.11). The importance of matching form to content, in the case of the poetry classroom relies heavily on the relationship between the poetry text (content) and pedagogy (form). Vallance (1991p. 163) suggests that in educational contexts, works of art and curriculum are both ‘artifactual’. That is to say they are both ‘constructed’ by individuals. In this context she proposes that both act as forms of communication and transformation and both are products of a problem-solving process. It follows then that in recognising the ‘artifactual’ nature of both poetry and curriculum, the teacher is facilitated in the use of representational teaching methods which recognise, reflect and celebrate the value of poetry.

Exploring poetry teachers’ role conceptualisations and aspirations Hennessy et al., (2010) noted the emergence of strong altruistic ambition amongst teachers, however no evidence
Chapter VIII  Poetry in Crisis

exists of the translation of altruistic ambition into ethicality in teaching for the poetry teacher. In fact, while the essence of poetry is well defined, as documented above, the concept of ethical practice within the poetry classroom remains largely undefined, a mitigating factor perhaps surrounding the ontological ambiguity documented by many poetry teachers (McEwan, 1992, Hennessy, Hinchion and Mannix McNamara, 2011a). The ethical imperative of listening to pupil voice is noted by Freire who advocated 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). Listening to pupil voice and in doing so, acknowledging their educational experiences in reconceptualisation the role of the poetry teacher therefore holds much significance. Hennessy & Mannix McNamara (in review) highlight five key conceptions of effective poetry teaching from the perspective of the pupil. These conceptions detail the importance of a teacher’s epistemological position, the development of critical thinking and understanding, a positive attitude towards poetry, the encouragement of poetic composition and the promotion of creativity within the class.

In reaffirming the role of the poetry teacher, teachers must realise the significance of their own role as prospective agents of change. Hill (2007) contends that teachers hold the necessary power “individually and collectively to legitimate or delegitimate the current hegemonic project of liberalising capital” (p.208). Noting the inherent challenge of hegemonic cultural assimilation in this effort, Holloway & Greig (2011) argue that while individuals may internalise many hegemonic beliefs, they still hold the power and agency to act and make decisions that will influence their own lives and that of others (p. 27). Acknowledging and acting within the ‘spaces’ present for re-imagined educational experiences while breaking through ‘spaces of silence’ in order to communicate a common goal is therefore central to becoming an initiator of new beginnings (Greene, 2005). Ball highlights that educational reform, which challenges the ‘persistence of educational inequality’ will not be achieved by schools or teachers working in isolation from the complex matrix of social relations which surround them (Ball, 2008). Therefore, encouraging teacher agency in challenging the noted consistency and strength of teachers’ unquestioned adherence to conventional practice in the English classroom (Holloway & Greig, 2011) is now an educational imperative in the counter hegemonic struggle. In Foucauldian terms, self-regulation implies individuals are completely subordinated to the larger social networks of society; individuals are not ascribed any personal agency (Foucault, 1977). However, from a critical pedagogy perspective, the concept of praxis bears significance here, as praxis is
conceived as a self-creating and self-generating free human activity (Darder et al., 2009). It is also reflexive;

All human activity is understood as emerging from an on-going interaction of reflection, dialogue and action. All human activity requires theory to illuminate it and provide a better understanding of the world. Within critical pedagogy, all theorizing and truth claims are subject to critique. (Darder et al., 2009, p.15)

A strong emphasis on informed questioning and critique is also aligned with praxis. Darder et al., (2009) assert that praxis is impossible in “an undialectical vacuum driven by the separation of the individual from the object of their study” (p.13). Within such a dichotomisation, Freire contends that both theory and practice lose their power to transform reality. Separated from practice, theory becomes ‘simple verbalism’ and separated from theory, practice becomes ungrounded activity or ‘blind individualism’ (Darder et al., 2009, p.13). Developing a model of praxis whereby teachers might engage in teaching in a reflexive way, cognisant of their role in creating the world around them must be forefront in the drive towards educational advancement.

**Ideological Redress in Education**

Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
- Dylan Thomas (1952)

According to Freire (1970), social transformation is the product of praxis at a collective level. It follows that action, not only at a school level, but in tandem with a concerted rejection of status quo within colleges of education is called for in contesting hegemonic practice within the poetry classroom. Confronting practices which give sustenance to inequity, marginalisation, bureaucratic models of accountability and depersonalisation requires the collective appropriation of agency. It also necessitates passion for the possibility of a critical pedagogy in uncritical times (Greene, 2009). However, a focus on pedagogical redress alone, which may result in the “mere removal of constraints or mere relaxation of controls” (Greene, 2009, p.95) is inadequate. Given that pedagogy is often developed from political and social agendas, challenging endemic hegemonic practices within the classroom requires action which transcends simple pedagogical re-evaluation and enters into the realm of ideological transformation. Lipman (2009) argues that a change in the discourse of and
about education is necessitated in order to achieve this goal. She argues that “neoliberal educational discourse shifts responsibility for inequality produced by the state onto parents, students, schools, communities, and teachers” (p.366). Accordingly Lipman advocates the united resistance to discourses of ‘equity’ as tied to ‘individual responsibility’, ‘efficiency’ as vindication of standardisation along with ‘business metaphors’ such as accountability, quality control and standards (p.366). The pervasive use of such discourse redefines the role of education into the development of necessary skills and dispositions for the capitalist labour market. In this context the meaning of a ‘good school’ is redefined into technical and narrowly instrumental terms (Ball, 1997). Such a restricted definition of schooling according to Giroux (2009) strips education of a democratic vision where citizenship and the ‘politics of possibility’ are given serious consideration (p.443).

Teacher education is well placed to tackle the pervasive technicist discourses embedded in education. Harris (1994) contends that it is still possible for teachers to become agents within education and resist acting as “mere managers of day to day activities imposed from beyond the school” (p.115). Harris asserts that it is possible for teachers “through their discourse and interventionary practice in the ideological and political determinants of schooling to promote empowerment, autonomy and democracy” (p.220). The development of such agency at pre-service level is critical to generating a critical pedagogy. Rock & Stepanian (2010) stress the necessity for teacher educators to help prospective teachers develop and use their professional voice as collaborative agents of change. In order to act as agents of change, pre-service teachers need to recognise the political nature of education and the reproductive nature of schools (Bartolomé, 2009). Hill (2002; 2003) suggests that the provision of critical education programmes at third level may assist in the development of teachers as skilled, transformative intellectuals. At this level, opening up critical spaces in initial teacher education where students can engage in ontological and epistemological exploration, would serve to create space for the counter hegemonic struggle. Currently education systems fail to afford the majority of students opportunities to study the lives of others, much less the opportunity to study their own lives (Gabbard, 2003). Reaffirmation of the value of a ‘humanising pedagogy’ (Bartolomé, 2009) where students cease to be commodified and treated as ‘objects’ and still enjoy academically beneficial and rigorous education is also required (p.344). Greene (2009) argues that to humanise pedagogy and treat students as individuals “is to affirm our own incompleteness, our consciousness of spaces still to be explored, desires still to be tapped, possibilities still to be opened and
pursued” (p.95). In the establishment of this pedagogical model, Macedo (1994) posits the benefits of an ‘anti-methods’ pedagogy. This approach to teaching;

refuses to be enslaved by the rigidity of models and methodological paradigms. An anti-methods pedagogy should be informed by a critical understanding of the sociocultural context that guides our practices so as to free us from the beaten path of methodological certainties and specialisms. (p.8)

It is to be noted that while the lessons to be gleaned from Macedo’s ‘anti-methods’ concept are significant, the employment of more integrative rather than oppositional lexis here is required. In so doing, the need for a more representational pedagogic approach, rather than the apparent absolute rejection of methods would be prioritised. Here teachers are encouraged to avoid the uncritical assimilation and utilisation of pedagogy, curricula and texts. Rather they are encouraged to cultivate learning environments informed both by both action and reflection. Engaging in this reflective approach, teachers are enabled to adapt and invent teaching methods appropriate to individual learning contexts and cognisant of sociocultural considerations. In doing so, this approach affords space for teachers to consider the experiences of pupils that can serve to enhance or reduce the possibilities to humanise education.

**Conclusion**

The establishment of a learning environment which places primacy of attention on the learning experience and needs of each student is not a simple task. Yet, it is a necessary one. Contemporary education is failing students. There exists an urgent need to counter many practices within schools, such as the uncritical adoption of standardisation, passive assimilation, methodological rigidity and suppression. The silence of assent is no longer acceptable. Countering hegemonic cultures is made possible through critical pedagogy. A critical approach to the development of students as independent thinkers, who hold the ability to assess and determine their own development, is an educational imperative.

The need for change is starkly evident in the poetry classroom. Here, evidence of teacher dissonance is widespread as teachers are increasingly being required to set aside personal beliefs and values and live ‘an existence of calculation’ (Ball, 2003; Hennessy et al., 2010; Hennessy et al., 2011a). As a result in the current culture of standards and standardisation, teachers are losing their professional confidence to teach poetry (Wilson, 2010).
Accordingly non examinable aspects of the genre, such as poetic composition and orality/aurality are being marginalised, and in many cases excluded, from the classroom where they are perceived as ‘inappropriate activity’ in a milieu where standards are set and innovation is oft unwelcome (Benton, 2000; Dymoke, 2001; Dymoke, 2002; Gordon, 2008a; Wilson, 2010). Personal engagement too has for the most part been abandoned in place of mechanistic response in the poetry classroom (Fuller, 2010). Analytical thinking, critical questioning and reflection have become marginalised (Howell, 2009) and in many instances, dichotomised from the concept of academic success. A dualistic appropriation of knowledge is widely endorsed, with the pressure to produce the ‘correct’ response for examination purposes subverting practices of academic discussion (Benton, 2000; Hennessy et al., 2010). Within this context ‘the dead hand of the exam’ (Dymoke, 2002) has resulted in a growing emphasis on studying as opposed to experiencing poetry (Hanratty, 2010). Unsurprisingly then, a great number of pupils studying poetry state a dislike of the genre. Here, pupil passivity and marginalisation of pupil voice is widespread (Hanratty, 2010b; Hennessy et al., 2011a; Hennessy & Mannix McNamara, 2011b). Yet while students may well become more technically competent and successful in exam performance, they may be less able to illustrate agency over their learning and confidence in their subject ability (Dymoke, 2002, p.92).

Greene (2005, p.80) calls for a new type of teacher, one who can be an initiator of new beginnings. She asserts that “to act at a beginning is to move towards possibilities, to live and teach in a world of incompleteness, of what we all are but are not yet”. Establishing oneself as an initiator of new beginnings requires ideological as well as pedagogical commitment. It requires pedagogy reflective of mature epistemological and axiological foundation. Commitment at this level would according to Eisner (2004a) require not only “a shift in perspective regarding our educational aims; it represents a shift in the kind of tasks we invite students to undertake, the kind of thinking we ask them to do, and the kind of criteria we apply to appraise both their work and ours” (p.14). Such a pedagogical approach is not beyond the bounds of possibility. It is aligned with commitment, enthusiasm, a passion for knowledge and above all recognition of the needs and values of others. Hanratty (2008) notes that poetry, and its rewards can be elusive (p.156). The same may be asserted of engendering critical pedagogy in current schooling structures. Yet, he notes “there is always the possibility that, looking into its deep well, one will ultimately spot, and, perhaps, grasp the quartz of truth” (p.156). The role of an educator should not be to focus on
reproducing that which can be accredited on a test result sheet or evaluation report. The promotion of critical thinking, autonomy and reflexivity is particularly important. Commitment to the promotion of a democratic learning experience which values and recognises the needs and aptitudes of all, remains the central responsibility of the teacher. Beginning this journey for many will present challenge and require committed vision. The rewards emergent however will sustain and advance the pursuit of this journey...

This capacity to always begin anew, to make, to reconstruct, and not to spoil, to refuse to bureaucratize the mind, to understand and to live as a process – live to become – is something that always accompanied me throughout life. This is an indispensible quality of a good teacher. (Freire, 1993, p.98)

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Chapter IX

Conclusions & Recommendations
Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to conduct an exploration into the experience of teaching and learning poetry within the Leaving Certificate poetry class in Ireland. The research was predicated on the conviction that effective engagement with poetry holds the power to refine the senses, to enlarge the imagination, to inspire, to challenge and to open the mind (Eisner, 2004; Hanratty, 2008). The results of the research pose some concern for the educational community. The research points towards a shift in educative focus which appears to permeate both attitudes and practice within the poetry class. In a move antithetical to the aims of the syllabus and the genre of poetry, it appears that poetry is now vulnerable to becoming a technicised product in many Leaving Certificate classrooms. Poetry is frequently presented rather than taught and received rather than engaged with in the classroom. Moreover, the research points towards a significant narrowing of the genre with many teachers adopting an à la carte approach to curriculum content, selecting to develop only those topics and skills from the curriculum perceived to be of value for examination purposes. Creativity, subjectivity and innovation are often inadvertently precluded from this selection. Teachers indicated dispassion, anxiety and antipathy which in many cases seems to have replaced the vision of engendering creativity and enthusiasm in pupils. Many teachers in the study were aware of their practice in this regard and indicated experiencing significant dissonance. Yet, they felt they had little agency in this regard due to the oppressive nature of the terminal examination towards which they felt compelled to teach. This poses much cause for concern for the future of poetry in Irish schools. The complexity of this finding should not however be underestimated, nor limited to poetry teaching alone, as it permeates not only poetry pedagogy but subject choices and even teacher ideology. The consequences are far reaching.

Poetry teacher dissonance

The performativity agenda was noted to have a significant impact on teachers of poetry. A widespread altruistic ambition amongst poetry teachers undoubtedly exists, with many teachers asserting a desire to develop the imagination through challenging and engaging experiences with poetry and in so doing imbue a love of poetry in their pupils. However, given the technicist focus of the state examination, underpinning the performativity agenda, many teachers were struggling with their professional role and indeed experiencing significant professional dissonance. They faced the difficult challenge of ‘teaching to the exam’ or focusing on inspiring the love of poetry. The capacity to combine both effectively was
limited, if existing at all. For many teachers acquiescence to the performativity agenda prevailed, rationalised through a discourse of professionalism, in that teachers were able to equate pupils’ examination success as evidence of their professional achievement. Conversely, the researcher perceives this move as a shift towards deprofessionalisation, with teachers increasingly serving the needs of an audit culture, thus limiting their autonomy and agency within the poetry classroom.

**Pupil passivity**

A worrying trend of pupil passivity was also identified in the research. In many instances this could be linked to the teacher centred and didactic nature of the poetry classroom. Pupils were provided with limited opportunity for subjective oriented responses to poetry. For many pupils, critical engagement with poetry was seen as time wasting and less favourable than being provided with poetry analysis notes from the teacher. Success for pupils was often conceptualised in terms of rote learning and exam preparedness. Engagement with poetry outside of the requirements for school was particularly limited and often negated. Moreover the majority of pupils assumed a product oriented stance towards poetry in which it was seen as only as means to an end, namely for the purpose of exam success. Many pupils forecasted minimal engagement with poetry beyond this ‘end’. Yet pupils aspired for more, with many noting a desire for enhanced engagement with poetry through poetry composition, group work and critical classroom discussion.

**Affective development**

A marked imbalance in the prioritisation of pupil development was also identified, with many teachers taking a mutually exclusive approach to cognitive and affective development. In so doing, the expansive potential of the reciprocal relationship between the cognitive and affective domains was negated, and the development of affective, artistic and aesthetic sensibility was seen to be consigned to the realm of superfluous and inappropriate. Practices which encourage creative and expressive output including *inter alia*, graphic representation of poetry, drama-in-education techniques, the use of response journals and poetry composition were noted to be marginalised in the poetry classroom according to the research. Yet, these are considered positive practice and strongly advocated within the syllabus documents.
Epistemic development
The provision for epistemic development within the Leaving Certificate poetry classroom was also limited. Here, knowledge was often seen to be constructed as dualistic in nature. The lack of pupil voice gives rise to inequitable and expert privileged knowledge on the part of the teacher, thus suggesting an absolutist view of poetry in which the teacher alone holds the key and expertise to poetic appreciation. Additionally practices which encouraged conformity and standardisation, many of which offered a dualistic view of knowledge (and poetry), were frequently noted.

The impact of exam-driven schooling
The impact of the state exam on poetry was noted to be particularly malign in the Leaving Certificate years. The commercialisation of poetry was noted to be widespread and the treatment of the genre as exam currency was shown to be a common occurrence. A ubiquity of poetry notes provision, a lack of differentiated pedagogy, a narrowing of curricula, a tendency to produce rather than develop knowledge, and pupils’ perception of poetry as something to be received and assimilated, rather than critiqued and explored, all served to consolidate this view. Within schools where such a product oriented view was common, teachers were potentially open to deprofessionalisation and pupils, to becoming silent consumers of the product of poetry. Critical engagement was notable by its absence in these circumstances.

Pupil conceptions of effective poetry teaching
Pupils had clear messages to relay about the role of poetry in their schooling experience. Five conceptions of effective poetry teachers were suggested and posited as significant in tackling pupil apathy in the poetry classroom. Pupils noted the importance of a non-dualistic approach to the study of poetry, asserting that their interpretations also had a role to play in the poetry classroom, an approach that could be enabled through the espousal and practice of a more mature epistemological position by the teacher. This would entail the provision of space for critical pupil engagement in the poetry classroom. In addition pupils noted the importance of promoting critical thinking and understanding in the class. The significance of a creative approach to encourage creative thinking was desired. The importance of encouraging poetry composition, a practice that appeared largely ostracised in the classroom, was cited as important in pupils’ conceptualisations of effective poetry teaching. Moreover the importance
of a positive attitude on the part of the poetry teacher (seen to imbue positivity and enthusiasm amongst pupils) was highlighted.

The place and status of poetry
The findings of this research point towards poetry in crisis in Irish post-primary schools, owing to the growth of performative practice and the narrowing of critical educational experiences. The pressures of standardisation and bureaucratic accountability appear to have a significant impact on both the aspirations and practices of Leaving Certificate teachers and pupils of poetry. It can be argued that the weight of neo-liberalism and corporate hegemony have resulted in a narrow and politicised realisation of education now permeating the poetry class. The rise of exam driven schooling and cultures of performativity have promoted a technicist approach to schooling, which serves to limit the potential of the poetry lesson when taught by a teacher subscribing to this ideological agenda. The naturalisation of such hegemonic practice in the classroom and subsequent emergence of cultural reproduction has an impact on both poetry teachers and pupils, who in many cases appear to lack agency in remodelling approaches to teaching and experiencing poetry.

In brief the research has identified the following:

• The experience of teaching and learning of poetry at Leaving Certificate level in Ireland is arguably in a state of crisis.
• Many poetry teachers present a dualistic version of knowledge and therein, poetry. Many pupils appear to reproduce this dualistic approach.
• There exists an imbalance in the prioritisation of the cognitive and the affective within the poetry class with cognitive aspects of development being prioritised at the expense of the affective.
• A narrowing of curricula is evident with the marginalisation of poetry composition, subjective response and critical analysis.
• A narrowing of pedagogy is evident with the marginalisation of graphic representation of poems, ICT, creative imitation, drama-in-education techniques, response journals and in the rise of teacher centred approaches to teaching which premise the textbook, exam papers and pre-scripted poetry notes.
• A narrowing of vision in the poetry class is evident through the relegation of aesthetic and creative ambition in order to meet the requirements of the state exam.
• Many poetry teachers are facing a crisis of confidence as they encounter professional dichotomisation between the demands of the Leaving Certificate examination and
their more altruistic and holistic pedagogical aspirations. This creates widespread professional dissonance.

- Many pupils experience frustration and consequently disaffection studying poetry at Leaving Certificate level due to the paradox between the nature of poetry and the manner in which it is treated in many schools.

- The deprofessionalisation of the poetry teacher and reduced agency of the poetry pupil is evident, whereby many teachers are assuming the role of functionaries and pupils assuming the role of silent and passive assimilators and consumers of poetry.

- The constraints of instrumentalism and performativity in a culture of calculation and standardisation are posited to be particularly malign in the poetry classroom with poetry becoming a packaged commodity as pupils and teachers take a product oriented stance to the study of the genre.

**Recommendations**

An altruistic ambition exists amongst poetry teachers who recognise the potential of poetry in developing creativity and critical thinking in the classroom. Yet, this ambition is largely negated due to the pressures of a more pragmatic approach to poetry pedagogy in the face of performativity pressures driven by the Leaving Certificate examination. This may contribute in no small part to the ontological ambiguity posited by many teachers in this research. Given the lack of a cohesive vision for the teaching of poetry at post-primary level, acquiescence to the immediacy of performative pressures is unsurprising.

An ethical re-evaluation of poetry pedagogy is required at this time centred on the purpose of education. If school is purported to act as an environment for the holistic development of the pupils, consideration needs to be given to whether a pragmatic approach to teaching and learning is sufficient to achieve this aim. The researcher proposes a technicist and utilitarian approach to pedagogy to be at odds with the broader ambitions of education, namely pupil centred holistic development. Yet, while this research reports a dichotomous view of teaching and learning for the exam and teaching and learning for the holistic development of the pupil, the researcher posits concurrent achievement in both areas to be possible. Moreover the researcher proposes that a more creative approach to poetry pedagogy may serve to counter the current trends of pupil instrumentalism and passivity.

Drawing on the research, the development of a vision for the teaching of Leaving Certificate poetry based on the perspectives of pupils and teachers is now possible. In ascribing to the
values of this model of teaching, the development of a more critically aware, pedagogically respondent and student oriented teacher of poetry is envisaged.

**Reimagining the Leaving Certificate Poetry Teacher**

- The creative poetry teacher is committed to the educational advancement of their pupils, maintaining a vision for poetry education which meets and more importantly transcends the requirements of exam performativity.

- The creative poetry teacher rejects practices of standardisation and conformity and be critical in the selection of pedagogical approaches in the classroom.

- The creative poetry teacher provides learning experiences which engage, challenge and inspire pupils, and in so doing aim to develop in students an enduring relationship with poetry.

- The creative poetry teacher is committed to the promotion of both critical and creative thinking in the classroom, employing a variety of representational approaches in the classroom which serve to meet this ambition, such as pupil led critical analysis of poetry, poetry writing, drama-in-education activities, the use of response journals and graphic representation of poems.

- The creative poetry teacher recognises the interconnectivity of the cognitive and affective domains and employs an integrated approach to poetry pedagogy.

- The creative poetry teacher espouses and encourages a mature epistemological stance towards poetry, in so doing encourages subjective analysis and multiple perspectives on poetry, in addition to educating on the value of sustaining contradiction in poetic analysis.

The development of the outlined teacher attributes for the advancement of both the poetry teacher and pupil requires urgent attention. The implications for future teaching both at pre-service and post-primary level are significant. Given that the Leaving Certificate syllabus advises and provides directives on creative approaches to teaching poetry and that the concurrent examination provides some space for illustration of such, it appears that the required advancement at pre-service and post-primary level currently is somewhat ideological. The syllabus is explicit in its call for teacher creativity; however poetry teachers’
ideological perspectives appear less certain. The development of teachers’ understanding centred on potential of creative pedagogies to advance pupils’ educational experiences and academic success is called for.

**A Vision for Teacher Education**

The role of teacher education in this reform effort is significant. Countering a naturalised agenda which premises reductionist and disempowering approaches to education requires immediate attention at this level. The provision of critical education programmes which encourage questioning, inquiry and reflexivity is critical to the development of agency in teachers. A critical approach to teacher education will involve equipping teachers with the tools to identify practices which lead to inequality and marginalisation through guided exploration into the issues of power relations, social justice, democracy and hegemony. In so doing, teacher education needs to encourage teachers to critique and explore curriculum rather than to simply implement it.

Countering Hill’s (2004) critique of teacher education as a “detheroised, sanatised, technicised, and deintellectualised” endeavour, teacher education requires the provision of space for rich and meaningful encounters with theory, where complex questions are posed and grappled with, rather than avoided or negated. In addition, the centrality of pre-service teachers’ experiences needs to be prioritised through the provision of space for guided exploration into pedagogy and praxis with a removal or reduction of current practices which hold practice and practicum simply as a mean for measurement and grading. Teacher education should afford space for pedagogical exploration and experimentation based on a developing acquaintance with theory, therein reducing pre-service teachers’ perceived gap between third level theory and its application to post-primary teaching (Cheng, Cheng & Tang, 2010). The rejection of a dualistic approach to knowledge must also begin at pre-service level. This holds implication for both pedagogy and assessment. Recognition of multiple realities and the principles of knowledge co-construction are fundamental for the effective epistemological development of pre-service teachers and in particular, poetry teachers. Engagement with poetry must equate to experiences which encourage subjective input, discussion and reflection. Moreover, the construction of assessment structures must premise creative, engaged and critical practice and move towards the crediting of process over product. The use of critical pedagogical strategies on the part of the pre-service educator will be central to the accomplishment of these aims. The advancement of pre-service teachers’
ideology and pedagogy must be modelled through both the promotion and practice of democratic and critical educational experiences by pre-service educators.

A Vision for Post Primary Poetry Teachers

Central to the provision of more democratic and creative educational practices in the poetry classroom, as outlined above, is recognition on the part of the poetry teacher of the power of poetry as a genre. This research suggests that poetry teachers acknowledge the aesthetic potential of the medium but fail to recognise the potential of creative encounters with the genre to transcend exam pragmatism and reduce the pronounced level of teacher dissonance evidenced in this research. As a tool for educational advancement, poetry is powerful. Its potential to advance affective, cognitive and epistemological sensibilities through engaged encounters with the genre is well delineated. However, currently there exists a failure to recognise the power of engaged experiences with the genre on the part of both the pupil and teacher. The development of creativity is not antithetical to exam success, conversely it enhances it. The poetry syllabus provides significant encouragement for rich and meaningful encounters with the genre through the implementation of creative pedagogical approaches. In addition, since the introduction of the syllabus an increased alignment between the aims of the syllabus and the exam prescribed is evident, with many questions on the exam paper calling for pupils’ personal responses to poetic texts. Yet, as this research highlights, such demands and spaces for creativity are often met with reductionist approaches in the classroom which serve not only limit the potential of pupils’ achievement in the exam, but also their ability to engage with the genre upon completion of their post-primary education. Recognition of the power of engaged and creative approaches to poetry, as conceptualised earlier in this chapter, to meet both the vocational and lifelong needs of pupils is required on the part of the poetry teacher. Such an approach would acknowledge the centrality of pupil voice and experience and therein reassert the role of the poetry teacher from that of technician to that of a critical educator.

A Vision for Future Research

This thesis exists currently as a standalone investigation in the nature of teaching and learning poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland. As such, it aims to generate discourse and subsequent investigation in the field, opening up a marginalised area to scrutiny and critique.
Acting as a framework for future researchers, it highlights a number of areas of significance requiring supplementary research in order to develop an enhanced vision of and for praxis in the Irish poetry classroom.

Central to the research findings of this thesis was the poetry teachers’ dichotomisation of the process of teaching for the exam and teaching for the holistic advancement of the pupil. Consequently as illustrated in this research, creative approaches to poetry pedagogy which place emphasis on engaged and student centred experiences are often negated in favour of more exam focused approaches to teaching. Such polarisation of experience and its impact on the potential to incorporate more engaging approach to poetry in the class requires attention. The researcher proposes that creative and challenging approaches to poetry teaching not only hold the potential to counter current trends of pupil passivity but may also hold the potential to enhance understanding and thus enhance achievement in the terminal examination. Investigation into the comparative impact of a student centred approach set against a traditionalist approach (as evidenced in this research) to the teaching of one unit of poetry is required. Here it is envisaged that two cohorts (representative of two varied approaches to pedagogy) would study identical texts and sit an identical blind reviewed summative exam. The impact of a creative and student centred approach on exam performance would then be measured against that of a traditionalist approach, allowing for the quantification of research findings. Such data holds the potential to significantly influence current ideology around the apparent dichotomised role of the Leaving Certificate poetry teacher.

What is Possible

The re-imagining of educational provision as described in this thesis is not without its challenges. Contesting current hegemonic practice in the poetry classroom requires commitment and engagement at both post-primary and pre-service levels. Yet, the realisation of the potential outcome of such challenge demands our attention. A creative poetry classroom holds the potential act as a space where pupils can engage in rich and meaningful conversation and debate, where poems can be written, heard and spoken, where perspectives, varied and imaginative can be voiced and appreciated, where enthusiasm may grow nurtured by the seed of challenge and choice. A creative poetry classroom may act a space for the advancement of both pupil and teacher agency and confidence, and in so doing, generate spaces to grow in unison the critical and creative mind.
The last words of this thesis, I wish to leave to the poetic form. The words of Adrienne Rich (1981, p.23) resonate with a vision of hope and possibility, a vision for advancement;

**What is Possible**

A clear night in which two planets
seem to clasp each other in which the earthly grasses
shift like silk in starlight
If the mind were clear
and if the mind were simple you could take this mind
this particular state and say

This is how I would live if I could choose:

this is what is possible

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**References**


Appendix
Appendix A: Journal Publications


Hennessy, J., Hinchion, C. and Mannix McNamara, P. (2011) “‘The points, the points, the points’: Exploring the impact of performance oriented education on the espoused values of Senior Cycle poetry teachers in Ireland’, *English Teaching: Practice and Critique (ETPC)*, 10(1).

Poetry and Pedagogy: Exploring the Opportunity for Epistemological and Affective Development within the Classroom

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Abstract

This paper provides a review of the priority afforded to the development of pupils’ affective and epistemological development within the contemporary poetry class. The paper reports on the findings of a research project which explored the experience of teaching and learning within the post-primary Leaving Certificate programme in Ireland. The research includes interview and questionnaire data obtained over a three year period from 2007-2010 from 80 post-primary teachers of Leaving Certificate poetry and 200 post-primary Leaving Certificate pupils. The paper highlights the malign impact of summative assessment on teachers’ pedagogical aspirations, identifying widespread professional dissonance amongst the cohort. Resultantly, empirical data highlights the reduced opportunity for epistemic and affective development within the poetry class and its impact on pupils’ learning experiences. Recommendations for pedagogical redress focus on the necessity for enhanced contemplative, critical and subjective inquiry within the poetry classroom.

1. Introduction

The pressures entailed in meeting the increasingly diverse range of demands imposed on the contemporary teacher are significant [1]. Hargreaves, cautions that teachers’ work is becoming increasingly intensified, with teachers expected to respond to greater pressures under “conditions that are at best stable and at worst deteriorating” [2]. Central to this concern for teachers is the task of negotiating tensions arising between the contrasting dominant ideologies of neo-conservatism and instrumentalism within contemporary curriculum policy and discourse [3]. Underlining the instrumentalist ideology is the philosophy of education for economic expansion. Consequently, of secondary concern within this value system is the holistic development of the individual. From this perspective education, the curriculum and even knowledge itself becomes a means to an end, not an end in themselves [3]. For neo-conservatives, the canon of English literature and traditional school subjects define the essence of the curriculum. Those opposing neo-conservative ideologies argue that it does not afford recognition to the social and historical nature of knowledge [4]. So closely aligned are neo-conservative and cultural heritage values that the weight of expectation for the poetry teacher to reflect such values in their pedagogy is significant, given the historical dominance of the cultural heritage model of English education [5]. Followers of the cultural heritage tradition widely endorsed the power of poetry as a means towards cultural elevation, emphasising the responsibility of schools to lead children to an appreciation of those works of literature that have been widely regarded as amongst the finest in the language [6].

“Good poetry does undoubtedly tend to form the soul and character; it tends to beget a love of beauty and truth in alliance together, it suggests, however indirectly, high and noble principles of action, and it inspires the emotion so helpful in making principles operative.” [7]

While the more problematic elitist and exclusionary virtues enshrined within the cultural heritage model are now widely rejected, allegiance to some elements of the tradition remain within English education discourse [8]. In an attempt to mediate between these contrasting educational ideologies and provide students with a broad and wide-ranging poetry foundation it is asserted that the contemporary English teacher tends to “occupy the middle ground” [9], recognizing the importance of offering students the opportunity to experience the canonical texts and “literary greats”, in addition to acknowledging the more pragmatic duties of English teaching. From an epistemological perspective, this stance would strongly suggest a position of multiplicity on the part of the teacher [10], where it is felt that students should be taught to believe that information is neither absolute nor externally controlled and where pupils are encouraged to have different perspectives on texts, in an environment where “everyone has a right to his own opinion” [11]. However, in an education system which has been increasingly directed toward economic instrumentality [4], as is evident within the Irish context [12], tensions arising from this mediated stance within the teaching of English are widely acknowledged with the “delegated gatekeepers of both linguistic and critical literacies, facing new questions about the purposes and priorities of their discipline” [13]. The impact of globalisation has resulted in instrumentalism and technical rationalism emerging as the dominant traditions of thought within contemporary schooling structures;
The role and function of education are undergoing dramatic changes in response to these economic imperatives. The notion of a broad liberal education is struggling for its very survival in a context of instrumentalism and technocratic rationality where the catchwords are “vocationalism”, “skills formation”, “privatization” “commodification,” and “managerialism” [14].

Responding to economic demands, preformativity, rather than constantivity has come to characterise educational policy [15]. Target setting, testing and assessment have become synonymous with the process of learning [16] in what Eisner describes as the development of an technicised cognitive culture [17]. Within this cultural framework it is asserted that the conditions required for intuitive insight are quite different than the subsequent dispassionate, logical testing of it [18]. Consequently, subjects of affective and subjective orientation such as poetry are severely challenged to withstand the patterns of standardisation evident across the curriculum. In addition, given that instrumentalism is charged with the marginalisation of the aesthetic in education [19], the challenge of holding ‘the middle ground’ for many poetry teachers is proving increasingly difficult. Within this culture, epistemological dualism [10] within the poetry classroom becomes a pedagogical concern. Outlining the emergence of what she terms a ‘damaging epistemological shift’, Marshall [20] cautions;

“Something very odd is happening to school English. There has been a subtle and barely perceptible shift, whereby what was once the lifeblood of the subject is in danger of being drained from it, leaving it devoid of the spirit it once contained.”

2. The necessity for an interconnected approach to poetry pedagogy

Pepin [21] suggests teachers’ beliefs and conceptions are manifested in their practices and can be traced back to, amongst other constructions, their epistemological positions. In addition Trigwell et al., [22] have shown that approaches to teaching are directly related to approaches to learning. The value systems espoused by teachers’ through their pedagogies therefore afford the potential to significantly influence pupils’ learning experiences. The importance then of providing an educational experience espouses a critical approach to learning and encourages pupils’ to achieve a mature epistemological understanding cannot be underemphasised.

Kuhn et al., [23] assert that an orderly progression in levels of epistemological understanding can be observed and the attainment of mature epistemological understanding is based upon the synchronization of the subjective and objective dimensions of knowing. Acknowledging this, the importance of incorporating both the subjective and objective, the cognitive and affective and the emotional and intellectual concurrently within the poetry classroom becomes evident. Pike [24] too asserts that the relationship between the emotional and intellectual is something which cannot be ignored if teaching in the arts is to be truly aesthetic. Drawing on the writings of Iser and Eliot, who assert that the highest of all teaching is essentially aesthetic in character, Pike argues for an ‘aesthetic approach’ to the teaching of aesthetic subjects such as poetry where the development of personal growth supersedes the transmission of knowledge

3. Context

Post-primary education in Ireland generally begins at the age of twelve and continues for six years. A common programme which aims to build on the education received at primary school, termed the Junior Cycle, is followed by students for the first three years leading to the Junior Certificate examinations. This is followed by an optional year, entitled Transition Year which aims to advance the personal, social, educational and vocational development of pupils. Subsequently, the Senior Cycle, (more commonly referred to as the Leaving Certificate years) spans two years and concludes with a summative Leaving Certificate examination. This research focuses on poetry teachers and pupils working within the Senior Cycle or Leaving Certificate years.

The following section of this paper details initial findings from a longitudinal research study which began in 2007 and is currently being conducted on the teaching and learning of poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland. The purpose of this research is to conduct an exploration into the poetry teachers’ and pupils’ perspectives on a range of pedagogical topics and ideological values. Claims outlined previously in this paper which summarise contemporary research in this field are supported by the initial findings of this on-going research study.

4. Methodology

This research uses the combined theoretical framework of the positivist and interpretative educational research paradigms in doing so this study takes a ‘pragmatic research approach’ [25]. The study comprised two key phases completed by both Leaving Certificate teachers and pupils.

Phase one was quantitative in nature and consisted of the completion of a self-administered questionnaire. The key objective for this stage of the research was to obtain preliminary findings on a number of central research questions from a broad
range of geographical and culturally diverse schools. This data served to highlight areas of interest and relevance for phase two. Statistical analysis was performed using PASW (Predictive Analytics Software) Statistics v.17, while open responses were categorised based on emergent themes. Each category was codified and entered into the PASW. When analysing the data, simple descriptive analysis was required and utilised to provide an account of the practices and espoused views of the teachers and pupils involved. The teacher questionnaire was sent via postal distribution to 50 post-primary schools throughout the Republic of Ireland, while the pupil questionnaire was disseminated in 8 schools by the researcher.

Phase two was qualitative in nature and consisted of detailed semi-structured interviews with 10% of both research cohorts in a gender stratified sample of phase one participants. The interviews were semi-structured in nature to enable to collection of data pertaining to specific beliefs while also affording teachers and pupils the opportunity to discuss issues of particular relevance to them. The purpose of this phase was to conduct an in-depth inquiry into the issues emergent from phase one. Phase two data were analysed via thematic content analysis.

5. Research findings

The teacher questionnaire (phase one) elicited a 58% response rate from the schools contacted, resulting in the phase one participation of 80 post-primary teachers of English. 10% of the phase one research cohort partook in phase two interviews (n = 8 post-primary English teachers). Table 1 illustrates the gender distribution of the research cohort for both teacher research phases.

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<th>Table 1. Leaving Cert English teacher participants</th>
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| Phase 2                                      |
| Male            | 1 | 0% | 1 | 2% |
| Female          | 1 | 2% | 3 | 6% |
| Total P2        | 2 | 2% | 4 | 8% |

While establishing English teachers’ perceptions of their role within the poetry class research participants were not limited to the identification of a singular purpose or role. Sixty per cent of poetry teachers asserted their role as the development of aesthetic appreciation amongst their pupils; “My purpose is to help pupils appreciate poetry as an artistic, aesthetic medium which they can relate to.”, “To open students to the pleasure of cracking open and appreciating a form which they may think is difficult.”, “I want to encourage a passionate engagement with poetry amongst my pupils.”. “To inspire a lifelong love of poetry amongst my pupils”. In addition 42.5% of teachers felt their purpose as a Leaving Certificate poetry teacher was to explain poems to their class and to help pupils pass their Leaving Certificate exam; “to deal with and prepare pupils for the Leaving Certificate exam.”, “to provide various notes and questions on selected poems.”, “to help students understand themes, structure and imagery to prepare for the exam.”, “to educate, to prepare for the Leaving Certificate”. However, this technical focus was noted by teachers to have a subversive effect on the accomplishment of their primary espoused ambition of aesthetic appreciation. As outlined by one teacher in relation to this dichotomy of ambition, “When it comes down to it we’re working within the confines of the exam”. Teachers’ primary aims of inculcating an aesthetic pedagogy into the classroom were relegated to an aspirational or secondary ambition rather than an objective as outlined by another participant who noted; “My purpose is to prepare pupils for the exam and hopefully give them some love of poetry along the way”.

Poetry teachers were unlikely to ask pupils to illustrate poems through an alternate expressive art form with over half (59%) of teachers rarely (26%) or never (33%) using this teaching strategy. Seventy five per cent of poetry teachers surveyed ‘never’ (33%) or ‘rarely’ (42%) use drama-in-education when teaching, yet drama-in-education provides a highly accessible medium through which the

Table 2. Leaving Cert English pupil participants

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Two hundred Leaving Certificate pupils from 8 post-primary schools took part in phase one of the pupil research. Twenty four pupils were then chosen at random from these schools to participate in phase two of the research. Table 2 illustrates the gender distribution of the research cohort for both pupil research phases.
affective domain via personal and social development can be catered for [26]. The use of response journals has been advocated as instrumental in the affective development of pupils [27], however 66% of poetry teachers who partook in this research stated they do not use response journals in their class. Composition is noted within the syllabus as a “vital necessity” [28] for Leaving Certificate pupils. Within the poetry class, composition provides rich terrain for the affective development of pupils [29], yet this activity also appears underutilised within the Leaving Certificate context. Sixty seven per cent of poetry teachers in this study stated ‘sometimes/ rarely’ encouraging their pupils to write poetry and a further 17% of teachers asserting they ‘never’ ask pupils to write their own poetry. The Leaving Certificate English Syllabus in Ireland asserts that students must “develop an awareness of their own responses, affective, imaginative, and intellectual, to aesthetic texts” [28] in order to foster an aesthetic pedagogy in the classroom. Congruent to achieving this ambition in the teaching of poetry is a focus on the subjective response of the pupil to a poem. To this end teachers were asked to list the most frequently occurring pedagogical activities in their poetry class. ‘Teacher questioning and class response’ emerged as the most frequently utilised pedagogical strategy in the classroom with 88% of teachers citing the frequent use of this approach in the teaching of poetry. ‘Teacher clarification’ of poetry emerged as the second most frequently cited pedagogical approach with 77% of teachers noting the regular occurrence of this method in their class. The teacher centred nature of the poetry classroom was too reflected in pupils’ responses where 54% of pupils asserted never personally analysing poetry in class in advance of their teacher’s ‘poetry clarification’. In addition, difficulties in terms of pupil self-efficacy and encouraging a subjective pupil response encountered by teachers in the teaching of poetry were also reflected upon in phase two of the research. Teachers discussed at length how many of their pupils sought to establish the ‘correct’ meaning to a poem thereby continually undervaluing their subjective interpretation of texts. Pupils highlighted their sense of frustration with what they perceived as the ambiguous nature of poetry with 71% of pupils asserting the ‘problem with poetry is that you can never be sure you are correct’ in your understanding of a poem. Evident too was a sense of dependency on the part of both poetry teacher and pupil for prescribed responses to questions on poetry, with exam pressure and time constraints being cited as the main instigating factors in this trend. As noted by one interviewee; “An awful lot of students now want to be spoon fed with notes and you have this ridiculous situation then where pupils are learning off essays by heart for the leaving cert which is crazy. Where is the originality going to come in?” Indeed while confidence levels pertaining towards the study of poetry amongst pupils emerged as positive, with 58% of pupils asserting themselves as ‘confident’ in their understanding of poetry, the primary reason cited for this sense of self-confidence amongst respondents was ownership of ‘good notes’. Support for the use of traditional resources was also evident in pupil responses with pupils’ citing teacher notes (53%), the poetry textbook (42%), notes accessible on the internet (29%) and books of poetry notes (24%) as the four most effective class resources for enhancing their understanding.

6. Discussion

The data highlights a pattern of professional dissonance amongst teachers of poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland, who identified a feeling of discomfort arising from the conflict between professional values and expected or required job tasks [30]. While for many teachers in this research, altruistic and intrinsic motivations may have provided the grounds for becoming a teacher, such motivations were felt to be far removed from the realities of teaching within a context that endorses curriculum uniformity, test scores, competitive individualism, league tables and extrinsic rewards [17, 31]. As is evident from the findings of this research, teachers are increasingly being required to set aside personal beliefs and values and live ‘an existence of calculation’ [32]. Working within a framework in which ‘value’ appears to replace ‘values’ [32] the tensions between teachers’ sense of professional purpose and sense of performative purpose resonated clearly in this research. For the majority of teachers in this research altruistic ambition defined their role conceptualisation. Discussions focusing on the role of the poetry teacher without reference to contextual constraints or situational limitations invariably centred on conceptions of developing aesthetic appreciation, encouraging engagement and enjoyment, inspiring a love of poetry within pupils; “I want to open the minds of students to the potential of poetry to communicate on issues of significance”, “I want to enrich my pupils’ lives and help then to discover the escapism of poetry.”, “I want to encourage and enthuse my pupils and make learning fun and enjoyable for them”. However, teaching in the manner aspired to here, is fraught with both promise and peril [33]. The perennial constraints of instrumentalism posited by teachers in this research highlight the perils of altruistic ambition within the poetry classroom and gives credence to the long standing notion of the ‘say/do’ dichotomy of Irish life [34]. Teachers in this research were vocal in their criticism of the impact of summative examination on their pedagogical aspirations,
relegating the ‘ideal’ to the ‘aspirational’ as “everything is influenced by the dreaded exam paper”. Despite calls for the teaching of poetry to reflect a poem’s overall aesthetic unity [35, 36], practice appears dominated by a deep-rooted standardised approach to poetry analysis in which the transmission of dualism, the lowest level of epistemic development, appears to be well situated.

The relegation of teachers’ espoused values in the face of pressures of standardisation and performativity was seen from this research to significantly impact on the potential to develop pupils’ affective, subjective and epistemic sensibilities. The relegation of the affective and subjective in the teaching of poetry in order to meet the requirements of summative assessment emerged as a key theme. While it is widely acknowledged that enthusiastic teaching predicated on the deployment of a wide range of teaching and learning strategies, holds the key to successfully engaging pupils’ in poetry lessons [35], the predominance of a ‘traditionalist’ approach to teaching poetry was openly conceded by research participants, who felt that the nature of curriculum assessment failed to provide space for a more aesthetic approach to the teaching of poetry. The use of illustration of poetry, drama-in-education techniques and poetic composition, all holding the potential to enhance pupils’ subjective understanding remain a negated feature of the Leaving Certificate poetry classroom. Additionally, the use of response journals to track subjective poetic reflection was also marginalised within the participating teachers’ pedagogies. Cogniscent of the necessity for the coordination of the objective and subjective dimensions of knowing in the development of epistemological understanding [23], it is to be noted that the malign impact of negation of the affective and subjective within the Leaving Certificate poetry class is multifaceted.

Teachers’ pedagogies as reported on in this research highlight the predominance of a dualistic approach to the teaching and learning of poetry resulting in students increasingly conceptualising reasoning and analysis as distinct from academic achievement. The predominance of this model of teaching is evident through the central role played by teacher questioning, teacher clarification, passive pupil assimilation and recited response within the poetry class structure as outlined by respondents. The widespread provision of notes from teacher to pupil as reported upon by pupils in this research evidences the pervasiveness of dualism within the Leaving Certificate poetry class. The provision of notes can be seen to scaffold the conceptualisation of knowledge as absolute and the promotion of correct or incorrect responses to poetry. Highlighting the detrimental impact of such conceptualisations, Paulsen and Feldman [37] note that students with the naïve belief that the structure of knowledge is simple are less likely to have an intrinsic goal orientation, to appreciate the value of learning tasks, to perceive an internal control over learning, and to feel efficacious about their capacity to learn. The experience of learning poetry at Leaving Certificate Level as reported upon by students in this research consolidates the notion of the pervasive and accepted influence of dualism within the poetry classroom. Over half of the pupils in this research reported never personally analysing a poem, rather waiting for the teacher to ‘clarify’ the ‘meaning’ of the poem for them, as time spent analysing from the pupil’s perspective was seen as wasteful; “We don’t want to waste time figuring out the meaning.” Pupils reported frustration with the ‘wasteful’ ambiguous nature of poetry which prevented expedient access to the ‘meaning’ or ‘solution’ of the poem. Moreover, pupils’ highlighted support for a teacher centred, notes and textbook based class in which meaning is transparent and clearly defined. Within this value system, pupils defined achievement and ‘meaningfulness’ as correlated with knowledge retention rather than understanding; “I don’t want to lose time analysing that could be spent learning something meaningful”.

7. Conclusions: Finding a balance

The research highlights the existence of an aesthetic vision for poetry pedagogy amongst post-primary English teachers which embraces the affective and subjective and encourages elevated levels of critical engagement. Emergent also from the research is the complexity of effecting pedagogical ambition in a world of instrumentalism and widespread professional dissonance. In ‘Harlem’, Langston Hughes poses the question: what happens to a dream deferred?

What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up? 
like a raisin in the sun? Or fester like a sore - And then run? 

Does it stink like rotten meat? Or crust and sugar over - like a syrupy sweet? Maybe it just sags like a heavy load. Or does it explode?

Deliberating the likely outcomes for a deferred dream, Hughes refuses to engage with the possibility of the dream dispelling. Hope and the concept of persistence resonate quietly within the poem. This research identifies the significant challenges facing teachers of poetry. It highlights the need to support teachers in their attempts to foster enhanced potential for epistemological and affective development within
the classroom. Addressing the malign impact of absolutism, it has been asserted that this conventional epistemology “hands us a dangerous counterfeit in truth’s place, one that may pass for truth, but in fact is partial and impoverished” [18]. Indeed Pike [24] cautions against the very real dangers inherent in the virtual obsession with explicitness in teaching, especially in disciplines, such as poetry which seek to nurture aesthetic experience. The importance of encouraging honest subjective engagement and multiple meanings therefore remains a central concern for the poetry class. It is asserted that “to counter the dominant view of knowledge as neutral and capable of ‘speaking for itself,’ knowledge must be approached as problematic in its social construction” [38]. In striving to develop enhanced epistemological engagement reasoned argument provides a most productive path to knowledge [23], therefore acknowledgement of the benefits of ‘sustained uncertainty’ and ‘contemplative inquiry’ within the poetry class is central to achieving this ambition [18].

Whelan [39] discusses the value of achieving balance when engaging with poetry and the arts, arguing that balance should be sought between ‘filiation’ (that to which we are born) and ‘affiliation’ (that to which we aspire) in order to truly understand, create and engage with works of art, such as poetry. Drawing on the work of Whelan, it can be asserted that effective engagement with poetry in the classroom must acknowledge both a poem’s affective and analytical attributes. Stevens [40] too argues the necessity for the coordination of subjectivity and objectivity where both should be treated as mutually beneficial rather than mutually exclusive. This notion of balance resonates deftly in the poem ‘Lightenings viii’ where Heaney [41] compares the work of a crewman to that of a poet;

The annals say: when the monks of Clonmacnoise
Were all at prayers inside the oratory
A ship appeared above them in the air.
The anchor dragged along behind so deep
It hooked itself into the altar rails
And then, as the big hull rocked to a standstill,
A crewman shinned and grappled down a rope
And struggled to release it. But in vain.
‘This man can’t bear our life here and will drown’,
The abbot said, ‘Unless we help him’. So
They did, the freed ship sailed and the man climbed back
Out of the marvellous as he had known it.
- Seamus Heaney

This poem provides an exposition of the challenges facing a poet, challenges which resonate powerfully for the teacher of poetry also. It details the ‘marvellous’ of experiencing and creating poetry which is somewhat suspended above everyday experience but yet which does not lose itself in aesthetic qualities. Heaney himself commented on this poem:

“I was devoted to this poem because the crewman who appears is situated: between the ground of everyday experience and the arier realm of an imagined world. An essential thing—whether you’re the poet or the crewman – is to be able to move resourcefully between these two realms, not get yourself bogged down in quotidian, yet not to lose your head in the fantastic.” [42]

The challenge for teachers of poetry in achieving enhanced affective and epistemic development while working in a context of standardisation and uniformity is great. “Poetry and its rewards can be elusive” [35], however the benefits to be gleaned in the redress of poetry pedagogy hold promise. In the words of Seamus Heaney:

“I can’t think of a case where poems have changed the world, but what they do is they change people’s understanding of what’s going on in the world.”

8. References


“The points, the points, the points”: Exploring the impact of performance oriented education on the espoused values of Senior Cycle poetry teachers in Ireland.

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CARMEL HINCHION
PATRICIA MANNIX MCNAMARA
University of Limerick, Ireland

ABSTRACT: Teachers of English experience significant pressure in attempting to meet the requirements of the national examination system, while also seeking to uphold their own ideological and philosophical perspectives on the value of poetry. Drawing on a mixed method study into the teaching of poetry at post-primary level in Ireland conducted between 2007 and 2010, this paper examines current methodological trends in poetry pedagogy. The research identifies a marked imbalance in the prioritisation of pupil development, with many teachers privileging the cognitive development of pupils’ poetic understanding over the affective. The paper also suggests limited attention to the interwoven dimensions of the affective and cognitive domains in the teaching of poetry at senior cycle level in Irish schools. This paper advocates the need to support teachers to develop an integrated pedagogy for teaching poetry in second-level schools, which engages both the critical and the creative in a meaningful manner.

KEYWORDS: Poetry, pedagogy, affective, cognitive, education.

The taxonomy of educational objectives, inclusive of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains as developed by Bloom (1956), continues to hold significant influence in teacher education, remaining as one of the most widely applied texts in education (Schoen, 2008; Fisher, 2005). In the last number of years, however, technical rationalism and measurability have become prevalent in post-primary educational provision (Eisner, 2003; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Gleeson & O’Donnabhain, 2009). This ideological shift in educative ethos challenges attempts to provide balanced development in pupils’ psychomotor, affective and cognitive domains, as prioritised in directives for successful pedagogy (Ediger & Bhaskara Rao, 2006).

It has been argued that the artificial separation of the domains in the construction of Blooms’ taxonomy has led to the perception of the affective domain as non-cognitive and thus requiring limited mental engagement (Efland, 2002). Some suggest that the cognitive and psychomotor domains lend themselves more easily to measurement and specification and thus are awarded higher levels of privilege and recognition among educationalists (Efland, 2002; Eisner, 2002). Given the difficulty of measurability associated with the affective domain combined with its inherently subjective nature, questions regarding the value of the affective domain have emerged across the disciplines (Jensen, 2001; Sinclair, 2009; Alsop, 2005) with the rational/emotional debate featuring strongly in educational discourse (Beard, Clegg, & Smith, 2007; Crawford, 2007; Robinson, 2001). This debate centres on the role of emotion in education and the prioritization of the cognitive and affective domains.
The influence of the Enlightenment, with its focus on empiricism, scientific rigour and reductionism, has meant that the emotional realm is perceived by those who uphold such values as inappropriate territory (Porter, 2001; Fitzpatrick, Jones, Knellwolf, McCalman, 2004). Indeed Kant regarded prioritisation of the emotional realm as malign to the ambitions of a successful education (Beard, 2005). However, recognition of the importance of achieving balance between the affective and cognitive domains in education has grown in recent decades with, amongst others, Dewey (1948) advocating the interconnectivity of lived-experience. Dewey (1934) advocated the aesthetic and intellectual as inherently interwoven, asserting that one could not be successfully separated from the other. Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, (1964) also expressed hesitancy with regard to the artificial separation of the affective and cognitive domains and indicated that “nearly all cognitive objectives have an affective component if we search for it” (p. 48).

The contributions of Dewey and Krathwohl et al. have led to an increasing recognition of the importance of a pedagogical space which allows “the exploration, expression and acceptance of emotions and feelings of self and others in ways that contribute to learning” (Beard et al., 2007, p. 240). Balancing the cognitive, psychomotor, affective and indeed the aesthetic dimensions of learning holds significant benefits for students. There is need to dispel the common perception that poetry is estranged from any developmental cognitive process (Best, 1992), as young people who regularly participate in the arts have been found to learn better and to perform better in creativity, fluency, originality and elaboration than their counterparts (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999). Pupils in “arts-intensive” settings were also found to be strong in their abilities to express thoughts and ideas, exercise their imaginations and take risks in learning (Catterall et al., 1999).

Acknowledging the interconnectivity of the domains through a domain sensitive pedagogy holds the potential to provide enhanced learning and developmental opportunities within the poetry class. Research into the conceptualization of creativity has been gaining momentum over the last decade, in an attempt to construct a comprehensive theory of creativity (Russ, 2003; McWilliam & Haukka, 2008). As a result, a more refined knowledge base and sophisticated understanding of the field of creativity is emerging (Mumford, 2003). Treffinger (1980) and Treffinger, Isaksen, and Firestein (1983) developed a “model of creative learning” comprising three levels: divergent functions, complex thinking and feeling processes, and involvement in real challenges. What is particularly noteworthy about this model is the presence of both cognitive and affective domains at each level of creative learning. The synergy of domains is seen within this model to be inherent in the establishment of creativity. Creativity is consequently considered both a cognitive and affective endeavour (Fasko, 2001; Runco & Chand, 1995; Houtz & Krug, 1995; Claxton, Pannells & Rhoads, 2005).

However, the development of an integrated pedagogy which affords space for the development of creativity is not without its challenges, particularly in the current culture of technical, rational, scientific and points-oriented education (Pike, 2004; Government of Ireland, 1999). Misson and Sumara (2005) argue that meeting the demands of an increasingly “product”-driven educational system, has led to the emergence of a technicised model of educational pedagogy that relegates affective development to that of decorative functionality. For the teaching of poetry this in
effect means that poetic analysis tends now to be dominated by technical
decomposition (Meehan, 1999; NCCA, 2009) and time given to poetic inquiry is
challenged by the focus upon exam “achievement” (Eisner, 2003). The aesthetic
endeavour in poetry teaching, according to Fowler and Wilson (2001) and McCracken
and McCracken (2001), is now frequently displaced by prosaic standardisation.

The power of poetry as an art form to develop the cognitive domain of the pupil is
widely acknowledged (Bresler, 2007; Davis, 2008; Efland, 2004). When contrasted
with other genres of English studies, the study of poetry emerges favourably vis-à-vis
the cognitive development of students. Students find poetry to be more cognitively
challenging and emotionally engaging than prose and frequently spend longer periods
of time analysing and contemplating “the poem” rather than prose (Peskin, 2007).
Engaging in the process of poetry composition can act as an effective medium for the
development of the cognitive domain (Dymoke, 2003). In crafting poetry pupils are
challenged, *inter alia*, to transform knowledge through various formal means, to
analyse effective thematic exposition, to cogitate on semantics and syntactics, to
synthesis meaning, to investigate sound and to construct form, structure and cohesion
(Ruurs, 2002; Tompkins, 2008; Jordan, Jensen, & Greenleaf, 2001; Wilson, 2007). As
a tool of cognition, poetry challenges us to “pare down our reality to its linguistic
essentials, whose interplay, be it clash or fusion, yields epiphany or revelation, and
because it exploits the rhythmic and euphonic properties of the language that in
themselves are revelatory” (Brodsky, 1995, p. 208). It is therefore generally accepted,
given the widely documented value of poetry, that this art form has a key role to play
in the cognitive development of students.

Perhaps less widely valued within the current educational framework is the
importance of its contribution to the development of the affective domain for students.
This research sought to explore these issues, focusing on the teaching of English
poetry in Irish schools. Like Lynch (2001), the authors suggest that individual and
expressive emotional output is important for the contemporary adolescent. Poetry can
have a significant role to play in the education or refinement of affect (Carr, 2005)
and poetic exploration can cultivate subjective knowing and act as a catalyst in the
development of complex emotional expression (Stewart, 2002; Collins, 2008). It
offers a cathartic medium through which individuals can engage with the full range of
human emotion and experience by providing what Motion (2001) terms a “meditative
space”;

Poetry makes a kind of singing sense out of confusing experience. Through words, it
is possible to shape and articulate our most joyous and troubling moments. When we
write of loneliness, even of what may feel like despair, even of what may be despair,
we discover that there is in language itself a kind of resilience, a surging, hopeful
energy that is redemptive and reassuring (Kennelly, 1999, p. 184).

THE IRISH EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Post-primary education in Ireland is comprised of two distinct but interconnected
“cycles”. Students enter post-primary education at the age of 12 or 13 years and
immediately enter the Junior Cycle. This programme spans three years, building on
the education received at primary level and culminates in the Junior Certificate
Examination. Following the completion of the Junior Cycle, students at the age of 15-
17 years enter the Senior Cycle, more commonly referred to as the Leaving Certificate years, the name of which derives from the final exam at the end of this two year cycle. The Senior Cycle builds on the Junior Cycle and culminates in a summative examination entitled the Leaving Certificate Examination. A strong transdisciplinary emphasis on the summative examination exists at Senior Cycle level (Government of Ireland, 1999), as eligibility for university placement is governed by points attained in this examination. Thus, the Leaving Certificate years form a distinctly pressurised time for student and teacher alike. The Points Commission Report (1999) conducted to review Ireland’s system of matriculation, highlights a number of damaging effects attributed to this points system. Issues raised included negative impact on students’ personal development; a narrowing of the curriculum arising from the tendency to teach to the examination rather than to the aims of the curriculum; and an undue focus on the attainment of examination results. The prevailing, measurement-driven and performance-oriented model dominant in Irish education (Glatter, 2003) has a significant impact on the pedagogical methodologies drawn on by the poetry teacher within the classroom. The dominant influence of the points system has led to a teaching to the exam ideology (Government of Ireland, 1999) within post-primary schooling, the effects of which are explored in this paper, with a specific focus on the provision of an integrated pedagogical experience within the poetry class.

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical framework

This research uses the combined theoretical framework of the positivist and interpretative paradigms. In doing so this study takes a pragmatic research approach (Yardley & Bishop, 2008), as the aim of the research was not to seek a truth independent from human experience, but to enhance experience through the attentive exploration of socio-cultural values and practices (Maxcy, 2003). The research employed the use of questionnaires in phase one, to facilitate the collection of data from a wide distribution of post-primary schools. However, this research also focuses on subjective realities; therefore quantitative data alone was not deemed sufficient to explore often deeply embedded individual attitudes (Dyson, 2006). Interviews were employed to explore in greater detail emergent areas of interest from phase one. 

Phase one

Following a review of the literature, a questionnaire developed by O’Neill (1998) was selected as suitable for adaptation using the questionnaire development framework of Radhakrishna (2007). O’Neill’s questionnaire sought to establish the perspectives of poetry teachers working within the Junior Cycle (the pre-requisite to the Senior Cycle or Leaving Certificate years) in relation to their professional role. Permission to adapt the instrument was granted by O’Neill. An analysis of the adapted questionnaire using the Gunning-Fog Index formula demonstrated a high level of readability, with a score of 10.17 being accorded to the instrument. Reliability was established by examining the test-retest reliability of the questionnaire. Over a two-week interval period, a test-retest correlation coefficient of 0.82 (p=>0.001; n=8) was achieved. A pilot of the adapted instrument was then carried out to obviate the occurrence of glitches incurred in the questionnaire adaptation. The pilot was administered to two, third-level teacher educators (both of whom previously held poetry teaching positions at post-primary
level), two researchers in the field from alternate third-level institutions, two members of a support service body for English teachers and nine, Senior-Cycle, post-primary poetry teachers. The finalised instrument comprised sixty-seven, semi-structured questions focusing on the areas of: the role of the poetry teacher, poetry studies, the Leaving Certificate syllabus, classroom resources, pedagogy and the Leaving Certificate assessment (Table 1). This paper reports on section one, role conceptualization, and section five of the teacher questionnaire. Closed questions, both dichotomous and 5-point Likert Scale, were used to provide specific information based on a prescribed range of responses. Questions constructed in this form act as reliable and efficient methods for data collection due to the uniformity of data they provide (Fink, 2006). Open questions were used to explore more complex subjective teacher responses and to afford enhanced investigation into areas of significance for interviewees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key research area</th>
<th>Embedded issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of the teacher</td>
<td>Role conceptualisation, actualisation of self-perception, self-confidence, levels of enjoyment, perception of success within the poetry class, sources of reference, challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry Studies</td>
<td>Perceived importance, frequently used poets, use of poetry beyond examination prescription, pupils’ abstract thinking ability, pupil motivation, poetry selection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving Certificate</td>
<td>Familiarity, pupils’ interests, thematic diversity, course content, prescription of poets, linkage to the Junior Cycle, cognitive and affective development, recommendations for improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllabus</td>
<td>Resources</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Departmental resources, ICT, in-service, availability of resources, acquisition of resources, proposed resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Class frequency, illustration, response journals, creative imitation, drama in education techniques, oracy, poet visits, memorisation, pupil engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Alignment with the syllabus, benefits, influence on pupils, cognitive and affective development, recommendations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Phase one research areas

Based on an approximation of 4 English teachers working in each post-primary school in Ireland, it was decided to distribute the questionnaire to 50 post-primary schools across the country to reach a cohort of 200 teachers. The research cohort for this phase was selected using a probability sampling method (Scott & Morrison, 2006), with schools selected via a process of simple random sampling (Fink, 2006). All schools included on the Irish Department of Education post-primary school list (n=730) were accorded a randomly allocated number between 0 and 1 in Microsoft Excel using the code =RAND(). The schools were then reordered according to their number from lowest to highest. The top one hundred schools from this list were selected for contact. Once consent was obtained from 50 schools the research cohort was established. A response rate of 58% (n=29 schools; n=80 teachers) was achieved. Descriptive statistical analysis was applied using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 13.0. As questionnaires were completed anonymously, responses are coded Q.1 (Questionnaire 1) / Q.2 (Questionnaire 2) etc. for data dissemination.
Phase two

Phase two served to deepen exploration into the emergent issues arising from phase one through a series of teacher interviews. It aimed to provide teachers with the opportunity to detail their individual pedagogy rationale, without the constraints of a set schedule of invariant questions (Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood, & Son, 2004). The use of semi-structured interview was employed to gather data on the more intangible aspects of school culture, that is, values, assumptions and beliefs (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Given that a teacher’s experience of poetry education is influenced by the gender of the group being taught (Pike, 2000; Hanratty, 2008), school stratification was employed. The selected cohort from phase one was stratified according to single-sex, boys’ schools (SSB), single-sex girls’ schools (SSG), and mixed grouping schools (MG). Stratified random sampling was used to identify the research cohort of phase two.

Due to the in-depth nature of the interviews, data drawn from interviews with 10% of the research cohort (n=8 teachers) was determined to be satisfactory for this exploratory study (Silverman, 2005). Pilot interviews (n=2) enabled the researcher to identify certain “unscheduled probes” that would be necessary in the subsequent interviews (Berg, 2001). Interviews were conducted with two poetry teachers from the SSB and SSG cohorts respectively and with four poetry teachers from the MG cohort. An eclectic range of perspectives was emergent from this research phase, as only one interviewee per participating school was called upon. Each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes with two interviews extending to seventy-five minutes. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of data representation. The interviews focused on both key emergent themes from phase one and also on issues of importance for the interviewees. Data analysis for the purpose of this research was conducted deductively, based on the research questions posed in phase one and inductively, based on the emergence of new themes (Aneshensel, 2002). In order to maintain interviewee anonymity, data for this phase of the research is reported upon in the form of I.1 (Interview 1) /I.2 (Interview 2) and so on.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval was sought from and granted by the University of Limerick Department of Education and Professional Studies Research Ethics Committee. Participation in the research was entirely voluntary and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any stage. Participants were assured that data would be treated as confidential information at all stages of the research process and that requirements of the Data Protection Act (1998) were observed.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Dichotomised aspirations

Poetry teachers were asked to provide a subjective definition of their “purpose” as a Leaving Certificate poetry teacher. Given the complex nature of teaching, research participants were not limited to the identification of a single aim. The development of
aesthetic appreciation amongst pupils emerged as the most frequently cited aim, with 60% of poetry teachers in phase one noting the development of this attribute as inherent to their role conceptualization. The interview provided greater insight on this issue:

I associate poetry with almost like music. I consider poetry touching that extra dimension in a person’s life. The aesthetics. It’s a gift they’re going to take with them for life. I think it should be treated differently to all other elements of the English course, being almost like a gift that you can give them (I.8).

I want them to look at a poem and I want them to get excited by this poem. I want them to be enthused by poetry to the extent that I am. I would love to breathe more enthusiasm into the students because it’s very personal, it’s from the soul and I want them to see that (I.3).

The benefit of fostering an aesthetic appreciation amongst students was outlined by teachers to be twofold in purpose. It was noted that the development of poetic appreciation amongst pupils during their formative years would assist in nurturing continued positive engagement with poetry subsequent to their post-primary schooling: “I want to inspire my students so that they will develop a life long love/relationship with poetry” (Q.17); “My primary purpose is to stimulate an interest in poetry itself. I’d like them to leave the school having, like myself, one or two favourite poets themselves (Q.42); “To stimulate an interest in poetry for poetry’s sake” (Q.63). It was also noted by teachers that pupil appreciation of the genre assists in fostering a more positive attitude in relation to the Leaving Certificate exam: “With the Leaving Certificate if they have a positive attitude towards poetry they don’t see the exam as a huge mountain to climb” (I.2); “If I can get them to appreciate a poet and understand where they are coming from they will be much better equipped for the exam” (I.5). However, the challenge of fostering an aesthetic appreciation of poetry amongst pupils was noted by one teacher who asserted “moderation” to be the key to successfully engaging pupils;

It’s hard to convince a seventeen-year-old fella that poems have aesthetic pleasure. It’s a nice idea and it would be something you would try to covertly bring in. It wouldn’t be something as overt as aren’t poems lovely. Moderation is probably a good thing (I.2).

While acknowledging the value of experiencing poetry as an aesthetic art form, teachers noted that this educational ambition is quite often relegated to that of an aspiration owing to the obligations of an exam-oriented educational framework;

It is very exam orientated and you just have to make sure you’ve covered the poems for the exam (I.7).

I suppose ideally I’d like them to like poetry and maybe even read poetry when school is over but I have a feeling that for some of my students once they finish English that is it for the poetry (I.6).

Forty-three per cent of questionnaire respondents highlighted a more technicised self-conceptualization, asserting their role as a Leaving Certificate poetry teacher in terms of developing lower-order cognitive capacity: “To introduce and analyse the poetry of selected poets. Also to provide various notes and questions on those poems” (Q.34);
“On a day to day basis my purpose is to explain any difficulties in content and language” (Q.27); “To provide students with an overview of each poet on the course paying attention to theme, language and style” (Q18); “To teach the students how to access a poem for exam purposes” (Q.45); “To deconstruct poems for my students” (Q.62).

The technicised demands perceived by teachers to be exacted upon them by the pressures of the Leaving Certificate exam were reported by many respondents to have a subversive effect on their aim to promote aesthetic appreciation. As noted by one teacher:

When it comes down to it we're working within the confines of the exam and basically students have to know their poetry thematically and the language used by the poets. That tends to be my purpose in teaching poetry, unfortunately I suppose but that is the way it is (I.5).

One teacher offered an alternate perspective from their experience of teaching poetry on a concurrent Senior Cycle programme, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). This programme caters for less academically oriented students and therefore is not as driven by summative assessment as the Established Leaving Certificate programme (Smyth, McCoy, Darmody, & Dunne, 2008).

If you compare the teaching to that of English in LCA – for me as an English teacher of LCA I have no constraints whatsoever. I can do whatever I like and my teaching is completely different. In LCA it’s great fun, we could be studying the lyrics of a modern song. We have covered a lot of Coldplay’s music. I ask them what is their favourite song, they bring in their favourite song and we get the lyrics off it then and work from there creating poetry (I.3)

Developing pupil voice

Sixty-seven per cent of Senior Cycle poetry teachers in the questionnaire identified that they “sometimes”/“rarely” encourage their pupils to compose poetry and a further 17% of teachers asserted they “never” ask pupils to write their own poems. The challenges of encouraging student composition were discussed during interview;

We don’t really have the time (for poetry writing) which is a pity I suppose because that’s where you should be encouraging the creative juices to begin (I.5).

This is a major problem. Unfortunately I’ll admit straight out I don’t do it at Leaving Cert. It’s because of time constraints. They want to be doing what’s on the course and I’m afraid that’s what we have to give them unfortunately. It would be an awful lot more value to them if we did get them to write poetry (I.8).

No we don’t. I don’t have time and I feel embarrassed to tell you that but no. It’s something I should do more often but I’m concentrating so much on the syllabus, the curriculum, the curriculum and I’m so obsessed with it that I’m forgetting; I’m leaving out very important details like getting student to compose themselves (I.3).

One teacher suggested that the pressure to work solely within the remit of “examinnable material” came also from students when he suggested that pupils approach the Leaving Certificate years “like a machine” (I.4). Discussing his failed attempts to develop his pupils’ poetry writing skills he asserted: “I’ve tried before (to
develop pupils poetry writing skills) but students say this isn’t relevant…the points, the points, the points”. The questionnaire data reiterates this trend with just 16% of teachers surveyed asserting they “always”/“often” work on the development of pupils’ poetry writing skills within the poetry class.

While the development of students’ affective and subjective responses to prescribed poetry appeared more positive with over half (52%) of teachers asserting that they “always” ask pupils for a personal interpretation of a poem and a further 41% “often” asking pupils for a personal response, the interviews revealed a high level of superficiality in the development of pupils’ subjective responses to poetry. Teachers discussed at length the reluctance of pupils to contribute their subjective interpretations of a poem and also to embrace the notion of multiple meanings in poetry:

I think the students would prefer if the teacher would just say what the poem meant but I do say it’s not like a maths problem where there’s one right answer, there’s many ways of looking at the line but if I go on with it, they’re saying well which one is it? I think they prefer something more definite at the end to finally come to a conclusion (I.7).

Interviewees suggested a sense of dependency on the part of both poetry teacher and pupil for pre-scripted responses or “notes” on individual poems:

Leaving Cert are waiting for notes and they don’t want to think (I.6).

Youngsters are getting lazy and just waiting for the notes and others are lacking in confidence and they would think whatever they write down wouldn’t be as good as what they would learn off by heart (I.8).

They think if they have these notes and they regurgitate them that they will do better. You will always have the few who will work away with you but more and more you’re getting the students who are waiting for the notes (I.1).

I know teachers who give reams and reams and reams of pages of their own notes to students (I.3).

While outlining their attempts to obtain a personal response from pupils on the poetry studied, teachers frequently suggested that their attempts were often thwarted by demands for detailed notes and conclusive meanings. This impact on teacher motivation is reflected on by one interviewee who asserted:

I’m fighting against this and some of them are just sitting back passively you know ones who are very bright. They’re just not engaging because they know they’re going to learn these (notes) off. Then when you give them a question some of them regurgitate the notes without even twisting them to answer the question. I find that very disheartening (I.4).

In contrast, interviewee 4 suggested the provision of notes to be an uncontested and habitual feature of their class;

The bulk of my methodology, the bulk of how I impart my knowledge to them is note taking. We don’t spend too long on each poem before I move onto the next one. I
certainly would give them a good idea of what the poem is about before I move onto the next one.

The potential impact of this style of poetry teaching on pupil enjoyment was highlighted by one interviewee who asserted “an awful lot of those students that are forced with all their notes, after their Leaving Cert they will never ever open a poetry book again.” (I.8). Interviewee 4 highlighted the influence of performance accountability on classroom practice;

I think some teachers give them out ’cause they want their pupils to do well. They’re afraid it will reflect on them if their pupils don’t do well and that they won’t do well if they don’t have all these phrases (I.7).

Pedagogical regression did not go unnoticed by interviewee 1 who remarked; “It’s ironic in some cases that we’re back to the rote learning which we’ve been trying for the last fifty years to get away from”.

Over half (59%) of the teachers in this research stated that they “rarely” (26%) or “never” (33%) ask pupils to illustrate poetry through an alternative art form, for example, drawing. Reasons for this included: pupils’ perceptions of the activity according to their teachers, “They would consider it childish” (I.1); teachers’ conflicting perceptions of the purpose of this activity and the purpose of poetry teaching at Leaving Certificate Level (“It’s not an art exam” (I.2)); and finally, time constraints as noted by interviewee 8 (“The problem is it is very difficult with the time constraints. I know if you asked me straight out what I should do – that [illustration of poems] is what I should do. It helps the pupils to empathise with the poet themselves”).

Drama is also prioritised in the Leaving Certificate English program (NCCA, 2010a). Yet, 75% of poetry teachers surveyed stated that they “never” (33%) or “rarely” (42%) use drama in education methods in their Leaving Certificate class. Again, teachers’ perceptions of pupils’ response was cited by many as a primary inhibiting factor;

It’s very hard to get a group of seventeen-year-old fellas to stand up and do a freeze frame of Elizabeth Bishop. I think you’re making a lot of people self-conscious about poetry that don’t need to be self conscious about poetry. Then what happens is you spend five minutes cajoling someone to go up and do something, then when they’re up there they feel uncomfortable about doing it and they look at you and think, I’m not two anymore (I.2).

I just couldn’t see myself winning over a class group with it (I.7).

DISCUSSION

The data suggest a tension between teachers’ altruistic ambitions and the pressure to meet the requirements of summative assessment. While fostering an aesthetic appreciation of poetry, which engages pupils affectively and creatively, emerged as central to teachers’ perception of their professional role, in practice this was limited. The impact of a prevailing technical rationalist culture in which exam achievement is afforded priority over a broader appropriation of academic accomplishment was posited as particularly challenging by teachers in this research. “Teaching to the
exam” also emerged as a significant theme. This theme permeated not only teachers’ pedagogical philosophies, but also influenced their methodological approaches. A widespread reductionist approach to the teaching of poetry was acknowledged by participants.

The findings highlight also the existence of a trend towards pupil passivity. The dominance of a traditionalist, lower-order and teacher-centred approach to poetry teaching was acknowledged by research participants, who posited that the current curriculum framework which contextualizes their everyday classroom pedagogies is failing to provide the necessary space for a more aesthetic, creative and engaging student-centred approach to the teaching of poetry. While the development of student voice and of the affective domain is asserted as a primary ambition of the Leaving Certificate English syllabus (NCCA, 2010b), it appears challenged within the poetry classroom. It appears that the potential for affective development via poetry composition remains negligible at Leaving Certificate Level, as this research points to the majority of poetry teachers choosing not to embark on poetry composition with their pupils. While respondents noted the benefits of poetry composition within the class, they also noted a sense of pressure to work solely within the remit of “examinable material”, thus rendering poetic composition and the development of its affective merits, a largely utopian aspiration.

Meeting the demands not only of a system privileging technicism and exam performance, but also the coexisting demands of students who subscribe to a reductionist model of study was posited to afford little room for pedagogical creativity. Notwithstanding the subordination of affective development through poetic composition, this research suggests that the relegation of pupils’ subjective responses to poetry is occurring due to the pressure of achieving standardisation and measurable outputs for the purpose of examination. The Leaving Certificate English Syllabus asserts that students must “develop an awareness of their own responses, affective, imaginative, and intellectual, to aesthetic texts” (NCCA, 2010c p. 14). Development of pupils’ subjective and affective responses to poetry texts is significant in achieving this aim. However, disparity is evidenced by teachers in this research, between the development of pupils’ “subjective voice” for the purpose of the exam and the more affective-oriented development of pupils’ voice, serving to enhance pupils’ sense of self-efficacy and cultural awareness within the genre. As a result of this dichotomy, difficulties in striving to foster pupils’ own voice emerge within the poetry class, with pupils frequently attempting to discover the “correct” or “set” meaning of a poem, a trend which is exacerbated by the use of pre-scripted notes at Leaving Certificate Level. This prescription potentially facilitates the undervaluing of poetry and contributes to a failure to appreciate the value of subjective interpretation within the genre.

Differentiated modes of representation play an important role in advancing pupils’ affective development, skills of comprehension and literacy and enjoyment (Kendrick, 2004; Cowan & Albers, 2006; Buckelew, 2003; McDonald & Fisher, 2006). One of the most widely espoused forms of differentiated representation in the poetry class remains the poetic representation through visual illustration. It is asserted that the succinctness of poetry can focus pupils’ minds on their affective responses and that the visual imagery of poetry consequently lends itself to illustration (Hope, 2008). This research indicates reticence amongst teachers to provide space for
differentiated representation in the form of illustration within the poetry classroom. In addition, while drama-in-education as an alternate form of representation provides a highly accessible medium through which the affective domain via personal and social development can be catered for (Cramer, Ortlieb, & Cheek, 2007; Wright, 2006), the research suggests negation of this methodology.

IDENTIFYING CONCEPTUAL BOUNDARIES

A number of conceptual boundaries for the teaching of poetry studies at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland emerged from this research. The data suggest that teachers grappled with the fear of “getting it wrong”. In an educational system which places value and status on “getting it right” and “knowing the correct answer”, it appears that teachers may be reluctant to move into unfamiliar terrain both pedagogically and philosophically. The pressure exerted by summative examination can arguably be charged with limiting the ambitions of both pupil and teacher, and placing a dependence on the “known” and the “unambiguous answers” (Dymoke, 2003). The findings of this research are not in isolation but are reflective of research emerging within the wider educational community, which appears to mirror this pedagogical trend (Benton, 2000; McNess, Broadfoot & Osborn 2003; Dymoke, 2002).

Time constraints were also asserted to be a significant factor for many teachers of poetry. The quantity of course content and limitations of time were viewed by the teachers in this research as barriers to change and experimentation. On the topic of poetry writing, one teacher noted:

This is a major problem. Unfortunately I’ll admit straight out I don’t do it at Leaving Cert. It’s because of time constraints. It’s terrible you see that an awful lot of us buy into the idea that students want notes. They want to be doing what’s on the course and I’m afraid that’s what we have to give them unfortunately. It would be an awful lot more value to them if we did get them to write poetry (I.6).

From a broader perspective, meeting the demands of a top-down accountability system in an era of left-brained dominance (Pink, 2006) is seen as a pedagogical barrier by the majority of teachers in this research. Over the last decade, researchers have pointed to the damaging impact of “cognitive culture” (Eisner, 2003) on creativity and innovation, an occurrence charged with separating intelligence from feeling (Robinson, 2001). Eisner (2002) asserts that we are “creating an industrial culture in our schools, one whose values are brittle and whose conception of what’s important narrow” (p. 3). Consequently students have become experts at consuming knowledge rather than producing it (Sawyer, 2005). Indeed, societal acquiescence within the realm of this cultural circumstance is highlighted by Flutter and Ruddock (2004), who claim that “the public have been captivated by the language and style of this winner-takes-it-all culture” (p. 1).

FINDING A BALANCE

In a world beset with conflicts, internal as well as external, isn’t it of equal if not greater importance to balance the sharpening of our intellects with the systematic cultivation of our hearts? (Zajonc, 2006, p. 1)
Contemporary society and consequently education, prizes rationality, logic and cognitive exposition so much so that critics of a technical approach to schooling have charged it with “freezing people’s imaginative thinking” (Greene, 2000, p. 124). Such a technicised emphasis contrasts greatly with the innovative and aesthetic roots of poetry. Poetic analysis has consequently become synonymous with technical deconstruction (Meehan, 1999; NCCA, 2009); poetic inquiry replaced by exam “achievement” (Eisner, 2003) and aesthetic endeavour, frequently displaced by prosaic standardization (Fowler & Wilson, 2001; McCracken & McCracken, 2001). Kind, Irwin, Grauer, & Cosson (2005) advocate the need for a different type of educative focus;

> Education is longing for a deeper more connected, more inclusive, and more aware way of knowing. One that connects heart and hand and head and does not split knowledge into dualities of thought and being, mind, and body, emotion and intellect (p. 33).

Clearly teachers of poetry face challenges in terms of their professional aspirations and the reality of their classroom practice. Teachers need to be supported in order to remain true to their pedagogical aims, particularly in educative cultures where common practice may differ significantly from these aims. Pink (2006) argues that the demands of society have surpassed technical knowledge and now call for the development a conceptual era, an era in which advancement is inexorably linked with imagination, creativity and innovation. Inherent in the development of such aptitudes is the inculcation of an integrated pedagogy into the classroom, which takes a holistic approach to pupil development. An integrated pedagogy recognises and celebrates the interconnectivity of “lived experience” (Dewey, 1948) through both the cognitive and affective domains and, in doing so, creates a learning environment in which pupils are enabled to develop as both creative and critical thinkers. One of the key missions of the schools must be to educate for creativity (Sawyer, 2005). Creativity should hold a fundamental role in the English classroom (NCCA, 2010a) which is affirmed and celebrated.

Moreover, acknowledging this necessity calls for an awareness of the reality that creativity is not necessarily comfortable (Misson & Sumara, 2005). From an educational context it involves posing questions, testing new methods, re-orienting relationships and at times “getting it wrong”. It involves the subversion of pre-existing beliefs. Stepping outside traditional conceptual boundaries can facilitate an enhanced understanding of self-imposed limitations and also potentially serves to highlights pathways for transcending such limitations. Lieberman and Miller (2005) advocate the necessity for educators to embrace a “cosmopolitan rejoinder” in the face of educational change. This means commitment to an educational ethos which supports enablement rather than prescription of good practice and which prioritises the tacit knowledge and teacher creativity. In the case of the poetry teacher, the adoption of an integrated pedagogy which provides opportunities for more connected and inclusive ways of knowing (Kind et al., 2005) holds the possibility to recalibrate current pedagogical disequilibrium. Drawing meaningful value from poetry within the contemporary classroom is neither an elusive or utopian task, it is a pedagogic necessity. In the development of a resourceful and innovative society, the provision of an integrated pedagogy which recognises that both the cognitive and the affective has much to offer. The development of pupils as both critically engaged and creative thinkers is now more than ever an educational imperative.
REFERENCES


J. Hennessy, C. Hinchion & P. Mannix McNamara  “The points, the points, the points”: Exploring...


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Appendix B : Conference Presentations: National and International


Appendix C: Copyright Declaration

October, 2011

Permission was sought and granted by each journal for the right to re-print the articles used within this document. Full copyright correspondence details are available upon request.

_______________________     _______________________
Jennifer Hennessy                                    Dr. Patricia Mannix McNamara
(Candidate)                (Supervisor)
Appendix D: Teacher Questionnaire

A STUDY OF ENGLISH TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES ON THE TEACHING OF POETRY AT LEAVING CERTIFICATE LEVEL

GENERAL INFORMATION

Please tick the appropriate box.

A. Sex:                     Male [ ]    Female [ ]

B. Type of school:          (a) Single sex boys [ ]
                               Single sex girls [ ]
                               Co-educational [ ]

                               (b) Voluntary Secondary [ ]
                               Community [ ]
                               Comprehensive [ ]
                               Community College [ ]
                               Vocational [ ]
                               Other [ ]
                               (Please specify)

C. How long have you been teaching English at Leaving Certificate level?
   0-5 years [ ]
   6-10 years [ ]
   11-15 years [ ]
   16-20 years [ ]
   21-25 years [ ]
   26 years and over [ ]

D. Do you teach/have you taught at: Ordinary Level [ ]
                                           Higher Level [ ]
SECTION A

THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE TEACHER OF POETRY

1. (a) As a teacher of poetry what would you consider your purpose to be?

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

(b) This purpose is supported by the current Leaving Certificate English syllabus:
Strongly agree [  ]  Agree [  ]  Unsure [  ]  Disagree [  ]  Strongly disagree [  ]

2. Please indicate the extent to which the following have made a positive contribution to your teaching of poetry by placing a number of 1 to 7 in each of the accompanying boxes, 7 being most positive and 1 being least positive.
Poetry anthologies [  ]
Colleagues in school [  ]
Degree course [  ]
Practical inspection [  ]
In-service training sessions [  ]
Syllabus documents/guidelines [  ]
Books on poetry teaching [  ]
Other (please state) ___________________ [  ]

3. Do you feel confident in teaching poetry?
Yes [  ]  No [  ]

4. Do you enjoy teaching poetry?
Yes [  ]  No [  ]

5. I feel a poetry class has been a success when…___________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

5. If you encountered a difficulty in teaching an area of poetry where would you be most likely to seek a solution?
Please indicate the relative likelihood of each of the following by entering a number from 1 to 6 in each of the accompanying boxes, 6 being most likely and 1 being least likely.

Read a book [ ]
Talk to a colleague [ ]
Check in-service materials [ ]
Departmental websites [ ]
Other websites [ ]
Departmental resources (e.g. Draft Guidelines for Teachers of English) [ ]
Other (Please state) _____________________ [ ]

6. Please tick the appropriate box in response to each statement:

(a) The time spent in teaching poetry rarely pays off in terms of pupil enjoyment.
Strongly agree [ ] Agree [ ] Unsure [ ] Disagree [ ] Strongly disagree [ ]

(b) Pupils’ motivation towards poetry decreases from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle.
Strongly agree [ ] Agree [ ] Unsure [ ] Disagree [ ] Strongly disagree [ ]

(c) The problem with teaching poetry is that you can never be sure you are doing it right.
Strongly agree [ ] Agree [ ] Unsure [ ] Disagree [ ] Strongly disagree [ ]

(d) Apart from school work, I seldom read poetry.
Strongly agree [ ] Agree [ ] Unsure [ ] Disagree [ ] Strongly disagree [ ]

END OF SECTION A
SECTION B

LEAVING CERTIFICATE POETRY STUDIES

1. Please rate, in your opinion, the importance of poetry in English Studies by circling one number below. 1 being very important and 5 being not very important.

   1  2  3  4  5

2. Please list the three poets from the prescribed syllabus which you feel work well with Leaving Cycle classes and explain why:

   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

3. Do you study poems/poets outside the prescribed Leaving Cert. poetry course? 
   Yes [ ]   No [ ]

4. In poetry studies students tend to get trapped at a literal level.
   Strongly agree [ ]   Agree [ ]   Unsure [ ]   Disagree [ ]   Strongly disagree [ ]

5. I find it difficult to motivate pupils in the Leaving Cert. poetry class compared with other sections of the English class.
   Strongly agree [ ]   Agree [ ]   Unsure [ ]   Disagree [ ]   Strongly disagree [ ]

6. In the poetry course I teach I am primarily shaped/guided by:
   The policy of the school’s English Department [ ]
   The Syllabus [ ]
   Past Examination Papers [ ]
   Other (Please specify) ______________________________ [ ]

7. Please rank your first five priorities on the factors which have a positive influence on your choice of poems for Leaving Certificate classes by placing a number 1 to 5 in each of the accompanying boxes, 5 being the most positive and 1 being the least positive.
   Deals with themes/ideas which appeal to my class [ ]
   Is most likely to appear on the exam paper [ ]
   Has a personal appeal for the teacher [ ]
   Is linked to a theme being studied [ ]
   Will stimulate whole class discussion [ ]
   Other (please specify) ______________________________ [ ]
8. Please tick from the list given below three areas which provide the greatest difficulties for Leaving Certificate students when they are dealing with poetry.

Comprehension [ ]
Lack of motivation [ ]
Rote learning [ ]
Writing answers in examinations [ ]
Oral discussion [ ]
Writing personal responses [ ]
Finding appropriate critical terms [ ]
Aesthetic appreciation [ ]
Other (please specify) __________________ [ ]

END OF SECTION B
SECTION C

THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE POETRY SYLLABUS

1. Have you read in full the current English syllabus?
   Yes [ ]       No [ ]

2. Developing pupils’ interest in poetry remains central to the Leaving Cert. English syllabus.
   Strongly agree [ ]       Agree [ ]       Unsure [ ]       Disagree [ ]       Strongly disagree [ ]

3. The poetry syllabus represents a wide range of themes.
   Strongly agree [ ]       Agree [ ]       Unsure [ ]       Disagree [ ]       Strongly disagree [ ]

4. I’m satisfied with the amount of poetry pupils must study under the current syllabus.
   Strongly agree [ ]       Agree [ ]       Unsure [ ]       Disagree [ ]       Strongly disagree [ ]

5. Prescription of poets at Leaving Certificate Level is beneficial for me as a teacher.
   Strongly agree [ ]       Agree [ ]       Unsure [ ]       Disagree [ ]       Strongly disagree [ ]

   Strongly agree [ ]       Agree [ ]       Unsure [ ]       Disagree [ ]       Strongly disagree [ ]

7. The study of poetry under the current Leaving Certificate syllabus helps my pupils to learn:
   1.___________________________________________________________________
   2.___________________________________________________________________
   3.___________________________________________________________________

8. Were you teaching English prior to the introduction of the syllabus in 1999?       Yes [ ] (For how many years? ___ )       No [ ]
   *If your answer to the above question was ‘No’, please ignore question 9.

9. Please tick the appropriate box in response to each statement:
   (a) My teaching of poetry has changed significantly since the introduction of the current English Leaving Certificate syllabus.
   Strongly agree [ ]       Agree [ ]       Unsure [ ]       Disagree [ ]       Strongly disagree [ ]
(b) The new poetry syllabus does not put extra demands on the English teacher.
Strongly agree [ ]  Agree [ ]  Unsure [ ]  Disagree [ ]  Strongly disagree [ ]

(c) Overall the new poetry syllabus is more satisfying to teach.
Strongly agree [ ]  Agree [ ]  Unsure [ ]  Disagree [ ]  Strongly disagree [ ]

(d) Pupils are more motivated by the new poetry syllabus.
Strongly agree [ ]  Agree [ ]  Unsure [ ]  Disagree [ ]  Strongly disagree [ ]

(e) Teachers are more motivated by the new syllabus.
Strongly agree [ ]  Agree [ ]  Unsure [ ]  Disagree [ ]  Strongly disagree [ ]

10. Please outline any change or recommendation you would perceive to be beneficial to the poetry syllabus:

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

END OF SECTION C
SECTION D

RESOURCES

1. Have you read in full the following Leaving Certificate materials?
   Draft Guidelines for Teachers of English    Yes [ ]    No [ ]
   Resource Materials for Teaching Language    Yes [ ]    No [ ]

2. For poetry studies outside the prescribed poets do you focus on poems from:
   Textbooks    [ ]    Personal collection   [ ]
   Anthologies    [ ]    Photocopied material   [ ]
   In-service materials    [ ]    Past examination papers   [ ]
   Other (please specify)__________ I only focus on prescribed poets    [ ]

3. How frequently do you use ICT as part of the poetry class?
   Always [ ]    Often [ ]    Sometimes [ ]    Rarely [ ]    Never [ ]

4. Compared with other classes like the novel or drama, poetry classes are difficult to
   resource.
   Strongly agree [ ]    Agree [ ]    Unsure [ ]    Disagree [ ]    Strongly disagree [ ]

5. In the area of resource materials, teachers of poetry at Leaving Certificate Level have
   been well served by in-service support.
   Strongly agree [ ]    Agree [ ]    Unsure [ ]    Disagree [ ]    Strongly disagree [ ]

6. How do you keep up to date with poetry resources?
   Journal subscription    [ ]
   Attendance at in-service    [ ]
   Collaboration with colleagues    [ ]
   Departmental websites    [ ]
   Other websites    [ ]
   Other (please specify)_________________    [ ]

7. Please mention one additional resource which would help the teacher of poetry at
   Leaving Certificate Level:

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

END OF SECTION D
SECTION E

METHODS

1. How often do you teach poetry in the class?
   More than once a week [ ]  Once a week [ ]  Less often [ ]  In study blocks [ ]

2. How frequently do you ask pupils to illustrate poems? (drawing etc)
   Always [ ]  Often [ ]  Sometimes [ ]  Rarely [ ]  Never [ ]

3. How frequently would you encourage pupils to explore a poem through drama-in-education techniques?
   Always [ ]  Often [ ]  Sometimes [ ]  Rarely [ ]  Never [ ]

4. Developing pupils’ oracy through poetry is fundamental to poetry studies in my class.
   Strongly agree [ ]  Agree [ ]  Unsure [ ]  Disagree [ ]  Strongly disagree [ ]

5. (a) Do you ask pupils to learn off lines/segments of poems?  Yes [ ]  No [ ]
    (b) If yes, please state why:

                       _____________________________________________
                       _____________________________________________
                       _____________________________________________

6. How frequently do you ask pupils to write their own poems?
   Always [ ]  Often [ ]  Sometimes [ ]  Rarely [ ]  Never [ ]

7. How often do you ask pupils for a personal interpretation of a poem?
   Always [ ]  Often [ ]  Sometimes [ ]  Rarely [ ]  Never [ ]

8. How frequently do you allow the pupils to choose the poetry to be read/studied?
   Always [ ]  Often [ ]  Sometimes [ ]  Rarely [ ]  Never [ ]

9. Do you encourage pupils to use response journals (to track their changing understandings of texts) in your poetry class?
   Yes [ ]  No [ ]
10. Generally pupils’ oral discussion of poetry is more impressive than their writing about it.
   Strongly agree [ ]  Agree [ ]  Unsure [ ]  Disagree [ ]  Strongly disagree [ ]

11. How often do you ask pupils to creatively imitate a poem in developing their writing skills?
   Always [ ]  Often [ ]  Sometimes [ ]  Rarely [ ]  Never [ ]

12. Do you use the biography of poets when teaching poetry?
   Always [ ]  Often [ ]  Sometimes [ ]  Rarely [ ]  Never [ ]

13. Have you ever invited a poet to speak to your class?
   Yes [ ]  No [ ]

14. From the following list tick three activities which would most frequently occur in your poetry class?
   Teacher questioning/ whole class discussion [ ]
   Pupil discussion in small groups [ ]
   Pupils in group reading [ ]
   Teacher clarification of poem [ ]
   Pupils writing personal responses [ ]
   Pupils engaged in silent poetry reading [ ]
   Pupils writing critical responses [ ]

16. Please outline briefly the structure of a poetry class you recently taught which you felt worked well:

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

END OF SECTION E
FINAL SECTION

ASSESSMENT

1. The poetry section of the Leaving Certificate examination reflects the aims of the poetry syllabus.
   Strongly agree [ ]   Agree [ ]   Unsure [ ]   Disagree [ ]   Strongly disagree [ ]

2. The Leaving Certificate examination is beneficial for the teaching of poetry.
   Strongly agree [ ]   Agree [ ]   Unsure [ ]   Disagree [ ]   Strongly disagree [ ]

3. The examination is important in motivating pupils to study poetry.
   Strongly agree [ ]   Agree [ ]   Unsure [ ]   Disagree [ ]   Strongly disagree [ ]

4. The examination does not allow my students sufficient scope to display what they have learnt in class.
   Strongly agree [ ]   Agree [ ]   Unsure [ ]   Disagree [ ]   Strongly disagree [ ]

5. Teaching poetry and preparing pupils for examination are essentially different activities.
   Strongly agree [ ]   Agree [ ]   Unsure [ ]   Disagree [ ]   Strongly disagree [ ]

6. Please outline one change or recommendation you would have for the Leaving Certificate examination:

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

END OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Please return the questionnaire to the research co-ordinator (the teacher who distributed the questionnaires) for your school as soon as possible.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire, it is very much appreciated.
Appendix E: Pupil Questionnaire

A STUDY OF LEAVING CERTIFICATE STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON POETRY STUDIES

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey.

All questionnaires are anonymous and will be treated as confidential therefore I would ask you to please be as honest as possible with your answers.

Your help is very much appreciated.

Please tick the appropriate box.

A. Gender                                                        Male [ ]            Female [ ]

B. I am currently in                   5th year     [ ]      6th year     [ ]
1. Who is your favourite poet? (Please tick one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poet</th>
<th>Other (please name)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sylvia Plath</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seamus Heaney</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Montague</td>
<td>Philip Larkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derek Mahon</td>
<td>Eavan Boland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Longley</td>
<td>John Donne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Bishop</td>
<td>W.B Yeats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Kavanagh</td>
<td>John Keats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrienne Rich</td>
<td>T.S. Eliot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Other (please name)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE NEXT TWO QUESTIONS ASK ABOUT YOUR ENGAGEMENT WITH POETRY OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL, TIME I.E. AS A PASTIME

2. Do you ever read poetry in your free time (not for schoolwork)?
   Yes [ ]  No [   ]

3. (a) Do you ever write poetry outside of school?
   Yes [ ]  No [   ]
   (b) Why/Why not?
THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS FOCUS ON YOUR STUDY OF POETRY FOR SCHOOL.

4. Do you enjoy studying poetry in school?
   Yes [  ]        No [  ]

5. If you knew someone who had never studied poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland what would you tell them it involves?

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

6. (a) Do you feel confident in your understanding of the poetry you have studied since the start of 5th year?
   Yes [  ]        No [  ]

   (b) Why/Why not?

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

7. I feel a poetry class has been a success when…

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

8. Please tick the appropriate box in response to each statement:

(a) I feel less motivated to study poetry now than when I was at Junior Certificate Level
   Strongly agree [  ]       Agree [  ]        Unsure [  ]        Disagree [  ]        Strongly disagree [  ]

(b) The problem with poetry is that you can never be sure you are ‘correct’ in your understanding of a poem
   Strongly agree [  ]       Agree [  ]        Unsure [  ]        Disagree [  ]        Strongly disagree [  ]

(c) I always analyse the poems we study first to find my own meaning before the teacher discusses it with us.
   Strongly agree [  ]       Agree [  ]        Unsure [  ]        Disagree [  ]        Strongly disagree [  ]
9. Please circle your favourite area of study in Leaving Certificate English (circle one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Novel</th>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Essay writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short Stories</td>
<td>Media Studies</td>
<td>I don’t like any area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>Other (please state)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. What do you hope to achieve from your study of poetry at Leaving Certificate Level? (Please tick one)

- Greater knowledge of poets
- Greater familiarity with poetic techniques (e.g. metaphor, rhyme etc.)
- A good grade in the Leaving Certificate exam
- Develop a greater appreciation for aesthetic writing
- Development of poetry writing skills
- An improved ability to analyse poems
- I don’t expect to achieve anything from studying poetry
- Other (please state) ____________________________

11. If you encountered a difficulty in understanding an area of poetry where would you be most likely to seek a solution? (Please tick one)

- Read a book
- Ask teacher
- Talk to a classmate
- Refer to teachers’ notes
- Refer to own notes book
- Visit a website
- Do nothing
- Other (Please state) ____________________________

END OF SECTION A
1. How important is poetry in English studies? (Please circle one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Very</td>
<td>Very</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>Unimportant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Which poetry themes appeal to you? Circle those that apply (maximum 6).
(You may want to include a theme that is not listed here)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminism</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Love</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-destruction</td>
<td>Life</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Rural life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aging and transience of life</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Ireland – history and sense of place</td>
<td>Sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Future</td>
<td>Addiction</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Quest for truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Place</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Please list one poet from the prescribed syllabus which you enjoy studying and explain why. If you do not like any please state why in Q(ii).

(i) ______________ (poet). I like them because __________________________________________________________________________

(ii) I don’t like any prescribed poets because __________________________________________________________________________
4. **I prefer studying:** seen poetry [ ] unseen poetry [ ] no preference [ ]

5(a). Would you like your teacher to teach poets/poems that are not examined in the Leaving Certificate exam as well as those that are?  
Yes [ ] No [ ]

(b) Why/Why not?
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

6. I am less motivated in the poetry class compared with other sections of the English class.  
Strongly agree [ ] Agree [ ] Unsure [ ] Disagree [ ] Strongly disagree [ ]

7. **Please tick the reasons you study particular poems**
Deals with themes/ideas which I like [ ]
Is most likely to appear on the exam paper [ ]
My teacher likes this poem/poet [ ]
Is linked with other themes I have studied [ ]
Will generate class discussion [ ]
Because I have to [ ]
Other (please specify) ____________________________ [ ]

8. **Please tick the areas which you find most difficult in terms of studying poetry.**
Comprehension [ ]
Analysis [ ]
Lack of motivation [ ]
Understanding metaphorical meaning [ ]
Rote learning [ ]
Writing answers [ ]
Oral discussion [ ]
Personal responses [ ]
Finding appropriate critical terms [ ]
Appreciation of poetry as a work of art [ ]
Other (please specify) ____________________________ [ ]

END OF SECTION B
SECTION C:

1. I think the Leaving Certificate English course is designed to develop my interest in poetry.
   Strongly agree [ ]   Agree [ ]   Unsure [ ]   Disagree [ ]   Strongly disagree [ ]

2. The poetry course represents a wide range of themes.
   Strongly agree [ ]   Agree [ ]   Unsure [ ]   Disagree [ ]   Strongly disagree [ ]

3. I enjoy the poets I study at Leaving Certificate level
   Strongly agree [ ]   Agree [ ]   Unsure [ ]   Disagree [ ]   Strongly disagree [ ]

4. I’m satisfied with the amount of poetry I must study under the current syllabus.
   Strongly agree [ ]   Agree [ ]   Unsure [ ]   Disagree [ ]   Strongly disagree [ ]

   (b) If you ticked ‘Disagree’ or ‘Strongly disagree’ would you like to study (tick one):
       More poetry [ ]
       Less poetry [ ]

5. Prescription of poets at Leaving Certificate Level is beneficial for me as a student.
   (Prescription of poets = specific named poets must be taught by the teacher for the exam. They cannot choose any poets outside of these for the exam)
   Strongly agree [ ]   Agree [ ]   Unsure [ ]   Disagree [ ]   Strongly disagree [ ]

6. Can you suggest any changes which would make the poetry course better?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

END OF SECTION C

60% Complete
1. What class resources does your teacher regularly use when teaching poetry? (Tick all that are regularly used)

   - Class poetry textbook
   - Other books on poetry
   - Book of poetry notes
   - Handout of teacher’s notes on poems
   - ICT (see explanation in Q.3)
   - CD recordings of the poet reading their poem
   - Physical objects based on the poem e.g. daffodils
   - Exam papers
   - None of these
   - Other ___________________

2. What resources help you understand poetry better? (Tick all that apply)

   - Class poetry textbook
   - Other books on poetry
   - Book of poetry notes
   - Teacher’s notes
   - ICT
   - CD recordings of the poet reading their poem
   - Tests from teacher
   - Physical objects based on the poem e.g. daffodils
   - Exam papers
   - Internet sites
   - Classmates
   - None of these
   - Other ___________________

3. How often does your teacher use ICT in the poetry class?

   (ICT = podcasts, PowerPoint, word processor, online blogging, youtube etc.)
   - Always [ ]
   - Often [ ]
   - Sometimes [ ]
   - Rarely [ ]
   - Never [ ]

4. (a) My poetry teacher uses the same amount of resources in the poetry class as they use in other classes like the novel or drama.

   - Strongly agree [ ]
   - Agree [ ]
   - Unsure [ ]
   - Disagree [ ]
   - Strongly disagree [ ]

   (b) If ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’, do they use (tick one):

   - More resources in the poetry class [ ]
   - Less resources in the poetry class [ ]

5. Please suggest one resource which you would like your teacher to use (more of) in teaching poetry:

   ____________________________

END OF SECTION
1. How does your teacher normally teach a poem to your class?
   Reading (tick one):  
   - Teacher reads poem  [  ]  
   - Individuals read poem [  ]  
   - Group reading of poem [  ]  
   - CD recording of poem played [  ]  
   - Poem is not read out loud [  ]  
   - Other (please state) ____________________  [  ]

   In class analysis (tick one):
   - Pupils encouraged to find their own meaning individually [  ]
   - Teacher explains poems “meaning” [  ]
   - Pupils work in groups to analyse the poem [  ]
   - Other (please state) ____________________ [  ]

2(a). Do you enjoy the approach your teacher uses? Yes [  ] No [  ]

(b) Why/why not?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. Have you ever used a response journal in your poetry class? Yes [  ] No [  ]
   (response journal = copy book in which you write down your interpretation
   of a poem at different times)

4. How frequently are you asked to illustrate poems by your teacher?
   (drawing, take photographs, collage etc)
   Always [  ] Often [  ] Sometimes [  ] Rarely [  ] Never [  ]

5. How frequently does your teacher use drama when teaching poetry?
   (drama techniques e.g. acting out the roles of the characters from poems, imagining the unspoken
   thoughts of characters in a poem, asking you to show the facial expression or stance of a character,
   getting you to create the scene from the poem in the classroom etc.)
   Always [  ] Often [  ] Sometimes [  ] Rarely [  ] Never [  ]

6. How often does the teacher ask you to write your own poems?
   Always [  ] Often [  ] Sometimes [  ] Rarely [  ] Never [  ]
7. How often does the teacher ask you for your personal interpretation of a poem?
   - Always [ ]
   - Often [ ]
   - Sometimes [ ]
   - Rarely [ ]
   - Never [ ]

8. How frequently does your teacher allow you to choose the poetry to be read/studied?
   - Always [ ]
   - Often [ ]
   - Sometimes [ ]
   - Rarely [ ]
   - Never [ ]

9. How frequently are you asked to read a poem aloud in class either individually or as a group?
   - Always [ ]
   - Often [ ]
   - Sometimes [ ]
   - Rarely [ ]
   - Never [ ]

10. How often does your teacher ask you to creatively imitate a poem?
    (Creatively imitate= to use one poem as a model from which to write your own poem)
    - Always [ ]
    - Often [ ]
    - Sometimes [ ]
    - Rarely [ ]
    - Never [ ]

11. How often does your teacher provide you with notes on specific poems or poetry?
    - Always [ ]
    - Often [ ]
    - Sometimes [ ]
    - Rarely [ ]
    - Never [ ]

12. Do you enjoy reading poetry aloud in class?
    - Yes [ ]
    - No [ ]

13(a). Do you find it beneficial to learn sections of poetry by heart?
    - Yes [ ]
    - No [ ]

   (b) Why? Why not? __________________________________________________________

14. Has a poet ever visited your class?
    - Yes [ ]
    - No [ ]

15. I feel more confident talking about poetry than writing about it.
    - Strongly agree [ ]
    - Agree [ ]
    - Unsure [ ]
    - Disagree [ ]
    - Strongly disagree [ ]

16. My teacher enjoys teaching poetry
    - Strongly agree [ ]
    - Agree [ ]
    - Unsure [ ]
    - Disagree [ ]
    - Strongly disagree [ ]

17. How could your teacher improve their teaching methods for teaching poetry?
SECTION F:

1. In my study before the Leaving Certificate exam I will (tick all that apply):
   Read back over the poems for new understandings [ ]
   Study notes [ ]
   Write sample answers for practice [ ]
   Learn off essays on poems [ ]
   Find new poems and try to analyse them [ ]
   Other _______________________________ [ ]

2. The Leaving Certificate examination is beneficial in terms of helping me understand poetry.
   Strongly agree [ ]       Agree [ ]        Unsure [ ]        Disagree [ ]        Strongly disagree [ ]

3. The exam motivates me to study poetry.
   Strongly agree [ ]       Agree [ ]        Unsure [ ]        Disagree [ ]        Strongly disagree [ ]

4. The exam does not allow me enough freedom to display what I have learned in class.
   Strongly agree [ ]       Agree [ ]        Unsure [ ]        Disagree [ ]        Strongly disagree [ ]

5. Studying poetry and learning poetry for the exam are two different things.
   Strongly agree [ ]       Agree [ ]        Unsure [ ]        Disagree [ ]        Strongly disagree [ ]

6. An in-depth understanding of poetry is required to get a good grade in the Leaving Certificate exam
   Strongly agree [ ]       Agree [ ]        Unsure [ ]        Disagree [ ]        Strongly disagree [ ]

7. Based on the exam papers which aspect of poetry do you find more difficult?
   Seen poetry [ ]       Unseen poetry [ ]        They are both equal [ ]

8. Please outline one change or recommendation you have for the poetry section of the Leaving Certificate examination:

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

QUESTIONNAIRE COMPLETE!
Appendix F: Pilot Feedback Sheet- Pupil Questionnaire

This questionnaire will soon be given out in a number of schools in the mid-west region. The purpose of this task today is to ensure this questionnaire is easy for you to understand and fill out. To help me ensure this please answer the following questions on your experience of filling out the questionnaire. Please provide as much detail as possible. Thank you very much for your assistance.

1. Were the instructions clear?

2. Were any of the questions unclear? If so which question(s) and why?

3. In your opinion has anything been left out in relation to poetry studies?

4. Were you happy with the length of the questionnaire?

5. Was the layout of the questionnaire clear/appealing?

6. Any other comments?
Appendix G: Pilot Feedback Sheet: Teacher Questionnaire

This questionnaire will soon be posted to a number of schools around the country. I endeavour to ensure the completion of the questionnaire is an uncomplicated and thought provoking experience. To this end, I would greatly appreciate if you could complete the questions below subsequent to completing the attached questionnaire. Please provide as much detail as possible. Thank you very much for your time and assistance.

1. Were the instructions clear?

2. Were any of the questions unclear? If so which question(s) and why?

3. In your opinion has anything been left out in relation to poetry studies?

4. Were you happy with the length of the questionnaire?

5. Was the layout of the questionnaire clear/appealing?

6. Any other comments?
Appendix H: Research Ethical Approval

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Faculty of Education & Health Sciences
Department of Education & Professional Studies
Phone: (061) 202701 Fax: (061) 331673 email: Tom.Geary@ul.ie

3rd October 2008

Ms Jennifer Hennessy
E&PS Department
Faculty of Education & Health Sciences
U.L

Dear Jennifer

A Study of English Teachers’ Perspectives on Leaving Certificate Poetry

I hereby confirm that the Department of Education & Professional Studies Research Ethics Committee reviewed your application for ethics approval at its meeting on 2nd October 2008

Full approval is herewith granted for this application.

Yours sincerely

Tom Geary
Chair

Project Title: EHSREC09-119 An Exploration Into The Teaching And Learning Of Poetry At Leaving Certificate Level In Ireland (Changes to previously approved project)
Principal Investigator: Patricia Mannix McNamara
Other Investigators: Jennifer Hennessy
Recommendation: Approved (from April 2010 to August 2011)
An Investigation into the Teaching and Learning of Poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland

Pupil Information Sheet

What is the study about?

Given the huge emphasis placed on schooling and education in Ireland over the last decade, it is important to ensure that the subjects taught meet pupils’ academic, social and creative needs. Poetry is a central part of the Leaving Certificate English course however little is known about pupils’ perspectives of poetry at Leaving Certificate Level.

We know that listening to pupils can provide valuable perspectives and new insights into teaching and learning. Therefore, we want to hear your perspectives on poetry and how it is taught at Leaving Certificate Level.

What will I have to do?

You are asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire which will take roughly 20 minutes to complete.
At a later stage a number of students will be called at random for interviews held within the school to discuss their perspectives on poetry in greater detail. If you are chosen we are asking you to give your consent to take part in an interview also.

What are the benefits?

The findings from the research will be presented at a number of conferences aimed at promoting knowledge of pupils' perceptions of poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland. The aim of this research is to enhance the teaching and learning of poetry at Leaving Certificate level.
What are the risks?

It is not envisaged that there will be risks to participants. You will not be asked for any personal or sensitive information.

What if I do not wish to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary and if you do not wish to take part there is no pressure to do so.

What happens if I change my mind about participating during the study?

You can withdraw your participation and consent at any time up to the survey completion day. However, as the questionnaire is anonymous once it is competed and collected we have no way of knowing which questionnaire belongs to which school and as such cannot remove it from the collected data. You can also choose to withdraw from the interview schedule at any point.

What happens to the information collected?

The questionnaire and interview responses will be used to write a research thesis. I will also form the basis for a number of conference presentations and academic research papers. As the questionnaires and interviews are anonymous, there will be no way of knowing which data comes from each participating school.

Who else is taking part in the research?

Eight randomly selected schools in the Mid-West of Ireland from which two hundred pupils will be asked to complete the questionnaire. From this around 20 students will be randomly selected for interview.

How will the results be disseminated?

The research will be made available to the University of Limerick in the form of a PhD thesis and to the wider educational community at a number of national and international education conferences over the next year in addition to a number of journal publications on the work.
The University is subject to the Freedom of Information Act and the research procedures will adhere to the provisions of Data Protection legislation.

What if I have more questions or do not understand something?

If you wish to ask any more questions about the research process you can contact the principal investigator at the following:

Patricia Mannix McNamara,
Course Director Health Education and Promotion
Faculty of Education and Health Sciences,
University of Limerick,
Tel: (061) 202722.
E mail: patricia.m.mcnamara@ul.ie

If you have concerns about this study and you wish to contact an independent person you may contact:

Chairman, EHS Research Ethics Committee
Faculty Office
Education and Health Sciences
University of Limerick
Tel 061 234101 or Email ehsresearchethicscontactpoint@ul.ie
Appendix J: Pupil Questionnaire Consent Form (Questionnaire and Interviews)

An Investigation into the Teaching and Learning of Poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland

I have read and understood the research information sheet.

I understand what the research project is about and what the results of the research will be used for.

I am fully aware of all the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with this study.

I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw consent from the project at any time without prejudice and without having to supply a reason.

I am aware that the data collected will form the basis of a research report that will be submitted to the University of Limerick in fulfilment of the researcher’s PhD thesis and that no identifying features will be in that report thus guaranteeing anonymity to the school, teachers and students.

Student Signature: _______________________

Student Name: ________________________ (Please print)

Researcher Signature: _______________________

Researcher Name: ________________________ (Please print)
An Investigation into the Teaching and Learning of Poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland

Parental Information Sheet

What is the study about?

Given the prominent status placed on formal education in Ireland over the last decade, ensuring the delivery of subjects which meet our students academic, social and creative needs is of great importance. Poetry is a prominent section of the Leaving Certificate English course however, little research has been conducted on pupils’ perspectives of this genre at Leaving Certificate Level. The act of listening to students can provide valuable perspectives and new insights into the complexities of teaching and learning. Therefore, this research seeks to examine students’ perspectives of poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in a sample of Irish schools.

What will I have to do?

Participants (in this case your son/daughter) will be asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire. As their parent/guardian, we are asking you to give your consent for your son/daughter to fill in the anonymous survey (which will take 20 minutes to complete). Subsequent one-to-one interviews will be scheduled and a number of students will be selected at random to participate. We are asking you to give your consent for your son/daughter to take part in an interview if selected.

What are the benefits?

It is the intention of the researchers to use the findings of the research as fulfilment of their PhD thesis. This research will also be used to inform teachers, schools and the wider education community of the teaching and learning needs of current Leaving Certificate students.
What are the risks?

It is not envisaged that there will be risks to participants. Students will not be asked for any personal or sensitive information.

What if I do not wish to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary and if you do not wish to take part there is no pressure to do so.

What happens if I change my mind about participating during the study?

You can withdraw your participation and consent at any time up to the survey completion day. However, as the questionnaire is anonymous once it is completed and collected we have no way of knowing which questionnaire belongs to which school and as such cannot remove it from the collected data. You can also choose to withdraw your son/daughter from the interview schedule at any time up to the interview day.

What happens to the information collected?

The questionnaire and interview responses will be collated and a research thesis will be written. As the questionnaires and interviews are anonymous, there will be no way of knowing which data comes from each participating school.

Who else is taking part in the research?

Eight randomly selected schools in the Mid-West of Ireland, from which two hundred pupils will asked to complete the questionnaire. From this ten students will be randomly selected for interview.

How will the results be disseminated?

The research will be made available to the University of Limerick and at a number of national and international education conferences over the next year.

Freedom of Information

The University is subject to the Freedom of Information Act and the research procedures will adhere to the provisions of Data Protection legislation.
If you wish to ask any more questions about the research process you can contact the principal investigator at the following:

Patricia Mannix Mcnamara,
Course Director Health Education and Promotion
Faculty of Education and Health Sciences,
University of Limerick,
Tel: (061) 202722.
E mail: patricia.m.mcnamara@ul.ie

If you have concerns about this study and you wish to contact an independent person you may contact:

The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee,
C/o Vice President Academic and Registrar’s Office,
University of Limerick,
Tel: (061) 202022.
Appendix L: Parental Consent Sheet for Pupil Questionnaires and Interviews

An Investigation into the Teaching and Learning of Poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland

I have read and understood the research information sheet.

I understand what the research project is about and what the results of the research will be used for.

I am fully aware of all the procedures involving my child, and of any possibilities and benefits associated with this study.

I know that my child’s participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw consent from the project at any time without prejudice and without having to supply a reason.

I am aware that the data collected will form the basis of a research report that will be submitted to the University of Limerick in fulfilment of the researcher’s PhD thesis and that no identifying features will be in that report thus guaranteeing anonymity to the school, teachers and students.

Parent Signature: _______________________

Parent Name: ________________________ (Please print)
**Appendix M: Teacher Information Sheet for Pupil Questionnaires and Interviews**

**An Investigation into**

**An Investigation into the Teaching and Learning of Poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland**

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**Teacher Information Sheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the study about?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Given the prominent status placed on formal education in Ireland over the last decade, ensuring the delivery of subjects which meet our students academic, social, emotional and creative needs is of great importance. Poetry is a prominent section of the Leaving Certificate English course, however little research has been conducted on pupils’ perspectives of this genre at Leaving Certificate Level. The act of listening to students can provide valuable perspectives and new insights into the complexities of teaching and learning. Therefore, this research seeks to examine students’ perspectives of poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in a sample of Irish schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What will I have to do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants (in this case a class nominated by you) are asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire (which will take 20 minutes to complete). Some students may be asked to partake in a follow-up interview (which will take 15 minutes). As their teacher we are asking you to give your consent for a class in your school to fill in the anonymous survey and for a small number of students to partake in a follow up interview.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are the benefits?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is the intention of the researchers to use the findings of the research as fulfilment of their PhD thesis. This research will also be used to inform teachers, schools and the wider education community of the teaching and learning needs of current Leaving Certificate students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What are the risks?

It is not envisaged that there will be risks to participants. Students will not be asked for any personal or sensitive information.

What if I do not wish to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary and if you do not wish to take part there is no pressure to do so.

What happens if I change my mind about participating during the study?

You can withdraw your participation and consent at any time up to the survey completion day. However, as the questionnaire is anonymous once it is competed and collected we have no way of knowing which questionnaire belongs to which school and as such cannot remove it from the collected data.
Thereafter you can withdraw your participation and consent at any time up to the scheduled interview day.

What happens to the information collected?

The questionnaire and interview responses will be collated and a research thesis will be written. The data will also form the basis for a number of conference presentations and academic research papers.

How will the results be disseminated?

The research will be made available to the University of Limerick library, in both thesis and journal form and at a number of national and international education conferences over the next year.

Freedom of Information

The University is subject to the Freedom of Information Act and the research procedures will adhere to the provisions of Data Protection legislation.
If you wish to ask any more questions about the research process you can contact the principal investigator at the following:

Patricia Mannix McNamara,
Course Director Health Education and Promotion
Faculty of Education and Health Sciences,
University of Limerick,
Tel: (061) 202722.
E mail: patricia.m.mcnamara@ul.ie

If you have concerns about this study and you wish to contact an independent person you may contact:

Chairman, EHS Research Ethics Committee
Faculty Office
Education and Health Sciences
University of Limerick
Tel 061 234101 or email ehsresearchethicscontactpoint@ul.ie
Appendix N: Teacher Consent Form for Pupil Questionnaire and Interviews

An Investigation into the Teaching and Learning of Poetry at Leaving Certificate Level in Ireland

I have read and understood the research information sheet.

I understand what the research project is about and what the results of the research will be used for.

I am fully aware of all the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with this study.

I know that the school’s participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw consent from the project at any time without prejudice and without having to supply a reason.

I am aware that the data collected will form the basis of a research report that will be submitted to the University of Limerick in fulfilment of the researcher’s PhD thesis and that no identifying features will be in that report thus guaranteeing anonymity to the school, teachers and students.

Teacher Signature: _______________________

Teacher Name : _________________________ (Please print)

Researcher Signature: _______________________

Researcher Name: _________________________ (Please print)
Appendix O: Teacher Questionnaire Information Sheet

Teacher Information Sheet

**Project:** A Study of English Teachers' Perspectives on Leaving Certificate Poetry.

**Aim of Research:** The aim of this research is to gain insight into the perspectives of English teachers on the teaching of poetry at Leaving Certificate Level.

Participants from 50 post-primary schools in Ireland are being invited to complete this questionnaire. Findings from the study will be made available to all participants on request. The questionnaire will consist of and be carried out via:

- 52 questions broken up into five key areas (listed above).
- The questionnaire contains both open and closed questions for completion.
- The questionnaire will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.
- You will complete this on an anonymous basis.

The findings from this research will be presented as part of a dissertation, as well as in conference papers and other academic publications.

Information retrieved will be stored securely in the office of the principal investigator within the EPS Department in The University of Limerick. The University is subject to the Freedom of Information Act and research procedures will adhere to the provisions of Data Protection legislation. You are a volunteer and may withdraw your consent at any time, including after the data has been collected. **At no stage will your name or the school name ever be used or published in any document.**

*If you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact the project researchers, Jennifer Hennessy, (email: jennifer.hennessy@ul.ie) and Carmel Hinchion (email: carmel.hinchion@ul.ie). If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact: The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee, c/o Vice President Academic and Registrar’s Office, University of Limerick. Tel: (061)202022.*
Appendix P: Instruction sheet for Liaison Teacher (Teacher Questionnaire)

University of Limerick
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Dear ______________

Subsequent to my contact with your school last week please find enclosed questionnaires concerning the teaching of poetry at Leaving Certificate Level.

I would greatly appreciate if you could distribute these to your colleagues who teach English at Leaving Certificate Level in your school.

The questionnaires are to be completed anonymously and will provide valuable feedback for this research and for the general educational community. These findings will be available to you, should you wish, following analysis of data. Please do not hesitate to email me should you wish to access these.

I understand this is a very busy time of the year for you and greatly appreciate your participation in this research. As the nominated liaison teacher for your school (directed by my initial contact with the school), I would ask you to please collect these questionnaires from your colleagues upon completion and return them to me in the enclosed addressed envelope before your summer break.

Many thanks for your co-operation and interest in this research.

Kind Regards,

____________________________

Jennifer Hennessy (BSc.), Postgraduate Research Scholar,
Department of Education and Professional Studies,
University of Limerick.
Tel: 061-233660.
Appendix Q: Instruction sheet for Liaison Teacher (Pupil Interviews)

Dear __________,

Thank you so much for your continued help with my PhD research. I really appreciate it.

My final phase of data collection involves:

- The completion of a 15 minute individual interview with six Leaving Certificate English students.
- Ideally these would be students that you teach.
- Ideally the interviewees would represent a good mix of students i.e. those that like and dislike poetry, those who find it easy and those who find poetry to be challenging.
- All interview material will be treated as confidential and interviews will be transcribed anonymously

In order to ensure the ethical integrity of the research, I will need to get parental consent for pupil interviews. While I will only need a maximum of 6 students, I have enclosed 10 consent sheets for distribution in case students are missing from school on the interview day. If you could distribute these to any 10 pupils in your class and ask them to return these to me on the appointed interview date that would be great.

Thank you again for all your support. If you need to contact me at any stage, please do not hesitate.

Looking forward to meeting with you again.

Kind Regards,

____________________________
Jennifer Hennessy (BSc.), Postgraduate Research Scholar,
Department of Education and Professional Studies,
University of Limerick.
Tel: 061-233660.