Adolescents Reading Poetry for Personal Meaning: An Exploration of Practices and Experiences in the Further Education Sector

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Greenwich for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DECLARATION

I certify that the work contained in this thesis, or any part of it, has not been accepted in substance for any previous degree awarded to me or any other person, and is not concurrently being submitted for any other degree other than that of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy which has been studied at the University of Greenwich, London, UK.

I also declare that the work contained in this thesis is the result my own investigations, except where otherwise identified and acknowledged by references. I further declare that no aspects of the contents of this thesis are the outcome of any form of research misconduct.

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Mike and James, the spare room is back!

This thesis is for my grandad, R.W. Povey (1904-1983). Thank you, Bam, for the introduction to the snow and the roses.

ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative exploratory study of adolescent students at four inner London colleges reading poetry for A level qualifications. It asks how they engage with taught poetry at the level of 'personal meaning and response'. Adolescents are developing minds that enable them to engage with poetry in new ways, but their experiences have been underexplored in the research. My thesis contributes to research on the 'accountability culture' in schools and its impact on poetry teaching (e.g., Dymoke, 2002; Gordon, 2018). I show how this extends to impact on reading poetry for personal meaning in further education classrooms.

Drawing on Rosenblatt's (1985) theorisation of aesthetic and efferent stances, I explore if, where, and how adolescent students experience an aesthetic response to poetry. Research is triangulated through teacher interviews, lesson observations, and student focus groups. Teacher beliefs and practical strategies for teaching poetry are explored, as are student responses in and outside lessons. Group discussion, dialogue, and teacher engagement are significant factors enabling students to make meaning with and respond to poetry. Sipe's (2000) framework for understanding children's responses to picture books is adapted as an analytical tool.

Findings include that adolescents can experience strongly felt responses to poems taught at A Level. Personal responses may be enhanced through promoting the sound of poems and their connections to music. Small group discussion is important for the development of personal meaning and response and teachers need to manage these sensitively. I recommend teachers review the practice of students reading poems 'out loud by turn'. Teachers and students experience great tension between reading for personal meaning and the dominant need to read to pass exams. This tension can never be finally reconciled. I offer an analogy of a 'weighted seesaw' to understand this.

TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALPS	Advanced Level Performance System
AO	Assessment objectives
AQA	Assessment and Qualifications Alliance
BERA	British Educational Research Association
DFE	Department for Education
EBSCO	Elton B. Stephens Company
LATE	London Association of Teachers of English
LEA	Local Education Authorities
MKO	More knowledgeable other
MRI	Magnetic Resonance Imaging
NATE	The National Association for Teaching of English
OCR	Oxford Cambridge and RSA
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment Programme for International Student Assessment
TA	Thematic Analysis
UK	United Kingdom
WJEC	Welsh Joint Education Committee
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Exploring Aesthetic Response to Poetry Amongst Adolescent Learners

My research seeks to explore the experiences of adolescents reading poetry at A level in colleges of further education. I want to shed light on how adolescents make meaning with poems taught in the classroom, focusing on their personal responses. I also seek to find out if and how adolescents experience an aesthetic response to poems to be learnt for an exam and, if they do, what teachers might do to encourage this. My interest in this topic is based on both my professional and personal interests, which are briefly outlined below.

This is an important topic to explore for many reasons. Since the 1980s, the education system in the United Kingdom (UK) and particularly England, has been increasingly marketized (Bridges and Jonathan, 2002; Ball, 2003; Giroux, 2011). Students have been positioned as consumers (Mayo, 2009) who must individually compete for exam passes to enter the job market or higher education. In addition, schools and colleges are under continuous pressure to improve results (Reay, 2004). The prevailing philosophy that education chiefly matters as a means to serve the economy is reflected in reductive business language, which dominates everyday educational discourse, such as 'delivery' of subjects and 'performance' of teachers and students (Pring, 2012).

Moreover, the current climate places a strain on all art subjects to justify their role in the curriculum. I would argue this is particularly so for poetry in high-stakes A level qualifications. Poetry is a versatile art form which works through the fine manipulation and privileging of language for its own sake (Probyn, 1984; Eagleton, 2007). In common with other language arts, such as drama, poetry offers distinctive cognitive and emotional experiences which resist quantification for exam assessment. In addition, I would argue that because poetry draws deliberate attention to the ways in which language may be manipulated, it is, as an art form, inherently critical of the utilitarian ethos of the current education system.

The resultant awkward and often marginal place poetry occupies within primary and secondary schools up to the General Certificate of Secondary Education has been explored by many (e.g., Benton, 1999; Dimock, 2012; Cremin, 2014; Gordon, 2014). Less has been researched in terms of post-16 students, although Atherton, Green and Snapper (2013) and Xerri (2013/2016) are

strong exceptions. Snapper, in particular, has explored antipathy and resistance to poetry at A level (2013).

My research has a new focus as it is particularly interested in students as adolescents situated within further education colleges. Based on research from a number of fields (e.g., neurological, social, and developmental), I argue in this study that adolescence is a time when people develop new creative capabilities and increasingly sophisticated thought processes. This means adolescents have the potential to engage with poetry in fresh and exciting ways. The personal experiences that they have with poems are valid and valuable, and I argue that in addition to preparation for exams, adolescent students should also have the right to engage with A level poetry in these terms.

In short, and to paraphrase the former Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy's collection of 2008, students should be able to 'answer back' to the poems they learn at A level based on their personal experiences and responses to the work of the poem. My thesis is, therefore, a contribution toward understanding the experiences of adolescent students reading poetry at A level within the culture of further education colleges. I also explore how teachers in further education may facilitate these 'personal responses'.

1.2 Professional and Personal Interest

I moved from further to higher education to work as a lecturer in a university Department of Teacher Education in 2002. In my role, I observed many English A level classes and had conversations with trainee teachers discussing how they might approach teaching poetry at A level. I often saw that trainee teachers found poetry difficult to teach, and I wondered whether students were getting pleasure from reading poems in the classroom. I also became curious about whether poetry could inspire what I found to be an increasingly prescriptive and skills-based teacher training curriculum. In this spirit, in 2012, I wrote a reflective piece entitled *'What if We Taught Teachers to Think Like Poets?*' for the university's local magazine, *Compass*. Following this and with a colleague, I undertook small-scale research exploring how and if reading and discussing poetry about teaching could scaffold meaningful reflection for trainee students. This was published in the *Journal of Reflective Practice* under the title*:* Did Anyone Else Think the Trees Were Students? (Speare and Henshall, 2014)

In personal terms, I would describe myself as someone who has found poetry meaningful in a variety of ways throughout my life. I was introduced to poetry by my grandfather, greatly enjoyed reading poems at school, and found ways of working poetry into my studies as an undergraduate studying Sociology. While teaching in further education colleges (1989–2002), I introduced poetry to my entry-level English classes. As an adult, I have participated in many poetry writing classes and have had poems published in English and Irish poetry magazines such as *Iota* and *The SHop*. In the early 1990s, I trained as a counsellor, and this further convinced me of the importance of honouring the power of words as they shape our lives. These are precedents leading me to undertake this research.

1.3 Focus of the Research and Conceptual Framework

In general, the UK education system is rooted in training students to recall information in order to pass external exams (Lucas, 2022). This can be problematic, particularly for artistic subjects such as poetry, which seek to evoke experiences with and through language. My study is specifically concerned with the twin processes of reading poetry to pass exams and the ways in which students may experience a personal and aesthetic response through reading poems. I am interested in the tensions between these processes and how and when teachers work with students to enable an experience of poetry at the level of 'personal meaning and response'.

My research is a general qualitative research project (Merriam, 1998). I undertook data collection between 2017 and 2020 at four London further education colleges based in North and East London, England. I took the decision to sample from all A level qualifications that taught poetry. My research, therefore, includes an exploration of students responding to poetry in English Language and Literature, English Literature, and Creative Writing classes.

The literary theory of reader response frames my research. This perspective is derived from literary criticism and was established by, amongst others, Rosenblatt (1938, 1985), Iser (1978), and Fish (1980). Reader response theories gained prominence in the latter half of the 20th century, and there are many precedents for research grounded in this approach. I discuss these in my literature review (chapter 2). There are many strands of reader response theory, but all prioritise the importance of the reader and her imaginative response to literary texts. I identify the work of Rosenblatt, who characterises the relationship between reader and text as 'transactional' as particularly useful for my research. I am exploring the dynamic relationship

between adolescents and poems in the context of further education classrooms to see if, where, and how adolescent students personally respond to poems. This leads me to consider how meaning is made through language and the role of language as a personally inhabited social and cultural experience. Key theorists in this area are Vygotsky (1896–1934), Bruner (1915–2016) and Bourdieu (1930–2002).

Bruner and Vygotsky provide a complementary focus to reader response and help me to conceptualise for this research relationships between language and thought. Vygotsky also illuminates the role of the teacher as a 'more knowledgeable other', and his work provides a starting point for my discussion of adolescent thought. 'Adolescence' is the first key concept in the title of my research and as such is discussed in depth in the literature review, drawing on a range of paradigms, including cognitive, neurological, and social developmental perspectives. The work of Kegan (1994) I found particularly helpful for thinking about the dilemmas of modern adolescence.

Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' enables me to consider the ways in which certain kinds of knowledge are valued in the classroom and, therefore, is an important tool of analysis as well as providing theoretical rigour for my study.

My methodology is grounded in the ontological position that the reality of my research is best understood as socially constructed and this, in turn, makes the concept of '*personal* meaning and response' a particularly thorny issue. To understand 'personal response', I again draw on Rosenblatt's work (1985, 1994). Her distinction between 'efferent' and 'aesthetic' reading stances is an invaluable perspective for my work. In terms of operationalising this theoretical distinction for my study, I found Sipe's (2000) framework for understanding the literary responses of children to be a helpful starting point for analysis. I refer to this framework in my literature review and discuss my adaptation of it in the methodology chapter.

1.4 Research Questions

The aim of this research is articulated by the main research question: *In what ways do adolescents studying English in the further education sector engage with poetry at the level of personal meaning and response?* Five subsidiary research aims support this broad aim:

1. To investigate and define the concept of 'personal response.'
2. To explore how poetry is taught in further education colleges.
3. To find out what experiences and knowledge students draw on when they personally respond to poetry taught at A level.
4. To explore tensions between teaching for the exam and teaching for personal response in further education settings.
5. To recommend how knowledge of the above might lead to enhancing adolescent experiences in learning poetry.

These aims are articulated through my five subsidiary questions, the purpose and scope of which I discuss next:

1. How is the concept of 'personal response' defined and situated within the curriculum?

Although, as described at the start of this introduction, I began with an intuitive sense of my own personal response to poetry, I discuss and define this concept in the literature review in two ways. Firstly, as a concept relating to thought, language, and cultural expression, and secondly as an assessment outcome at A level. However, I have also explored this question through data collection as it relates to the beliefs of teachers and the lived experience of the curriculum in the classroom.

2. What teaching strategies do teachers use to prepare students to read for personal meaning?

From a social constructivist perspective, the role of teachers in preparing students to read poetry is crucial. I therefore sought to explore teachers' perspectives on teaching poetry as well as their practices in the classroom. To this end, I interviewed teachers to gather data on their views as well as exploring their practices through lesson observations.

3. What experiences and knowledge do students draw on in the construction and articulation of a personal response?

Student responses to poetry are at the heart of my work, and although I recognise the power of teachers to shape these, it is important to hone in on the experiences and knowledge students

bring to their poetry readings. Methodologically this question complements the previous question because it is answered through students reporting their experiences in focus groups and through lesson observations.

4. How is the process of constructing and articulating personal responses to poems reconciled with pressures to pass exams?

Previous questions recognise the pedagogical choices and ideological preferences of teachers as well as the experiences and knowledge that students bring to reading poetry. However, at a more fundamental level, poetry reading in the A level classroom is framed by the need to pass exams. Teachers and students are both engaged in this as a primary purpose, and the kinds of poems that they may read are prescribed by the A level curriculum and their chosen exam board. Theoretically, I conceptualise reading through Rosenblatt's (1985) theory of efferent to aesthetic reading stances and want to explore if and how personal and aesthetic responses can be reconciled with efferent reading necessary to pass exams.

5. In what ways might knowledge of these processes lead to the enhancement of adolescent experiences of learning poetry?

This question links the purpose of my research with possible outcomes. It is addressed explicitly at the end of my Conclusion and Recommendations chapter and subsequently crystallised in the list of recommendations.

1.5 The Structure of the Thesis

I have divided my thesis into five chapters, the first of which is this introduction.

1. Chapter Two contains the literature review, which is divided into two main parts. Part One: Key Concepts, discusses and takes a position in relation to concepts underpinning my research. It begins with a discussion about what poetry is and how it may be read. I take an overview of a variety of theoretical approaches to adolescence, personal meaning, and response, and finally, I discuss aesthetic response. Part Two of my literature review is titled Contextualising Poetry in the Current Research, and the purpose of this is to hone in on the situation within which my research takes place. I look at poetry in the curriculum

historically and in the context of A level English in England. I focus on teaching and learning poetry and also discuss the further education sector as a distinct site of my research. I review empirical research, which informs my work.

2. Chapter Three sets out the methodology and research methods. This describes my approach to the research, justifies my ontological and epistemological assumptions and sets out the qualitative design of my work. I discuss data collection, ethical issues, credibility, and trustworthiness and reflect on my experience of primary research. I introduce my revisions to Sipe's (2000) framework for exploring literary responses. I conclude with a section on methods of analysis and reflections on data collection.

3. Chapter Four reports data analysis and discussion. This is a lengthy chapter which focuses on answering my main and subsidiary research questions. I begin with an exploration of teacher interviews and define teachers' ideological positions in relation to teaching poetry. Following this, the chapter broadens into an exploration of contrasting lessons to tease out similarities and differences between teacher ideologies, teacher practices and student responses. Following this I explore what students told me in focus groups about their experiences of reading poetry. This chapter emphasises the importance of adolescence for both teachers and students. I use Sipe's framework to look at instances where adolescents report experiences of aesthetic response to poems taught at A level.

4. Chapter Five consists of conclusions and recommendations. I summarise my findings in relation to my research questions and specifically address how knowledge of the processes of response might enhance adolescent experiences of learning poetry in the A level classroom. Recommendations, limitations of the research and potential future areas of study are discussed.

5. Appendices are numbered and include, for example, a table showing observed lessons by college, qualification and teacher, extracts of raw data, a framework for exploring personal response and field notes.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Part 1: Key Concepts for This Research

The purpose of this first part of the literature review is to discuss and define four concepts that are essential to my research. These are:

- Poetry;
- Adolescence;
- Personal meaning; and
- Aesthetic response.

Firstly, I review how poetry can be defined and then turn to literary theories to discuss in what ways poetry may be read. This will establish the relevance of theories of reader response and, in particular, the work of Rosenblatt (1904–2005). The distinction she makes between efferent and aesthetic responses is vital for my study.

Secondly, I adopt a definition of adolescence for my research and explain why this is an important lens through which to understand college students reading poetry. I argue there is a gap in research on adolescents reading poetry, which my own work addresses.

The 'personal meanings and responses' adolescent students experience with poetry taught at A level are at the heart of my research. I therefore review ideas about understanding how personal meaning and response are made. The perspectives of Vygotsky (1896–1934), Bruner (1915–2016), and Bourdieu (1930–2002) are explored as these are important for my research. Finally, I review definitions and debates about the more specific meaning of aesthetic experience and relate this back to the work of Rosenblatt. I conclude by offering a statement about how meaning and personal response are conceptualised in this research.

2.1 Poetry

2.1.1 Defining Poetry

Poetry takes many forms, and various positions are taken in relation to its origins, qualities, and relationship to other forms of literature.

The origins of poetry are unknowable, but it is likely that poetry developed in many cultural contexts from oral traditions of storytelling and song (Boyd, 2010). It may be that poetry arose specifically in response to the need for memorisation in orally literate societies. (Leithauser, 2013). Rhythm and rhyme, which remain key features of some poetic forms, may have enabled people to retain important information and pass it on to others in an organised fashion. Early existing examples in written form include those from the Greek and Persian empires.

The way one defines poetry is an ideological decision that privileges different aspects of the form (Lennard, 2005), and there are many definitions available about what constitutes poetry. Definitions are complicated in that poetry as a linguistic art form shares many features with prose, for example, the use of metaphor and rhythm to convey meaning. Eagleton (2007) has argued that, like novels and drama, poetry is preoccupied with morality and existential ideas about how people live. Whilst poetry as a form can be delineated from other literary forms by the *heightened* use of shared techniques, Pierce (2003) argues that essentially, poetry has no exclusive features, and the term poetry is best understood as a social construct: those 'publicly visible things in the world we call poems.' (2003, 151).

A starting point for exploring those 'things in the world we call poems' is the poet, Philip Larkin. He described a poem as a 'verbal device that would preserve an experience indefinitely by reproducing it in whoever reads the poem' (Larkin, 1982, cited in Padel 2004,3). Such an experience must entail emotions and feelings associated with lived material experiences. The definition is interesting because it begs more questions – how does a poem begin to attempt such a task, and what are the possible dimensions of poetry? A range of answers that attempt to define more exactly what poetry is, are discussed below.

Pinsky describes poetry as a vocal and bodily art in which the 'medium of poetry is a human body' (1998,8). By this definition, poetry is chiefly an aural experience meant to be heard and felt within the body. In so far as poetry is intended to be heard aloud, Socken (2013) argues that poetry has a stronger affinity with drama than the novel. These observations are akin to Auden's definition in *The Poet's Tongue* (1935) of poetry as 'memorable speech'. Auden believes that the power of such speech is derived from the role of poetry and, therefore, poets have a special role in society as custodians of language; the specificity and care with which

words are chosen contrasts with the casual manipulation of language used in everyday life to serve the ends of powerful socio-economic groups (David, 2017)

I now hone in on the way that poetry as an art form depends on and treats language. Poets working at different times and in different languages have drawn comparisons between poetry and music, for example, Larkin (Padel, 2004) and Brodsky (Lamont, 1974). Padel asserts that 'poetry is a verbal art that asks you to notice the medium in which it is made' (2004,5). From this perspective, poetry is a self-reflexive art form that explores language as an artefact. Nothing in a poem is spare; words are chosen to maximum effect, 'concentration and intensity are two of the qualities that distinguish the poetic treatment of a subject from its treatment in prose' (Probyn, 1984, p. 8). The effect of such extraordinary use of language is summarised by Nowotty (1962, p. 39), 'poetic language has the quality, paradoxical in non-poetic language, that when one layer of it is stripped off the onion looks bigger and better than it did before.' This resonates with Benton and Fox (1985), who argue that a distinctive feature of poetry is its ability to embody the general within the particular. The relationship between poetry and music and its relevance for my research is returned to in part 2 of this chapter.

With respect to the powerful relationship between poetry and language effects, many critics and poets have drawn attention to the importance of patterning within poetry. Ribeiro (2009) explored the repetition of sounds (for example, through alliteration or metre) in poetry. Repetition draws attention to words and encourages readers to notice and query the writing. In 'creating certain patterns, the poet is already implicitly telling us to pay attention to them, and so is expediting the comprehension process rather than slowing it down' (2009, p. 73). Eagleton (2007) discusses the repetitive use of visual effects such as line breaks and stanzas and the impact these also have on meaning making. Bradford (2010) brings both these aspects together to argue that a distinctive feature of poetry marking it from other 'literary texts' is the 'double pattern' contrived from the tension between the use of shared linguistic discourses and the marshalling of 'aspects of language into patterns that serve no purpose elsewhere in language and yet which play a role in the way the poem is structured, and, most significantly, in how it discharges meaning' (2010, p. 28) Poetry, in this sense, is a preoccupation with language for its own sake offering aesthetic experiences for the reader.

Vendler argues that poetry is a particular cognitive experience because it embodies thought as a process within the poem. This process goes beyond 'rational thought' since it contains

elements of perception, feeling, anticipation, and imagination (Vendler, 2004). There is an overlap between cognitive, neural, and liberal perspectives. For example, using neural imaging, Wassiliwisky *et al.*, (2017) have shown a relationship between reported aesthetic pleasure and the physiological impact of recited poetry. Using similar brain research, *The Centre for Research into Reading, Information and Linguistic Systems* at the *University of Liverpool* explores ways in which poetry as a form of cognition has a radical role to play in human well-being (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2015).

Felski (2008) discusses the conscious aesthetic experience of poetry. She describes poetry as a form of 'enchantment' in which we are carried away to another type of world different to that which is immediately around us. Enchantment is a phenomenon that can never be subject to a moral taxonomy of 'good or better' objects because we can never directly assess the quality of aesthetic charm. 'What characterises the phenomenology of enchantment simply is an intensely charged experience of absorption and self-loss' (2008, p. 67). This is close to Benton's view that poetry, like other literary texts, invokes a secondary world (1985) where readers inhabit partial, imagined landscapes and voices contingent but not entirely dependent on their consciously lived world(s). Poetry shapes reflections that 'constitute reflection by re-enactment – or, in the case of imagined experiences … by a kind of rehearsal that might perhaps be called virtual re-enactment' (Britton, 1993, p. 55).

In summary, answering the question of what poetry is, leads to many answers. For the purposes of this study, like Pierce (2003), I take a catholic view of poetry. My position is that poetry is a versatile linguistic art form which can offer varied and significant aesthetic experiences. Crucially, these include feelings of self-loss and self-location in the world, so this secondary world of literature is capable of intimate connection with the primary lived world. How aesthetic responses are experienced in the lived world of the college classroom goes to the heart of what this study is about.

This section began with the observation that poetry is, in some senses, an arbitrary category of those 'publicly visible things … we call poems'. This is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's (1953) proposition (cited in Kotzee, 2014) that the meanings of linguistic forms reside in their use and, in turn, suggests it is vital to look outwards to community and social definitions of poetry to understand poetry's aesthetic work. In other words, it is important to explore not only how the

idea of poetry may be defined but how poetry can *be* in the world. I will, therefore, now turn to perspectives on where and how poetry is read.

2.1.2 How Poetry May be Read

Arguments have long taken place about the relationships between, and the respective importance of, the reader, the author, and the text as these are experienced and conceptualised at different points in time. These, in turn, rest on questions of 'classic epistemological issues of what we can know and how we can know it' (Many and Cox 1992, p. 11).

According to Stockwell (1972), before the development of the printing press, people enjoyed poetry collectively as an aural experience. Poetry was a public and didactic form relying on devices such as repetition, direct address, and puns. 'Reading' was a social and communal practice defined by audiences coming together to respond to performers. Whilst little is recorded about audience responses at the time, the power of their engagement may be illustrated by the strength with which Puritans condemned and suppressed the theatre (Lopez, 2003). With the rise of modernity, the extent to which the printing press, the Reformation and the rise of capitalism replaced public reading with private reading is debated in the literature (Yandell, 2012). Middleton (2005) argues that reading aloud has become devalued in 'Western' cultures because it is seen as associated with an outdated oral tradition and contrasted unfavourably with silent reading. However, as discussed in this chapter, speech is the way in which we learn language, and therefore, orality is intimately related to learning. Teachers frequently share texts by reading aloud, which can promote shared understanding of texts (Hahn, 2002).

This section takes a historical perspective to briefly outline and delineate theories about reading poetry. The aim is to understand what a poem might mean, and be to adolescents reading printed poetry in the classroom. Firstly, I review the role of the reader in contrasting literary theories. These are important because they offer a lens through which I can appreciate the explicit and implicit theories that teachers hold as they teach poems. Teacher perspectives (which I explore in one-on-one interviews) matter because they inform the 'teaching strategies teachers use to prepare students to read for personal meaning' (research question 2). However, literary theories are not the only way to approach reading printed poetry and I move from these

to discussion of the associated field of theories of reader response. At the end of this section, I indicate the perspective which I argue is most useful for this study.

2.2 Historical Overview of Literary Theories

2.2.1 Romanticism

Beginning in the early 19th century, the Romantic tradition shares its roots in the aesthetic ideas of Keats and the practices of pre-Raphaelite artists (Upstone, 2017). Embedded in the philosophy of Rousseau (1712–1778) and the context of early industrial Britain, Romanticism was a loose movement concerned with a longing for the pastoral and ideas of the natural order (Cuddon, 2013). At this time, authorship was not established as a career within a marketplace. Books were expensive, and the ability to publish and sell them was limited to largely male and privileged groups of people. Sangster asserts that authors and critics 'were intensely aware of each other as living people who exerted social influence … in this literary culture intentionality was an assumption rather than a fallacy' (Sangster, 2012, p. 27). In essence, the author was celebrated as the centre of original thought and creativity even as philosophers such as Hume (1757) understood readers to have the capacity for a range of differing responses and tastes.

According to Eagleton (1996), it was during this time that ideas of 'literariness' emerged. Poetry became separated from other types of writing and is particularly celebrated for its imaginative power. For the Romantics, the artistic experience was understood to be both intensely personal and a political force. The concept of 'poetry' had 'deep social and political implications' (Eagleton 1996, p. 17). At a time of deep social upheaval, poetry 'checks the calculative avarice of a materialistic society, offering an alternative to a crass utilitarianism that is blind to everything that can't be instrumentalised; the use of poetry is therefore entwined with its uselessness' (Lerner and Steinberg, 2016, p. 71).

The issue of the 'uselessness' of poetry is discussed further in this chapter in the section *Aesthetic Response*. Romanticism laid the foundations for defining a canon of improving literature, and poetry from this period is included in the A level syllabus today (Bradford, 1993). The relevance of this is addressed in part 2 of this chapter under the heading *Poetry in the Current A Level Curriculum.*

In broad terms, the romantic ideal of the reader as a 'free thinker' capable of intensely personal engagement with aesthetic experiences would seem to match the aims of this research. However, this perspective does not address contextual factors such as classroom, teacher, and curriculum, all of which are significant for my research.

2.2.2 Russian Formalism

Russian formalists, an eclectic group of intellectuals who were influential in the early 20th century, sought 'to establish literary scholarship as a distinct and integrated field of intellectual endeavour' (Erlich,1973, p. 628). In doing so, they sought new answers to the question of what makes a work 'literary'. Formalists believed the distinctive nature of 'literature' could be found in the presentation of the work and, echoing points made in my previous section, the special usage of language (Erlich, 1973).

Literariness, for the Formalists, 'meant language which is peculiarly conscious of itself as such – or, to put it another way, language which has been 'made strange' so that it becomes *newly* perceptible to the reader or listener'. (Eagleton 2007, p. 48)

Literary language is an estranged and deviant form of everyday language and, as such, is a 'relative concept' (Eagleton 2007, p. 49). 'The Literary' is essentially a *type of language* which may be found anywhere that everyday accepted forms of language are displaced, and language is refreshed. Adverts, billboards, songs, and lists are all capable of being types of literature. The test of 'Literature' is not, therefore, context but whether the language (including syntax, sound, and shape on the page) is rich, complex, and unified. Formalism, according to Eagleton, is 'essentially the application of linguistics to the study of literature' (1996, p. 3), and formalist theorists such as Jakobson (1896–1982) drew on semiotics to develop ideas about the functions of language in poetry (Erlich, 1973).

Whilst the Romantics placed value on the purposes and skills of the author as opposed to the reader, Formalism innovated because it challenged the notion of a single canon called 'Literature' and replaced this with ideas about the nature of 'the literary'. It disrupted the romantic idea of text as an object of study and instead posited the text as a methodological field of enquiry (Payne, 1997).

With its emphasis on poetry as a form of specialised language, Formalism is concerned with the reader to the extent that she is a skilled reader of objective artistic technique (Goulimari, 2015). As a theoretical perspective, Formalism has significance for this research because it takes ideas of 'the literary' beyond the classroom to respect the many influences that students may draw on to construct and articulate personal responses (research question 3). However, it does not offer grounding for this research, which is concerned with readers 'personal meanings and responses'.

The Russian Formalists laid the groundwork for further structuralist approaches to literary criticism (Erlich, 1973). A key movement in this regard is 'New Criticism', which originated in post-war United States with the work of Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946). Aspects of structuralism are therefore turned to and their relevance for the present research is explored.

2.2.3 Structuralism: Practical and New Criticism

Saussure (1857–1913) pioneered a structuralist approach to texts and reading as he distinguished between 'langue' – the formal features of language, and 'parole' – the way language is used. From a structuralist perspective, meaning is a secondary effect. Structuralism explores the conventions and modes of signification which enable meaning to be made (Upstone, 2017).

Practical Criticism is rooted in this tradition, beginning in 1929 with the work of I.A Richards at the University of Cambridge. It is allied with New Criticism as similar ideas developed in the United States (Upstone, 2017).
As a pioneer of 'close criticism', Richards believed that readers 'must concentrate on the words on the page, extracting meaning from them alone' (Goulimari 2015, p. 186). Texts are thought of as complete in themselves with lives independent of the author. Personal associations are important but can become intrusive and create difficulties in meaning making (Goodwyn, 2021).

Supporting and developing this perspective, Wimsatt and Beardsley published two important essays: *The Intentional Fallacy* (1946) and *The Affective Fallacy* (1949). The 'intentional fallacy' is the belief that literature should be critiqued in terms of the author's aims and intentions. This belief is a fallacy because it assumes that the author has full conscious and

intentional control over their work. It underestimates the possibilities of influences both at the time of writing and subsequently in different readings of the same text. As Payne argues, 'Even if we were to go to a living author and ask what he or she meant by a particular text, all we would get would be another *text* (his or her answer), which would then, in turn, be open to interpretation' (2009, p. 22)

In *The Affective Fallacy* (1949), Wimsatt and Beardsley concern themselves with the reader. They argue that just as we should be sceptical about privileging the author, we should not rely on the response of a reader to guide our valuation or understanding of poetry. Readers' 'emotional engagement with the text leads us to confuse what the poem does with what the poem is' (Upstone 2017, p. 18). Consequently, to evaluate a work of art in terms of its effect on the mind of the reader is 'a critical error' (Cuddon 2013, p. 14). Readers are capricious and unreliable, their subjective impressions too varied to be taken seriously as a source of defensible criticism. Stanley Fish summarises the views of New Criticism: 'Only the text was both indisputably there and stable. To have recourse either to the poem or to its effects is to exchange objectivity for 'impressionism and relativism' (1980, p. 2).

The 'affective fallacy' argument challenges my research because, by implication, it questions the validity of exploring individual personal responses to poems. However, I argue later in this chapter that this is not the case. Individual responses to poetry are embedded in cultural as well as idiosyncratic personal experiences. Individual responses are also expressed in particular social circumstances and through social transactions. This means that 'personal responses' have an inherently social dimension open to many possible kinds of educational research.

Like the Formalists, New Criticism claims that texts have an intrinsic artistic integrity of their own. Whilst New Criticism is more interested in context and themes than Russian Formalism (Upstone, 2017), both perspectives involve a way of reading that emphasises form over the author or historical context. New Criticism led to the practice of close reading of texts: looking at the formal features of language, such as semantics and grammar, rather than focusing on personal experiences effected by interaction with words on a page.

As a dominant way of reading poetry in the 20th and 21st centuries, this perspective has influenced the lived experience of teachers and students in the classroom (Gordon, 2018). It will be relevant, therefore, to return to this in my research when discussing teachers'

perspectives on reading. However, Practical and New Criticism thinks of the reader essentially as a decoder of signs on the page. It does not take seriously the possibility that readers' personal responses have value in understanding the experiences that poetry can offer. For perspectives that take readers' meanings and responses more seriously, we first turn briefly to post-structuralist literary theory and then to theories of reader response.

2.2.4 Post-Structuralism: Readerly and Writerly Texts, the Reader as a Textual Subject

Eagleton locates post-structuralist literary theory in the historical context of the failure of the 1968 student uprisings in Paris. 'Unable to break the structures of state power, post-structuralism found it possible instead to subvert the structures of language' (1996, p. 123). Post-structuralist writers include Foucault (1926–1984), Derrida (1930–2004) and, in his later work, Barthes (1915–1980). The field is vast, and for my purposes, I touch on only a few relevant discussions.

Post-structuralism argues that 'reading subjects, like the texts that constitute them, are sites of disunity and conflict'. (Corcoran, 1992, p. 55) In this way, post-structuralists question the binary debate, outlined above, between the Romantic tradition and Structuralists about the primacy of author and text. Their starting point is that language, used to express and deconstruct ideas, is far from being the fixed shared system of meanings that it appears to be. Language is located in discourses of power and is inherently unstable (Eagleton, 1996). Meanings of words are not absolute but stand in relation to what they both are and are not. In the language of semiotics, there is a division between the signifier (the word) and the signified (the concept). Therefore, '[i]f you want to know the meaning (or signified) of a signifier, you can look it up in a dictionary; but all you will find will be yet more signifiers, whose signifier you can in turn look up and so on.' (Eagleton 1996, p. 111).

In his 1967 essay, Barthes declared *The Death of the Author*, meaning that in the triadic relationship between author, text, and reader, the author need not be attended to. In an inversion of the Romantics' position, he claims that the author is a lesser power than the reader. This is because only readers are able to enjoy a full and plural view of the many languages a text may embody.

Foucault goes further and problematises the concept of 'the author'. He draws attention to the paradoxical way in which the author is a historical construction bound up with ideas about the legality and ownership of texts (Payne 2009, p. 23). Texts are formations of power and language: endlessly fluid and open to interpretations. Rather than chase illusory questions of 'what is meant by X?' with reference to author or text, the role of literary theorists is to expose both relativism and the sources of power that seek to validate certain types of discourse (Payne, 2009).

Although such positions recognise the power of the reader, they do not provide a straightforward promotion of the reader as sovereign. Readers are shaped by texts, and according to Barthes (1967), some texts are more open to interpretation and response from readers than others. Barthes (1967) further distinguished between texts that are more or less predictable in structure and style and those that are not. The former he called 'readerly texts' (e.g., soap operas and detective novels). These are relatively closed to interpretation and are available to be consumed as they are.

> 'A writerly text, in contrast, involves the reader as co-producer, co-author, as creative interpreter of the text … The writerly text invites the reader to 'write' while reading, and to fill in the *gaps* in the text' (Hall 2001, p. 155).

The definition of a 'writerly text' seems to apply to poetry and, at first sight, suggests a useful literary distinction for this research. It can be questioned, though, whether one can make a definitive distinction between different types of text. What may be a 'writerly text' to one reader may be 'readerly' to another, and Barthes seems to be unable to conceive of the reader as active without imposing a writerly label on their activities. Nevertheless, Barthes is important because his work begins to prioritise the authority of the reader. In this sense, post-structuralism has common ground with reader response theories.

Post-structuralism also takes us closer to the role of the reader than previously discussed literary traditions. It indicates the vital role of language and situates it within power relations. This relates to an important aspect of this research, which explores reading for personal meaning and the articulation of personal responses. The role of language and how it relates to ideas of 'personal response' is explored in the section *Personal Meaning and Response.*

I now turn to theories of reader response as these are especially informative for the present research.

2.3 Theorising Readers' Responses

'While reader response theorists are unified in their opposition to the belief that meaning inheres exclusively in the text, they do not provide a unified critical position' (Connell, 2008, p. 106). Corcoran (1992) outlines a continuum of reader response theories that variously place the reader in relation to 'the text' from psychologically subjective to more socially determined positions. *The Reader as Textual Subject* has already been referred to above. *The Reader as Unique Responder, The Reader as Transactional Partner, and The Reader as Cultural Responder,* are outlined next.

2.3.1 The Reader as Unique Responder

Holland (1994) is an example of a reader response theorist at the psychologically subjective end of Corcoran's continuum. He writes from a Freudian perspective, which is concerned with subjective experiences of the conscious/unconscious and associated anxieties, pleasures, and fantasies. His project is to explore how reading contributes to the shifting formations of individual identity (Corcoran, 1992).

From this perspective, literary texts are a means through which unconscious fantasies may be transformed into conscious meanings. Therefore, there is no 'text as such' to transact *with*; all texts are projections, 'potential embodiments or blueprints of the reader's 'identity theme' or 'existential predicament'' (Hayhoe and Parker 1990, p. 133).

In common with the Russian Formalists, Holland believes that language is key to understanding why and how we respond to literature. However, in Holland's view, it is not the estrangement of language that is the critical factor; it is that language is intrinsic to an understanding of 'self.' 'If language … is a significant structural element of the self, then literature, insofar as it dislocates, manipulates and alters language can produce fundamental changes in the self' (Alcorn and Bracher in Holland *et al.*, 1985, p. 819). It seems from this point of view that reading is valued and valuable insofar as it may be described as 'therapeutic.' Eagleton raises basic questions about these assumptions: '…what of modernist forms which pulverise and

order, subvert meaning and explode our self-assurance? Is literature just a sort of therapy?' (1996, p. 158). Psychoanalytic approaches to the role of the reader, such as those of Holland, are relevant to this study insofar as they draw attention to the role of personal interpretation in understanding reading. However, as this is a study of students and teachers within a classroom, I take the view that material and social structural factors are more relevant than those of singular, psychological identities.

2.3.2 The Reader as Transactional Partner

In a long career, Louise Rosenblatt (1904–2005) was 'one of the first literary scholars to consider readers as active participants in the process of making literary meaning' (Cox, 1992, p. 12). In doing so, she built on the insights of Harding (1937) and Britton (1970), who discussed how the special role of the reader as a spectator enables a reader to 'construct and manipulate an inner story world' (Cox 1992, p. 13).

Rosenblatt (2005) argues that texts can only have meaning as they are understood by a specific reader at a particular time and location. 'Meaning' does not reside with either the author or with the text. Rosenblatt challenges the close reading of New Criticism by stating that 'language is not a self-contained system or static code' (2005, p. 27). She also challenges the Romantic notion that the author is at the centre of a literary universe: 'Keat's love of Fanny Brawne or Auden's feelings at the death of Yeats may have generated their poems, but the texts that resulted had an evolution and a character of their own' (1994, p. 49). Meaning should be seen as an *event*, a transaction of ideas between author, text, and reader. The text may signify and call for certain types of reading and prompt certain kinds of responses (Iser, 1978), but the reader initiates the process of understanding as they seek to make sense of marks on a page.

Rosenblatt (1994) distinguishes between 'efferent' and 'aesthetic' poles of responses. These are traits she characterises as relative stances toward what is being read. When we read efferently, we read – more or less – for information; on what can be taken *from* the text. However, when we read aesthetically, we are immersed in the experience of reading, even as we are conscious of the act of reading. This is an important distinction and is explored later in this chapter under the heading *Understanding 'The Aesthetic' Within a Reader Response Framework*.

The reader may be the 'essential ingredient' in reading, but texts are also active. This is because they contain features that trigger an aesthetic experience. These 'textual features' may be compared with the textual features that New Criticism recommends are paid attention to in 'close reading', for example, figurative language, use of metaphor, and sibilance (Goulimari, 2015). However, Rosenblatt's transactional approach to poetry draws attention to ways that readers make meaning through a *process* of immersed engagement with texts using skills such as imaging, anticipation, and evaluation. Reading, seen from this perspective, is not a set of discrete skills but an engaged transaction between the text and the reader. This suggests the need for me to take a careful interpretative approach to data analysis in my research.

2.3.3 The Reader as Cultural Responder

There are many perspectives on the reader as a cultural responder, which arise from different literary theories, such as post-colonial, historical, and feminist theories. What they have in common is that they 'generally assume that readers respond according to 'subject positions' acquired from socialisation by cultural institutions' (Beach, 1993, p. 125). I do not propose to discuss divergent branches of cultural response, but rather to identify the importance of the underpinning concept of the 'interpretive community' as proposed by Fish (1980). According to Fish, 'interpretive communities' lie at the heart of reader response. This is because our individual responses are essentially shaped by the shared discourses, cultural conventions, and attitudes of the community to which we belong.

Fish argues that 'Literature' does not consist of a special type of language; it is an 'open category' (1980, p. 11) to which certain kinds of writing are ascribed by particular communities at particular times. He further argues that the reader must be of primary place because words on the page can only acquire significance as they are read. 'I challenged the self-sufficiency of the text by pointing out that its apparently spatial form belied the temporal dimension in which its meanings were actualised' (1980, p. 2). Reading is, above all, a type of experience, and we should look at what texts *do* rather than what texts *mean*. This does not lead us into a position of excessive subjectivism because 'speakers of a language share a system of rules that each of them has somehow internalised … [therefore] … understandings will in some sense be uniform' (1980, p. 5). Readers are not fully constrained by a normative linguistic system because words can only make sense within actual social and political contexts. Similarly, they are not free to make anything of what they read. Readers automatically hear and assign shape,

context, and meaning from whatever cues are available. Context and meaning 'occur simultaneously' (1980, p. 313).

Fish's contribution to reader response theories is substantial, and several key principles are clear. We cannot think about language and communication free of social contexts. Social contexts arise out of historical experiences and political relationships and structures, and 'colleges', for example, actively recreate a certain type of formal education. Secondly, because 'no one is indifferent to the norms and values that enable his consciousness' (Fish, 1980, p. 319), no one can truly be an ungrounded relativist. To be so would mean deep indifference toward one's beliefs. Finally, confidence in interpreting and understanding what we read is not a matter of individual skill alone. Interpretation is drawn from practices within institutions such as schools and colleges that are 'communal and conventional' (1980, p. 321). Teachers and the content of their teaching have a strong bearing on how students respond to literary texts (Hickman, 1981). All of the above indicates that thought and meaning drawn from texts cannot properly be understood as the private property of individuals. Personal meanings are generated through the shared understandings of communities. Personal responses are inexorably also cultural responses, expressed through language. Links between personal and cultural response and the role of language is further discussed in the section, *Personal Meaning and Response*.

2.3.4 Key Points

I have discussed how poetry may be defined and outlined four areas of literary theory: Romanticism, Structuralism, Post-structuralism, and reader response theories. Aspects of each have been discussed and related to the present research.

Romanticism understands poetry to be a special kind of literature that develops social bonds and empathy. The power of poetry is derived from the meanings of authors. Both of these points make it of limited value in relation to the present research. Firstly, this is because it makes questionable moral and political assumptions about the role of poetry and the poet, secondly, because it relegates the role of the reader to individual supplicant.

Structuralists see poetry as a type of text that uses estranged language and particular techniques. The reader's interaction can only be with the text, and the purpose of reading is to become a

close and able decoder. This also does not offer a perspective for understanding readers 'personal meanings and responses' to poetry.

Post-structuralism is a vast area which encompasses other theoretical perspectives. Because post-structuralists explore the instability of language and the kinds of invitations texts make to readers this is a more relevant perspective for the current research. It can accommodate the idea that a reader actively engages with texts to a greater extent than either the Romantics or Structuralists.

The perspective of 'reader response' offers a good theoretical 'fit' for this study. I understand the cultural end of this spectrum of theories to be most useful for my study. Rosenblatt (1938, 1994, 2005) and Iser (1978) emphasise readers as fully engaged transactional partners who bring personal, social and cultural knowledge to bear to the act of reading. Fish (1980) also insists on the central role of the social context in understanding how readers make meaning with texts. I take the view that the context of the college classroom, which includes things such as discourse, relationships, resources, and the beliefs and role of the teacher, are all key elements shaping how students make meaning.

Finally, Rosenblatt's distinction between aesthetic and efferent reading is especially useful as it offers a way for my research to distinguish between different types of reading that I may observe in college classrooms. Aesthetic response and reader response are explored further later in this chapter under the heading *Personal Meaning and Response*.

2.4 Adolescence

The title of this study is *Adolescents Reading Poetry for Personal Meaning in London colleges of further education*. As my research is situated within colleges, I might have chosen to use the word 'students' in place of 'adolescents', but I decided against this, being concerned that the term 'student' was at once both too general and too narrow. Too general because it can apply to any age group or educational context, and too narrow because it situates the people at the centre of my study exclusively in a relationship with a teacher. Teacher-student relationships are important, but the appeal of the term 'adolescent' for me is that it is a more specific age-related concept. It implies influences on reading that are beyond a teacher-student nexus.

Emotional, cognitive, and physical changes embraced by the umbrella term of 'adolescence' and mediated by society are important to track in broad outline because they offer an age-related perspective from which to understand the responses offered in this study.

To complete this section, I undertook a broad literature search using search terms such as 'adolescent definition and theories,' 'adolescents in education', and 'history/ context of adolescents.' I began with textbooks from this century offering an overview of sociological and psychological perspectives, such as *Adolescent Development* (2004) by Dacey, Kenny, and Margolis and *Adolescent Development* edited by Adams (2000). Two key texts were Kegan (1994) *In Over our Heads* whose developmental schema is discussed on p 33-34, and Blakemore (2018) *Inventing Ourselves,* which led me to related research papers on neurological changes in the adolescent brain. Databases were also used, and journals such as the interdisciplinary *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* and the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* were consulted.

2.5 Origins of the Term

Graham (2004) states that the idea of adolescence has, since Ancient Greece, been used to describe people without full adult social rights and full physical maturity. It is an imprecise term. Arnett and Taber (1994, p. 517) argue that being located between the shifting boundaries of adulthood and childhood gives adolescence a 'terminable and interminable' quality. Graham states that in 'every age the way adolescence has been seen has depended on the prevailing beliefs about the world at the time' (2004, p. 27). For example, the rise of Calvinistic Protestantism in England cast youth as brutish and morally malign. By contrast, 18th-century Romanticism saw young people being described as lovesick and prone to neuroticism – themes that are explored in some of the poetry anthologies studied by students in this research (e.g., AQA English Literature Keats anthology).

Kehily (2007) argues that by the start of the 20th century, the new discipline of psychology effectively constructed adolescence for Western societies, becoming a dominant paradigm in framing the discourse of adolescence. It places adolescents in a liminal space: a point between the expectations and roles of childhood and those of adulthood.

The discipline of psychology is largely interested in this experience as an internal mental process, but adolescence, as indicated above, is also experienced within cultural, social, and economic boundaries. The current social construction of this adolescent liminal space and accompanying rituals is significant for my educational research. This is discussed in relation to the work of Kegan (1994) later in this section.

Hall (1844–1924) coined the modern concept of adolescence. His universalist perspective on the subject is grounded in social Darwinism. Hall believed that the different ages of an individual human life mirror the development of humanity, so that, for example, childhood corresponds to 'primitive' life and adulthood to 'modern' life. Between these lies the stage of adolescence, which he famously characterised as a time of 'storm and stress' (Smith, 2016). For Hall, adolescence is a time of opportunity and development as well as a time of danger and risk.

Adolescence, according to Hall, is also a time when people become capable of appreciating art and music. This reference to artistic appreciation is interesting because it touches on the idea that young people might have a particular interest/ability with aesthetic experiences, which my research explores. The importance of stress also has contemporary relevance at a time when government has highlighted the need to be alert to young people's mental health (Department for Education, 2018).

Concerns about adolescence take place at a time when there has been a massive decline of young people (ages 16–24) in the workforce. Coleman (1997) states that by the end of the 20th century, 70% of young people in the UK continued in education while approximately 30% were in training, with just a very small number in full-time work. More recent government figures record that at the end of 2020, 86.5% of 16–18-year-olds were in training, education, or apprenticeships. The vast majority of these were in full-time education (Department for Education, 2021). Adolescence and the experience of further education appear to be well-entwined in today's social structures.

From a Critical Realist perspective (discussed further in my methodology chapter), I take the position that adolescence is a social construct rooted in biological, psychological, and social developmental changes. To explore how adolescents might experience 'the aesthetic' and how culture manages and mediates this experience, I survey contemporary theories of adolescence

next. I focus on cognitive, neurological, psychological, and social developmental aspects of adolescence.

2.5.1 Cognitive and Neurological Factors in Adolescence

Although current research suggests that Hall's (1904) evocation of adolescence as 'storm and stress' has been exaggerated, there are profound changes to the brain which take place in the adolescent years (Berk, 2014).

Social cognitive psychologists have tracked changes in the thought patterns of adolescents. In this regard, Piaget (1983) argued that after the age of 12, young people increase their ability to think abstractly, and they become 'formal operational' thinkers, capable of thinking beyond the 'actual' to the 'possible'. A growth in sophistication and extent of language use is key to this ability, and hypothetical-deductive reasoning allows people access to exploratory and critical thinking. Empirical research by Ross (1976) confirmed an increase in formal thinking and verbal fluency among adolescents. This is controversial; Kuhn (1979) argued that formal operational thinking is not reached by all adolescents or adults and suggests that our education system itself is key to whether and how this skill develops.

Reading is at the heart of this study, and Berzonsky (2000) argues that child readers of literature are limited to the appearance of objects and events; in Piagetian terms, they are 'concrete operational' readers. Concrete operational readers can report pleasure or distraction when reading, but only older readers who have reached 'formal operational' thinking can tussle with the 'what ifs' of a narrative. In short, the relativistic thinking skills of adolescents allow them to fully experience the dilemmas of literary texts and what Eagleton (2007) has called the 'moral universe' of fiction.

Elkind (1967) conceptualised the importance of imaginary audiences during adolescence. A large empirical study based on self-reports by Schwartz, Maynard, and Uzelac (2008) confirmed the presence of this in late adolescence. Imaginary audiences arise because adolescents know that others think as they do, that is, have 'formal operational' thinking skills, but cannot yet differentiate between their preoccupations and those of others. Adolescents are, therefore, prone to egocentrism and the construction of an imaginary audience that watches and evaluates their behaviour. Many construct personal fables that pertain to the uniquely felt

nature of their misery/enjoyment. Personal fables are stories that include ideas of omnipotence and immortality. These ideas also suggest that adolescents have the potential for breadth, connection, and freshness of thought in relation to reading poems.

Seen in this context, adolescent reading can be conceptualised as essentially a self-centred activity. From a transactional reader response perspective, research by Appleman (2000) emphasises the solipsistic qualities of adolescence. Appleman shows how literary texts that connect to adolescents' 'personal experiences, values, [and] questions' (2000, p. 124) will prompt rich reading responses. From a similar reader response perspective, Probst (1990) has also explored adolescent development in relation to the kinds of texts to which they might respond. Whilst *what* adolescents read may be part of the picture of *how* they read, I argue later that it is the capacity to go beyond the self, to think in what Kegan (1994) calls 'cross-categorical' ways, that is a more important hallmark of adolescence. In other words, adolescents are capable of responding personally and deeply to texts which speak to them outside of their own experiences and beliefs.

Flavell (1977) summarises the changes in cognition that occur in people as they develop beyond childhood. In addition to hypothetical and deductive reasoning, he believes that during adolescence, people become capable of imagining the possible and impossible, imagining alternative outcomes to events and understanding and using metaphors. These are important points as the skills Flavell cites relate directly to poetry reading, which invites a multiplicity of readings and extensive use of figurative and metaphorical language.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) has been responsible for recent advances in understanding neurological influences on adolescence (Giedd, 2008). Findings include a growth in meta-cognition, which is the ability to introspect and evaluate one's own behaviours and responses (Weil *et al.*, 2013). There is an increase in information retention and speed of thought (Kail and Hall, 2001) and a doubling of short-term memory span (Ferguson, Bowey and Tilley, 2002). Little used brain connections – the synapses – are pruned leading to faster and more efficient cognition in adolescence than in childhood (Blakemore and Choudhury, 2006). The pre-frontal cortex, responsible for self-awareness, judgement, impulse control, and emotion undergoes substantial changes during adolescence, and this leads to a greater reactivity in adolescents to emotions and rewards than in adults. (Dumontheil, 2016; Blakemore, 2018). Additionally, during adolescence, there is an increased linkage of the two hemispheres of the

brain, which is facilitated by the growth of the *corpus callosum*. This thick nerve tract increases connections across hemispheres. It enables a 'unification of the sensory fields… [leading to improved] memory storage and retrieval, attention and arousal and enhancement of language and auditory functions' (Giedd, 2008, p. 337)

There is evidence that when adolescents reflect on their own thoughts, they use different aspects of the brain from adults. Adults rely on experiences and memory to evaluate their ideas. By contrast, adolescents draw more on their immediate environment, and especially peer feedback (Sebastien, Burnett and Blakemore, 2008). The ability to mentalise, which is to 'infer the intentions, beliefs and desires of others and to predict their behaviour' (Mills *et al.*, 2014, p. 123), also increases in adolescence. Positive peer acceptance has been shown to be highly rewarding to adolescents (Guyer *et al.*, 2012).

Taken together, these powerful changes enable increased executive functioning of the brain, increasing powers to plan for, anticipate and respond to external circumstances. Adolescent brains are therefore open to all sorts of new experiences (McMahan, 2009). 'Neurons become more responsive to excitatory neurotransmitters during puberty. As a result, adolescents react more strongly to stressful events and experience pleasurable stimuli more intensely' (Berk, 2014, p. 367).

There are important caveats to be considered at this point. Environment and behaviour can lead to changes in the brain, so there is a two-way relationship between the brain and the external world (McMahan, 2009). Choudhury (2009) reminds us that neuroscience is not a value-free activity. Current research is often directed by concerns about adolescent mental health, and 'experience under study in the lab may have different meanings in different cultures' (2009, p. 159).

I contend that adolescence is a time when there are key neurological and cognitive changes to individual thinking. As Dacey comments in relation to Piaget, '[d]uring adolescence, thought takes flight' (2005, p. 105). From this point of view, the concept of adolescence is well suited to this study. The implication of both cognitive and neurological perspectives is that adolescents have extended powers and new skills in the way that they think. The ability to manipulate abstract ideas and increased capacity with imaginary audiences suggests that where

adolescents are enculturated into poetry, they are well-placed to enter and engage with the aesthetic experiences that poetry can offer.

To see how the above might relate to my research as an exploration of 'personal meaning' and 'personal response', I now briefly examine psychological ideas about the self and identity.

2.5.2 Psychological Theories of Adolescence: Identity and the Self

Many theorists, such as Erikson (1968), Kohlberg (1970), and Bandura (1982/1995), have been interested in adolescence as it relates to the self and the growth of personal identity. Kohlberg (1970), cited in Dacey, Kenny, and Margolis, (2004), explored the development of relativistic morality in relation to Piaget's understanding of formal thinking discussed below. He understood adolescence to be a critical time in the development of morality from self-centred to more social and contractual forms of reasoning.

Bandura (1982, 1995) characterised adolescence as a period of developing agency and self-efficacy. Agency is concerned with making relatively independent choices in life, and a sense of agency is crucial for adolescents entering adult life (Bandura, 1995). Self-efficacy is related to agency and refers to a person's belief in their ability to attain goals. It is developed through the management of emotional responses and decision-making skills (Bandura, 1982). Essentially, adolescents are learning to manage their responses to situations to make choices about their future lives. They are forming nascent adult identities.

Erikson explored the growth of a personal self within adolescence. As this study is concerned with the construction of 'personal responses' to literature, Erikson's schema and the associated notion of 'identity' is now briefly surveyed.

Erikson (1902–1995), like Hall, defined life in terms of stages. His stages are psycho-social in nature and development depends on the resolution of conflicts at each stage of life. Erikson states that the chief task of people in adolescence is to achieve a coherent self-identity as opposed to a diffuse and partially integrated identity (Erikson, 1968). From this perspective, adolescence is a special time for identity formation and consolidation (Astalis, 2005).

Coherent self-identity is a linchpin of future development because when people develop a 'unified sense of spatial and temporal self-continuity' (Berzonsky, 2000, p. 21), they also begin to define their future potential. Thus, in psychological terms, adolescence is 'a life phase that is both socially significant and psychologically complex' (Kehily, 2007, p. 16). Peers are also particularly significant within Erikson's schema since they are the most important mediators of identity at this stage of life. This assertion has been supported by quantitative primary research amongst both male and female adolescents (Nawaz, 2011).

Graham (2004) critiques Erikson to caution against assuming that 'identity work' belongs solely to adolescence. In the 21st century, ideas about identity and the roles identity and identification play in our individual and collective lives are contested (Jenkins, 2004). 'Beliefs and values can change throughout life, and identity formation continues well into adult life and beyond' (Graham 2004, p. 19). This may well be the case, but adolescent self-identity work seems to be important because it coincides with physical (including sexual) maturity and particular types of social demands in our society, for example, the pressure to pass exams and make decisions about education and work. Therefore, I would argue that adolescence has particular resonance for our development of self. It is surely possible to accept that identities develop and change throughout life and that adolescence is a particularly important time for this experience.

Identity, however, is not a purely personal matter. 'Identity presents the interface between the personal – what is going on inside our heads ... and the social, cultural and economic factors which make it possible for people to take up some identities and render others inaccessible or impossible' (Woodward, 2004, p. 18). This is important because it draws attention to the fact that identity is an intersubjective construct. We define ourselves in terms of who we are in relation to the world around us. Our identities are, therefore, enmeshed within power relations. When adolescents in this study express opinions and feelings about poetry, they do this as people who also construct and perform themselves as students in a class of other students.

2.5.3 Social and Contextual Theories of Adolescence

Whereas psychologists explore adolescence predominantly through the lens of intrapersonal changes, social and contextual theories emphasise adolescence as a time to prepare for adult roles. This interpersonal focus considers many factors. These may include historical and social

norms, roles, and contexts for behaviour that shape adolescence. This section considers ways in which adolescence has been marked and contained in different social contexts. Finally, it will focus on the work of Kegan (1994), who proposes a developmental schema that locates the psychological construction of adolescence within social contexts. Kegan's theory, in particular, is a useful anchor for this study.

A socio-historical approach argues that modern concepts of adolescence in England can be traced directly to education, class, and power (Graham, 2004). The education of upper-class young men at Rugby school 'sowed seeds of the idea of separateness of this time of life' (2004, p. 30). However, this idea of separateness became negatively grafted onto working-class youth in the UK when poverty and a rise in population led to an increase in recorded crime and the prison population at the start of the 20th century. Graham writes that in these circumstances, the authorities cast crime as the result of 'a badly brought up age group rather than linked more generally to social disadvantage and poverty' (2004, p. 31). A socio-historical approach such as Graham's is useful because it illuminates the class origins of our current ambivalent attitudes towards adolescents. For example, adolescents are positioned as both uniquely privileged whilst also frequently considered as a single-minded disaffected group (Coleman, 1961).

Two models for thinking about cultural developmental approaches to adolescence are now discussed. The first can be found in the work of Coleman (1974) as developed by Coleman and Hendry (1999). Their work is interested in how adolescence connects to other aspects of life and the continuity between these rather than disjuncture. In seeking to understand agency and structure, Coleman and Hendry draw on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979), whose work contributes to the field of childhood development as embedded in social structures. From this perspective, 'each individual's development is embedded in a complex physical and social network of parents, siblings, peers, neighbourhood, school system, community and culture' (Jaffe, 1998, p. 60). Adolescents are 'active agents in shaping or determining his or her own development' (1999, p. 13). Adolescent agency can be understood through the concept of 'focal theory' originally developed by Coleman (1974). This theory, supported by extensive quantitative empirical research (Coleman, 1974; Kloep, 1999), argues that adolescents negotiate the many challenges of becoming adults by focusing on one developmental issue at a time. For example, peers are an important focus in middle adolescence (approximately 14–17), whereas parental conflict comes into focus at a later age.

Choudhury (2009) describes the work of developmental anthropologists Super and Harkness (2002), who define culture as 'the organisation of the developmental environment' (2009, p. 163). In culture, there are three subsystems. Firstly, there is a physical and social setting (in this research, the college and the classroom). Secondly, there are inherited customs and practice (what is expected of the role of student or teacher). Finally, there is 'the psychology of caregivers including beliefs concerning the needs of children and the community goals of child rearing' (2009,163). Well-defined and self-reinforcing subsystems that share values and practices shape what Super and Harkness call the 'developmental niche' of childhood and adolescence (1986).

Cultural developmental models described above are relevant for my study because they make clear the many influences that may shape what I have called a 'personal' response to poetry. These include the college classroom, students' cultural backgrounds and home lives, their previous experiences with poetry and their current social lives with peers. This variety of cultural practices, some well-established and institutional, others idiosyncratic, emergent and new, are unlikely to form collective and harmonious 'self-reinforcing subsystems'. However, they all suggest the kinds of experiences and knowledge that students will draw on when they respond to poetry, so it is important to consider these as I answer research question 4.

Coleman and Hendry rely on the foundational work of Vygotsky (1978/1986), who is a key theorist for the present research. Vygotsky emphasises the importance of the 'more knowledgeable other' in influencing how people learn and produce meanings throughout the lifespan. In doing so, he prioritises the social world of the classroom and the role of the teacher. In common with Piaget (1983), Vygotsky argues that an adolescent's thinking is qualitatively different from a child's thinking. A key change is in the increasing sophistication of conceptual thought. A child is only able to think of concepts in concrete terms; for example, a police officer wears a uniform. However, adolescents, given appropriate mediated help, are able to think more abstractly, for example, a police officer acts as an arm of the state. Vygotsky coined this as 'scientific conceptualisation': ideas that develop as a result of formal instruction (1978). Vital changes also take place in the role of memory as people develop. 'For the young child to think means to recall; but for the adolescent, to recall means to think' (1978, p. 51). This observation seems to anticipate the position taken by Kegan (outlined below) in which the subject of experience in the developing human becomes its object. Vygotsky offers a theoretical framework from which to ask questions 2 and 3 for this study. What teaching

strategies do teachers use to prepare students to read for personal meaning*?* What experiences and knowledge do students draw on in the construction and articulation of a personal response*?* Key elements of his theory are discussed further in the next section of this chapter, *Personal Meaning and Response.*

Kegan (1994) is important to highlight because he explores the social context of adolescence in relation to people's desires for a 'meaningful' life. Kegan is interested in how adults make claims on adolescent knowledge and have expectations not only of behaviour but also of '*how* we want them to know... [and]... the *way* we want them to make meaning of their experiences.' (1994, p. 19, his emphasis).

Kegan's approach is rooted in constructivist developmental psychology. His is an evolutionary theory which argues that epistemologies develop throughout life. Crucially, Kegan focuses not only on internal psychological pressures but also external social pressures that adolescents are placed under. He seeks to explore how these interact.

According to Kegan (1994), psychological growth is the unselfconscious development of complex principles that are used to organise experiences. Changes in the character of the subject and object characterise development. Subject refers to that which we work with – the principles behind our thought and experience, whereas object is that which we know outside of ourselves. Ways of knowing (personal epistemologies) depend on a shift between what is subject and what is object to the knower. This is because one cannot be both a subject and an object, and development is always embedded in the social environment (Illeris, 2008).
Social pressures include becoming educable citizens capable of identifying and sharing an inner life. Moreover, adolescents are expected to seek a culturally sanctioned, meaningful life, which, in our current society, involves getting an education and a job. In this way, we make claims not only on behaviour but 'on adolescent minds' (Kegan, 1994, p. 19)

In early childhood, children are prone to fantastical and impulsive actions because they do not have a durable sense of self. By primary school, children understand that people have separate minds and viewpoints, and this is because the self has become a durable category within the world. The child can think about the appearance of things and distinguish them from an underlying reality. In other words, the fantasies and frustrations of early childhood become the child's object of thought. In adolescence, people have, for the first time, the potential to think

about reality as an object of experience. If and when experience is organised in this way, people become capable of questioning *realities.* Self-interests can be subordinated to new relationships, and mutual reciprocity of thought becomes possible. People in this 'cross-categorical' way of thinking can internalise other's points of view and feelings and see the self as 'the author (rather than merely the theatre) of one's inner psychological life' (1994, p. 33). These stages of thinking are 'transformative, qualitative and incorporative' (1994, p. 33).

There are two key implications of Kegan's work for this study. The first relates to how students may construct personal meaning when reading poetry. The second is a wider point about the context of a college culture and how it may support adolescent learning.

Kegan makes a compelling argument that adolescents are beginning to think in fresh and complex ways. They are capable of thinking beyond the confines of the self. The objects of their thoughts can be concerned directly with points of view and 'thematic abstraction' (1994, p. 33). However, achievement of this way of thinking is a gradual process, and adolescents do not yet *fully* think in these ways. This means they can conflict with adult expectations of adolescent behaviour and emotional response. When this occurs, there is a challenge, which Kegan defines as a 'mismatch between external epistemological demand and internal epistemological capacity' (1994, p. 41).

In Kegan's terms, adolescents need support to think in 'cross-categorical' ways. A key implication of this is that further education must both challenge and support learning. Teachers and peers are important bridges to the emerging selfhoods of adolescence. Kegan argues that adolescents learn to think in 'cross-categorical' ways when they work in groups because this demands that they think of others as they pursue their own ends. Friendship groups enable a sense of self-continuity at this time of change, and teachers need to breed a culture of support and challenge which engages where students are as well as inviting them to step beyond immediate responses.

Kegan's insights chime well with the other theoretical positions being used in this study, for example, mediated learning, dialogic learning, and the overarching perspective of reader response theory. The concept of 'cross-categorical meaning making' also provides me with a tool for thinking about and reflecting on adolescent responses to poetry which are the centre of this study. It is my contention that adolescents are well-placed to enjoy the complex experience

that poetry can offer. I would suggest that poetry represents a particular challenge and possible bridge through which adolescents may deepen and develop their thinking.

2.5.4 Key Points

I have chosen to use the term 'adolescence' to describe the students in this research. I believe it is a multi-faceted and important concept that helps define and explore their response to reading poetry. This section has reviewed adolescence as a time of profound physical and mental change usually experienced in the second decade of life. Changes include bodily growth, sexual maturity and, most critically, for this study, neurological, cognitive, and emotional shifts.

I take the view that these changes, experienced at an individual level, are socially constructed and framed within the power relations of society at macro and micro levels. It is important to understand how adolescence is currently constructed as problematic, and development is intimately related to schooling. Social and ecological models such as those of Bronfenbrenner (1979), Coleman and Hendry (1999) are indicated as useful models for appreciating the complexity of growing up as an adolescent.

The overarching concept of 'formal operational thinking' originating in the work of Piaget (1983) is relevant for this study as it indicates that adolescents have the capacity for new types of thought and engagement with reading poetry. This concept aligns closely with Kegan's description of adolescents' potential to engage with 'cross-categorical thinking'. Adolescents are also active agents involved in identity work (Erikson, 1968), and it is my belief that responding personally to poems may contribute to adolescent development in these respects.
Finally, because this study is situated within further education classrooms, it is important to understand adolescence within this specific context. Kegan's work on adolescents' minds and their development within the demands of the education system is very helpful here as it addresses both formal operational thought as it develops in adolescence and the need for relevant support, including peer support, within the classroom. I return to these themes in my chapter *Analysis and Discussion.* I now turn to definitions of personal meaning and personal response.

2.6 Personal Meaning and Response

At the heart of my research is a concern to explore how adolescents express their experiences of 'personal meaning' as they respond to poems taught on the A level syllabus: do they have an aesthetic response to poems, and what is this experience like for them? To answer this, it is essential that the terms 'personal meaning, personal response and aesthetic response' are explored and working definitions are established.

As outlined in my methodology chapter, I take a Critical Realist stance toward my research. This states that there are independent realities in the world that are not immediately observable. However, epistemologically, knowledge about the social world can be derived from and constitutive of social processes. Essentially, I believe that language and discourse do not represent external reality; they are significant factors that constitute that reality. Both are 'artefact(s) of communal interchange' (Gergen 1985, p. 266), and I can only 'see meaning' through what is said and how it is said.

This section reviews different theories about how language works to explain how 'personal meaning and personal response' are conceptualised in my research. Particular attention is paid to the work of Vygotsky (1978, 1986), Bruner (1986, 1990) and Bourdieu (1993). I also discuss the role of dialogue and narrative in meaning.

These theoretical perspectives will be related to reader response. Finally, I consider how we can best understand what an aesthetic response is and conclude by conceptualising my understanding of personal meaning /response and aesthetic response for my research.

There is no consensus about the way that language functions, how it shapes thought, or indeed, what the relationship is between thought and language. From a socio-cultural perspective, whilst language and thought may have independent origins, they are inextricably associated with socialisation. It is not possible to discuss the 'personal responses' of adolescent students without discussing the classroom, the teacher, and wider social factors such as family and culture.

I now discuss the contribution of Vygotsky (1896–1934) and Bruner (1915–2016) to understanding making personal meaning and justify their perspective for use in my research. I

begin with a description of Vygotsky's understanding of the development of language, its origins, and functions, published in English (1978/1986).

2.6.1 Vygotsky: Language as a Cultural Tool

Behavioural perspectives, new as Vygotsky was writing in the 1920s, see language as a social signal, a verbal behaviour learnt from the outside world. However, descriptive behaviourism does not explore fully how and why children actively learn to ascribe meaning and use language (Herriot, 1970). For Vygotsky, intention and meaning required more explanation: 'The active search for words on the part of the child … indicates a new phase in his development' (1986, p. 62).

As a Marxist, Vygotsky sought to explain this proposed phase of child development not chiefly as a process of within child maturation, but as a process taking place within a dialectical and materialist framework (1978). Humans may be hardwired for a capacity to learn the complex signalling systems of a language, and this constitutes one side of their real material conditions of existence. Of equal importance, however, is the kind of language humans learn and the culture within which this language is active. There are, in short, social as well as biological conditions under which particular humans at particular times realise their capacity for utilising language.

Vygotsky likens language to a 'tool' (1978). This is significant as it implies from a Marxist perspective that language functions as part of the 'means of production': language works on the material and physical world in order to transform it. However, whereas the purpose of physical tools in the world is to master nature, language is not simply an external tool to master the world. It is also an internal, active shaper in 'the historically shaped and culturally transmitted psychology of human beings' (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 122).

Vygotsky follows Pierce's (1839–1914) insight that language is internal sign usage. The ability to use and interpret linguistic signs leads to increasingly sophisticated and internalised forms of speech and thought. This skill organises and unifies other mental processes such as perception, selection, and memory. 'The very essence of human memory consists in the fact that human beings actively remember with the help of signs' (1978, p. 51). Thus, the ability to use language is not separable from 'intelligence'; rather, 'the dialectical unity of these systems

in the human adult is the very essence of complex human behaviour' (1978, p. 24). The development of this unity is a complicated process. Vygotsky posits that thought and language are originally separable in the typically developing child. Before the age of approximately two, thought is a crude internal orientation devoted to images and sensations, such as hunger, and the development of the focusing mechanism of the eyes. Language has behavioural aspects, such as crying, which signals a need for physical attention to the dependent child. Gradually, these systems come together through the active acquisition of language. Critically, these systems do not unite and flourish spontaneously; they are acquired through social engagement with more capable 'others'.

> 'Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice, on two levels. First on the social and later the psychological level, first between people as an interpsychological category and then inside the child as an intrapsychological category' (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57).

Because language is a cultural tool, it is learnt through social engagement. From a Vygotskian perspective, the pedagogical dimensions of learning are explained through concepts related to the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), 'more knowledgeable others', and 'scaffolding'. These concepts are explored below (see p. 41).

It is pertinent to my research that Vygotsky (1978) distinguishes the thought processes of children and adolescents. He believed the thought processes of the latter are not merely additional, that is, more of the same kinds of thoughts that children have. On the contrary, as language use develops, it enables qualitatively different and new kinds of thoughts and intelligences. Deacon (1997) supports this assertion. 'If consciousness is inevitably representational, then it follows that a change in the nature of the way information gets represented inevitably constitutes a change in consciousness.' (1997, p. 449).

Vygotsky believed that a critical difference in consciousness is that by adolescence, increasingly sophisticated schemas of thought enable ideas to be abstracted from context. The adolescent's ideas move between and beyond concrete material circumstances, and this leads to a crucial shift in the role of memory. 'For the young child to think means to recall; but for the adolescent, to recall means to think' (1978, p. 51). Minds are, therefore, cultural and social

products (Gee, 1992), and adolescent minds are developing sophisticated and reflective consciousness.

In summary, Vygotsky's work claims that the internal private self is a socialised self. Language, perhaps our most personally inhabited skill, and the way in which we represent ourselves to ourselves and others, is an introjection of our social world. This makes his ideas very important for understanding the concept of a 'personal response'. The implication is that 'the personal' is not fully spontaneous and individual; it is also cultural and social and is enabled by our capacity for flexible language use.

Vygotsky's theory also dovetails well with neurological and psychological research cited in my earlier discussion about adolescence because he argues that adolescents are able to think in ways that are distinctive from children.

If learning is first and foremost a social experience, one implication for the present research is clear: the experience and knowledge that students draw on to articulate personal responses to poetry is culturally and socially located. Adolescent students bring their previous cultural experiences of family, locality and schooling to the classroom. Drawing on these and within the 'noise and exchange' of ideas in the classroom, students 'construct' and 'articulate' personal responses to poetry. There are important theoretical and pedagogical ramifications to this. Bruner explores some of these in *Actual Minds Possible Worlds* (1986).

2.6.2 Bruner: Language as Meaningful Narrative

Furthering Vygotsky's metaphor of language as a 'cultural tool', Bruner (1915–2016) argues that meanings are 'communal and consequential in terms of our relations to a cultural community' (1990, p. 29).

Learning to use a language is a matter of enculturation: the ability to express knowledge, intentions and desires in ways that are acceptable within particular cultural communities. Through this, one becomes a *maker of* culture. In this way, the self is both an agent of and shaped by our social structures.

Bruner distinguishes two modes of thought that enquire about and frame 'cultural realities' in different ways. One mode he labels the scientific/logical and positivist mode, the other the narrative mode. The former seeks to test ideas against the external world in order to falsify or prove the existence or non-existence of a 'thing'. 'There is a heartlessness to logic, one goes where one's premises and conclusions and observations take one' (1986, p. 13). The narrative mode of thought, however, is not concerned with 'proof' about 'things', it is concerned with human motivations, desires, and intentions. In this sense, the narrative mode does not make a claim to truth but to believability. It is concerned with the organisation of our experiences and perceptions of truth rather than 'truth' itself. It should be noted that Bruner does not claim that one mode is superior to the other, merely that they represent different aspects of thought and ways of knowing.

Making meaning with language, Bruner argues, is a complicated and slippery matter. When we look for meanings in dictionaries, there must be *a priori* knowledge attached to the search. The grammatical form (syntax) and intended use (pragmatics) of the word we are searching for are anticipated by us and connected to the meaning of the word we want in advance.

To summarise, Bruner asserts that scientific and narrative modes of thought produce different kinds of meaning because meaning 'requires a theory about sense and reference' (1986, p. 82). Scientific, logical meanings may require, for example, the verification of a numerical expression, whereas narrative meanings may be underscored through the power of simile or metaphor.

Bruner's work supports my understanding of meaning making as articulated by cultural theories of reader response, for example, Fish (1980). The distinction he makes between narrative and scientific modes seems to parallel Rosenblatt's definitions of aesthetic and efferent responses. I am interested in meaning making in the narrative mode as participants in my research construct their responses to poems through shared language generated in a social context. Adolescents respond to texts and teachers not by simply receiving and decoding but through interpretation and active construction of meaning. I now turn to aspects of interpersonal meaning. Firstly, I explore Vygotskian ideas about pedagogy and cognitive development.

2.6.3 Making Meaning Interpersonally: The Zone of Proximal Development; More Knowledgeable Others and Scaffolding

Making meaning within classrooms and reporting that meaning making within a research context (as students and teachers tell me about their experiences with poetry) are both types of *interpersonal* meaning making. When students offer feelings and ideas about poetry taught in A level classrooms, they are asserting their social and subjective beliefs in 'narrative mode'. (Bruner, 1986).

Bakhtin's concept of 'heteroglossia' (Holquist, 2001) refers to 'many voices' and is the idea that language is socially constructed according to who we are speaking or writing to and what our intention is. As Gee explains, 'different social languages we use allow us to render multiple *whos* (we are) and *whats* (we are doing) socially visible' (2008, p. 93). He argues there will be different and competing voices and discourses within a learning environment, although not all may be equally expressed, heard or valued.

The classroom provides a particular and unequal social context within which teachers and students make meaning with material on the syllabus, chiefly to pass exams. Three significant concepts derived from Vygotsky help to understand the dynamics of meaning making in the classroom. These are the ZPD, 'more knowledgeable others', and 'scaffolding.' What follows is a brief discussion of these concepts.

A key part of Vygotsky's theory of social cognition is his theory of the ZPD. He defines this as,

> 'the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more knowledgeable others' (1978, p. 86).

The ZPD is popularly and perhaps narrowly understood as a pedagogical tool relating to tasks in the classroom, but it is also a broad theoretical description of children's cognitive development (Chaiklin, 2003). I briefly indicate the distinction between these and discuss the implications for supporting meaningful learning.

In pedagogical terms, the ZPD has been interpreted as a description of the difference between what learners can do alone and what they can do with help (Wald and Harland, 2022). Any learner is capable of understanding more than they are able to achieve independently, and learning is a mediated process of support (Zaretskii, 2009). From this perspective, the ZPD can be seen as 'a way to describe instruction and assessment' (Puntambeker, 2022, p. 455). Underpinning the ZPD is a view of knowledge as provisional and subject to different levels of growth and assessment.

I have described Vygotsky's perspective earlier in this chapter, which is that language is socially internalised as a consequence of social engagement. The principle of internalisation of the social world is generalisable to all learning because, in Vygotsky's theory, learning is led by the active engagement of someone more capable in the subject or skill being studied. This is the concept of the 'more knowledgeable other' previously referred to in the section *Psychological Theories of Adolescence*. The 'more knowledgeable other' (MKO) in the classroom is often assumed to be a teacher who collaborates with and between learners to problem solve. This may be done in many ways, for example, by questioning or breaking a problem into smaller parts (Zaretskii,2009). However, the MKO has been conceptualised in a variety of ways, for example, as a negotiation between a learner and artefact (Abtahi, 2014). It has also been conceptualised as a collaboration between peers (Wald and Harland, 2022). Given the maturing cognitive facilities of adolescent students, peer collaboration, as well as teacher collaboration with students has been important to explore in my research.

The nature of the collaborative assistance that is offered in the ZPD is defined by the metaphor of 'scaffolding' (Wood, Bruner and Ross , 1976). This term was originally used to describe the kinds of affective management and design tasks teachers can use to support children in accomplishing tasks that they could not manage alone. In essence, development in any subject or skill is a 'transfer of responsibility' (Puntambeker, 2022, p. 455) from assisted achievement to independent achievement.

Scaffolding aims to withdraw support as the learner becomes more independent, competent, and able to abstract and apply what has been learnt to other tasks. When learners learn things that are problematic and are working with the upper end of their ZPD, they need to talk aloud in order to understand and internalise ideas (Dacey *et al.*, 2004). This point reinforces the importance of discussion for adolescents in classrooms, and in my research, I attend to how

talk assists them to make meaning with poems. Teachers are not the only architects of scaffolding, and it may be that within a further education classroom, adolescent students strongly scaffold their own learning.

Underpinning pedagogical practices, the ZPD is also a theoretical description of children's cognitive development, which explores how children think differently across different stages of childhood. For example, and as previously explored, adolescents are capable of more abstraction than younger children, who 'tend to be directed more by reactions to what they immediately perceive than by their wilful formation of an imagined possibility' (Chaiklin, 2003, p. 46). Development of thought is stimulated as children learn with others in different social and historical contexts. In short, children introject the cultural tools, values and practices of their family, communities, and wider society. In this respect, the ZPD points our attention to the importance of the structure of the environment within which children learn and the vital role culture plays in shaping our minds (Vygotsky, 1978/1986). However, learning is a delicate interaction between the child, their developmental stage, adult mediation, and cultural tools and activities (Chaiklin, 2003). In this respect, Vygotsky cautions that only when an environment is sufficiently demanding and intellectually stimulating will adolescent thinking qualitatively develop (Gredler, 2011).

Classrooms are institutional environments within which prescribed learning is decided in advance and arranged under the (partial but key) control of the teacher. This can make classrooms difficult places for students to take ownership of their learning and introduce what they know and learn from their families and communities (Moll and Greenberg,1990). In their research with Mexican families, students, and teachers, Moll and Greenberg researched how to harness the local community and their funds of knowledge to lead meaningful and engaged literacy lessons. Teachers and researchers collaborated to go beyond the classroom and engage with the lived experiences and funds of knowledge students have from their backgrounds. This engagement enabled students to become active learners whose literacy practices became more personally meaningful and increasingly skilled. Moll and Greenberg conclude that 'teachers and students (need) to develop their awareness of how they can use the everyday to understand classroom content and use classroom activities to understand social reality' (1990, p. 346).

Fundamentally, the work of Vygotsky draws my attention again to the importance of the cultural worlds that students inhabit: that of their home and peers and also that of the formal

setting of the classroom. These provide the source of the 'personal meanings' that they are able to make with poems. The concepts of the ZPD, MKO, and scaffolding are also significant for my research. My research explores ways in which teachers try to bridge spaces between what students already know and can do with poems and the demands of the A level syllabus. In addition to this, it also explores if, where, and how students scaffold their understanding of poems through different kinds of talk and discussion in the classroom.

I now turn to Bourdieu and the concept of 'cultural capital' as this clarifies further the kinds of tools that students may bring to meaning making.

2.7 Bourdieu: Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is a term captured by Bourdieu (1930–2002). His theory stemmed from widespread sociological concerns in the 1960s that free provision of education had not eliminated class, ethnic or gender differences in attainment (Goldthorpe, 2007). Cultural capital is a way of thinking about cultural resources and values that seeks to explain social inequalities and their reproduction, particularly through the education system (Goldthorpe, 2007). At its heart, cultural capital has to do with the extent to which individuals and groups are familiar with the dominant culture of a society (Attridge, 2021).

According to Bourdieu (1993), the dominance of the middle class is legitimated by claims of cultural superiority rather than birthright. From an English perspective, Gunn (2005) argues that cultural capital in England became significant as a way through which the rising middle classes could distinguish themselves from both the aristocracy and the working class from the mid-19th century onwards:

> 'Culture is a field of play (in which a dominant class) … search for distinction – distinction from the common folk who would not recognise what we, the enlightened ones, know to be truth inviolate.' (Beadle, 2020, pp. 67–68).

Human activity is oriented to exchange and social advantage across different social and economic 'fields', which may or may not be formally established (e.g., education/community groups). Fields are marked by different social spaces, overt/covert purposes, discourse, and language groups. 'Habitus' refers to the unconsciously acquired assumptions, feelings, mental habits, and presentations of self which we perform within fields. We do not do this as

autonomous individuals; rather, we develop 'distinctive, class, culture-based and engendered ways of seeing, being, occupying space and participating in history' (Carrington and Luke 1997, p. 101). These early learnt 'ways of being' affect how we relate to and benefit from the relative cultural capital offered within different 'fields'. Crucially, the education system 'reproduces the economic system in two distinct arenas: it recreates it in future generations, but it also recreates it in the present, in the educational institutions themselves' (Beadle, 2020, p. 97), and it does this through the means of economic, social, and cultural capital.

Bourdieu distinguishes between economic, social, and cultural capital as forms of investment. Economic capital refers to the acquisition of money, land and property, while social capital is about valuable social networks and connections. Both may be inherited or, to some extent, acquired (Huang, 2019). Cultural capital is about a wide range of preferences and competencies, particularly in relation to language (Reay, 2004), and it 'works rather like property: those with it can gain at the expense of those without' (Bennett *et al.*, 2009, p. 11).

Cultural capital concerns what groups of people have and know and can be understood as the symbolic way through which dominant classes seek to keep and pass on their privileges (Goldthorpe, 2007). It 'functions as a sort of advance' (both a head start and a credit) 'and it may be acquired … in the most unconscious and impalpable way' (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 70–71). Cultural capital is realised firstly in the family and has three dimensions: embodied, objectified, and institutionalised. Embodied cultural capital is about the presentation of self and internal knowledge within particular 'fields'. Dominant groups distinguish themselves from others through the way they dress and speak and their habits. Objectified cultural capital refers to material belongings (what one has) and institutionalised knowledge to symbols of authority such as qualifications and titles.

The education system is as much as way of passing on inheritance as property, providing a 'circuit of cultural reproduction' (Bennett *et al.*, 2009, p. 13). Despite meritocratic rhetoric, it is an exclusionary system. Middle-class children arrive at school with significant advantages over those from other backgrounds. Their parents, who have succeeded in an exclusionary competitive school system, are able to pass on habits and values that match those of the school. They shape their children's attitudes and behaviours so that they take advantage of institutionalised cultural capital, go to the 'best' schools, and get the highest qualifications. These, in turn, can lead to enhanced embodied skills and access to prestigious and important

social networks (Goldthorpe, 2007; Huang, 2019). In this way, the 'head start' and the 'credit' that Bourdieu recognises are generationally secured. The reverse is likely to be the case for working-class parents, where a lack of embodied skills and access to social networks may ensure continuing inequalities for their children.

The idea that poetry is a particularly valued and valuable form of cultural capital dates back to Matthew Arnold, who defined the traditional canon. He argued that classical, Elizabethan and some poetry from the Enlightenment has the power to help us understand, celebrate, and criticise life itself (Arnold, 1865). Behind this concern, as will be discussed, Arnold saw the acculturation of the rising middle classes as a bulwark against anarchy. He feared the enfranchisement of urban males (Reform Act, 1867) would disrupt the social order (Beadle, 2020).

Cultural capital, as defined by Bourdieu, is an important critical concept for my research as it helps me to conceptualise the ways that different types of knowledge and access to material goods can help or hinder students making meaning with poems in the classroom. The curriculum privileges both certain kinds of poems and knowledge about poems. In my research, I explore the kinds of cultural capital that teachers perceive students to have, as well as the kinds of cultural capital students discuss and can be seen to bring to the classroom. I also look at the tensions teachers experience trying to work with different kinds of unequally valued kinds of cultural capital.

Drawing on a variety of empirical research studies (e.g., Butler and Robson, 2003), Ball (2003) concluded that the marketisation of education exacerbates inequality as individual (parental) power increases the influence of cultural capital in schools. I would argue that the same point applies to the further education sector where, like schools, competition and marketing have become firmly established in the 21st century. These influences are discussed later in this literature review in the section *Poetry in Further Education.*

I now explore what an aesthetic response is and relate this to the concept of 'personal meaning'. Finally, I summarise this, part 1, of the literature review.

2.8 Aesthetic Response

The idea of an aesthetic experience is at the centre of my understanding of adolescent engagement with 'personal meaning and response.' Aesthetic response involves more than an enculturated judgement; it is also a felt response,

> 'in aesthetic appreciation a personal response is at a premium insofar as, without it, the anything but ordinary appearance of the aesthetic object will fail to materialise however much we may posit its presence at an intellectual level' (McAdoo, 1986, p. 6)

In this section, I outline some historical definitions and explore some debates about the value and meaning of an aesthetic experience. I briefly discuss accounts of aesthetic pleasure and relate this to my own research and the theoretical approach I am using of reader response.

2.8.1 Defining the 'Aesthetic'

The word 'aesthetic' derives from the Greek and refers to sensation, perception, and beauty (Abbs, 1989). Eagleton (2007) contrasts the terms anaesthetic and aesthetic to make clear that an aesthetic experience refers to a conscious and heightened lived experience of some kind. What makes an experience 'aesthetic' is contested. One understanding is that the aesthetic is an 'aspect of things … such as beauty or grace or dynamism' (Levinson, 2005, p. 3). In this case, it is taken to be the property of an object. However, the term aesthetic can be applied not only to an ascribed feature of an object, for example, a poem or a painting, but also to activities, such as the making of art and to a type of perception that, in turn, enables an aesthetic response. In this respect, aesthetic experience can be understood as a kind of human interaction with the material world (Dewey, 1934).

Longstanding philosophical debates surround the question of whether the essential quality of aesthetic experience lies within the object or exists as an encounter between human consciousness and something in the world. In addition, whether an aesthetic experience is valuable or not is debated (Levinson, 2003). These debates are now briefly reviewed.

2.8.2 Philosophical Debates About Aesthetic Experience

In *The Republic*, Plato argued that aesthetic experience is inherently dangerous since it distracts people from rational thought and contemplation of the purity of life beyond the physical world. He especially singles out poetry for criticism, seeing it as a 'species of mental poison and the enemy of the truth' (Havelock, 1963, p. 4). Plato's position contrasted strongly with that of his pupil, Aristotle, who took a pragmatic attitude to aesthetic experience. He stated that the ability to experience feelings of loss, joy and so forth through the medium of drama (and dramatic poetry), which is at one remove from our 'real' lives, is a cathartic experience which allows us to contain and process potentially difficult emotions. Unlike Plato, Aristotle believed the arts could be morally improving (Popkin and Stroll, 1975), and it might be argued that the fault lines of this disagreement prefigure later debates about the value and role of aesthetic experiences in human lives.

The study of 'the aesthetic' and aesthetic experiences developed as a particular field of philosophical enquiry during the 18th century. 'The crucial new departure lies in the way aesthetics is connected to the emergence of subjectivity as the central issue in modern philosophy' (Bowie, 2003, p. 2). From this perspective, our current understanding of what constitutes 'art' is best understood as a historical construction of the European Enlightenment (Iseminger, 2004). The Enlightenment deposed God as the centre of the universe. It replaced deity with human reason as both the source of knowledge and the legitimate test of that knowledge (Bristow, 2023).

Consequently, a philosophical gap opened between different conceptions of knowledge. 'Science' (objective, verifiable, and replicable knowledge) was separated from 'art' (subjective, experiential, and particular knowledge). This separation has had important ramifications for the construction of truth and knowledge. Eagleton argues that 'truth in the age of the Enlightenment (became) non-oral, non-dialogical, non-poetic, non-contextual and non-affective' (2007, p. 11). Thus, the purposes of artistic creativity could be newly questioned. It became possible to ask about the purpose and place of art and creativity in post-Enlightenment lives: is there a different kind of 'truth' about the world experienced in the making or appreciation of those things we call 'art' as opposed to those things we call 'science'?

An extreme realist position would claim that an aesthetic experience is only possible because of the inherently aesthetic properties of an object, whether found in nature or art (Zangwill, 2003). We must be very sceptical about this proposition. It seems unsustainable to argue that a poem, for example, brings joy because it independently owns reducible and particular language properties of sound or effect: enjoyment involves imaginative perception within a cultural context (Winters, 1998). Equally, an extreme, non-realist position risks excessive subjectivism. It would be impossible to make sense of a range of responses people offer to the same poem or painting if the aesthetic experience is solely 'in the eye of the beholder'.

One response to this dilemma is to argue that there is a distinctive quality to aesthetic experience. Emmanuel Kant (1724–1804) stated that aesthetic experience is unlike other sensory pleasures such as eating because it has a distinctive characteristic – that of 'disinterested' pleasure. In essence, this means 'our pleasure in a thing is not based on an awareness of a thing's relationship to our desires purposes or needs' (Zangwill, 2003, p. 75).

This quality of disinterested engagement is vital to the aesthetic experience. It is the opposite of what, in Marxist terms, is the experience of 'alienation'. Alienation is the separation of thought, feeling and object through the process of capitalist commodification and the establishment of exchange rather than the use value of objects (Marx, 1845). In art, there is 'the idea of the object which cannot be represented by anything else: the work of art' (Bowie, 2003, p. 4). This does not make human-made objects defined as 'art' immune from the world of exchange and commerce, but it does suggest that they are also capable of prompting strongly felt and 'disinterested' experiences, which appear as 'felt truth' to those engaging with them.

The idea that what we call art can engage us 'disinterestedly' is an important one as it speaks to the capacity of art to move us beyond our daily lives. I believe it matches well with Keats' concept of 'negative capability' which refers to the capacity of both artist and reader to tolerate uncertainty and eschew dogma in search of transcendent experiences (Ulmer, 2019)

Schopenhauer (1788–1860) defined the aesthetic experience as a function of evolution. Humans are at the mercy of our will to survive, constantly striving and never fully satisfied. This is a 'doctrine of pessimism' (Wicks, 2024), but one way in which this state of being can be temporarily relieved is through aesthetic engagement with the world. Aesthetic engagement involves 'intuitive cognition', a kind of perception of the world which is pre-conceptual. It is

felt rather than stated. It points toward something greater than ourselves and takes us out of our daily striving. Schopenhauer describes aesthetic experience as the 'will-less pleasure of tranquillity' (Wicks, 2024). We are fully engaged with 'what is' rather than why or how something is. Seen from this perspective, aesthetic experience is easier to characterise than it is to define. (Urhmacher, 2009). It is relevant then, at this point, to turn to the characteristics of an aesthetic experience and discuss how it has been described.

2.8.3 Defining Aesthetic Response

Marcovic distinguishes between aesthetic *preference*, which is bound up with judgement and active positioning in the social world and aesthetic *experience*, which is an 'exceptional state of mind' (Marcovic 2012, p. 1). Similarly, Dewey (1934) argued that a sense of completeness characterises aesthetic feelings. People experience an intensity of feeling and a heightened sense of being in the world, being fully conscious and engaged in the moment. Kearns (2015) sees aesthetic experience as an aspect of 'wonder' as well as cognition: when we experience something aesthetically, we are in awe of both the object and 'the harmony of our faculties' (2015, p. 108). These definitions match well with Rosa's (2019) concept of 'resonance' which is the experience of attunement with the world. 'Resonance' is further discussed in the section *Recent Developments in Reader Response* in part two of this chapter. The essential idea in relation to poetry is that resonance is a concept that captures the bodily sensation of the sound of language as well as the emotional/ cognitive sense-making of the words (Dimock, 1997). Sound and resonance give poetry an important aesthetic dimension.

Goodman (1976) cautions against seeing the excitation of emotions as a *primary function* of art. This is because emotions do not directly correlate to works of art, and he prefers the concept of 'satisfaction', which is akin to Dewey's notion of 'completeness', to describe an aesthetic experience.

2.8.4 Understanding 'The Aesthetic' Within a Reader Response Framework

Reader response theory is allied to the concept of aesthetic experience as a cultural or phenomenological aspect of human experience. There are different schools of thought within the umbrella term of reader response but all try to describe the aesthetic in terms of what it is

like to undergo such an experience, in contrast to epistemic definitions focusing on the structures of knowledge (Zangwill, 2003).

The authors and the context of reader response theories have been explored in relation to reading and poetry earlier in this chapter. I shall now introduce Rosenblatt's ideas about understanding 'aesthetic response.' It will be recalled that Rosenblatt took a transactional approach to reading, being interested in the space where text and reader vantage points meet. What follows is a more detailed exposition of her ideas in relation to the aesthetic because Rosenblatt's ideas are an important conceptual model for my research.

Rosenblatt (1994) draws on William James' (1890–1950) notion of 'selective attention' to posit that our focus is always selective: reading is a choosing activity. Selective attention depends on taking what Rosenblatt calls a 'stance' which is a type of focus a reader may or may not be aware of taking . A stance is a position along a continuum of awareness. Rosenblatt discusses readers' stances as being predominantly, rather than exclusively, of one type or another. A stance takes place between two poles, which frame a continuum. The poles at either end Rosenblatt labels 'efferent' or 'aesthetic'. In line with post-enlightenment thinking (discussed above), Rosenblatt states that the efferent and the aesthetic reflect 'the two main ways of looking at the world, often summed up as 'scientific' and 'artistic' (1985, p. 12).

Efferent, from the Latin 'effere', means to take away. When we read in a predominantly efferent mode, we are reading to find something out. Our selective attention in this mode can apply to many things, for example, knowing the date of a battle or the formula on which a medicine depends. This is not to be confused with instrumental reading, which implies immediate application of some sort, although there may be elements of instrumentality in efferent reading.

An aesthetic stance is different because when we read aesthetically, we experience the act of reading in itself. It is important to note that emotion is not a defining characteristic of aesthetic engagement. Efferent reading can also be prompted by or result in strong emotional effects. Rather, an aesthetic reading experience evokes 'a certain kind of reality' (Rosenblatt 2005, p. 96). It arouses cognitive skills such as attention, choice and anticipation alongside emotional responses. Unlike efferent reading, aesthetic reading involves the reader widening attention to 'a fuller arc of his (sic) response' (Rosenblatt 1994, p. 43). Aesthetic reading focuses inwardly

on the effect of the reading as it occurs. There is a 'live circuit' (1994, p. 44) in the process of aesthetic reading whereby the reader responds to and brings their understanding to bear on the features of the text as they read. There is an engagement with all elements of the text, which leads to a kind of 'gestalt' experience: 'he lives through the experienced meaning that is for him the poem' (1994, p. 44). Benton and Fox (1985) describe the act of reading in an aesthetic way as entering a 'secondary world' which lies 'in an area of play activity between the reader's inner reality and the outer reality of words on the page.' (1985, p. 5).

When we read aesthetically, we are 'immersed in a creative process that goes on largely below the threshold of awareness' (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 52). The inference is that both the conscious and the unconscious mind are active. The reader has the potential for a 'full lived-through fusion with the text' (1994, p. 47). To be engaged in aesthetic reading is not a vicarious or virtual experience; it is itself 'a unique mode of experiencing' (1994, p. 68). As Iser describes it, the author and reader 'share the game of the imagination … [and] … reader's enjoyment begins when he himself becomes productive' (1978, p. 108). One way in which literary texts effect this is through the 'indeterminate places' (1978, p. 174) or gaps in the text. For example, a poem may include an incomplete image, rhythm, or piece of dialogue which the reader is called to make sense of. It is in these spaces that imagination thrives, and personal and aesthetic response becomes possible. Readers make meaning of texts as they respond to the experience of reading.

'Reading has the same structure as experience to the extent that our entanglement has the effect of pushing our various criteria of orientation back into the past, thus suspending their validity for the new present' (Iser, 1978, p. 132).

2.9 Conclusion to Part 1: Key Concepts

The first part of this chapter reviewed key concepts in relation to my study, namely, poetry, reading, adolescence and aesthetic response. I discussed each of these areas and established perspectives and working definitions for my research.

The concept of aesthetic response clarifies a particular essence of 'personal meaning' for my research. I take the position that aesthetic responses to poetry are personal responses to the

extent that readers bring idiosyncratic and individually felt connections to poetry studied at A level.

It would seem from the above discussion that personal aesthetic responses present as intensely moving, sometimes quite brief moments of personal transcendence. In this sense, an aesthetic experience is almost impossible to describe because once language is involved, we are making judgements about, for example, words, audience, and meanings which can never quite capture the richness of our immediate feelings (Marcovic, 2012). Notwithstanding this, I believe it is possible to research personal responses to poems, including aesthetic responses, because essentially all language is contingent and an imperfectly representational system of our socialised minds.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, I take a Vygotskian position that human consciousness is anchored in our material circumstances and 'mediated by culturally constructed, labile systems of sign, of which language is exemplary' (Potgieter, 2017, p. 73). As a materialist and social constructivist, I dismiss the idea that an aesthetic response is an unfiltered/pure engagement with an object. It is essentially an idiosyncratic and culturally informed response.

I have further argued that adolescence is a developmentally important time of life which potentially enables students to experience fresh and heightened responses to poems. However, individual and collective experiences in the classroom will shape and mediate this capacity. Teachers and peers are essential to the development of personal aesthetic response. It is to this context and the influence of the curriculum, college, classroom, and previous research that I turn in part 2.

Part 2: Contextualising Poetry in the Current Research

In this part of my literature review, I review the position of poetry in the curriculum, historically and in the present, paying attention to how the concept of 'personal response' is currently situated (research question 1). I then scope out the context of further education to establish that my research explores poetry in a distinctive, but understudied area of education. I discuss strategies for teaching poetry and address the impact of assessment and exams on different types of reading in the college classroom. Finally, I explore relevant and recent research and clarify where there are gaps in the literature which my research aims to fill.

2.10 Poetry in the Curriculum

This section locates in overview, the historical and contemporary position of poetry in the English curriculum. To approach this, I first define the concept of 'curriculum.' Following this, I offer an overview of the development of English literature in the English curriculum, tracing chronologically the development of English state education in the 19th century. Some key debates and policies around the development of English in the curriculum are reviewed. Differing ideologies about the purposes of English as a subject and the role of poetry within this are discussed.

Finally, the contemporary position of poetry in the current A/S and A2 English curricula are introduced. This includes references to the place of 'personal meaning' in the curriculum, as this is integral to the research.

This section addresses the development of English within English schools – as opposed to the UK. This is appropriate because of the wide variation in provision in different areas of the country. This is also cognisant with the research project, which is based in London, England.

2.10.1 Curriculum as Product, Content, and Process

From an educational training perspective, Armitage (2007) summarises possible models for understanding the concept of curriculum. These are useful because they allow me to identify aspects of the curriculum that teachers and students negotiate in the classroom as they make meaning with poetry. These can sometimes be in tension with each other.

The product model is about what a course of study equips students to do. It is associated with Tyler (1971), and Armitage characterises this as 'the dominant model of twentieth century thought about curriculum design' (Armitage, 2007, p. 186). It may also be seen to be the dominant model of the early 21st century. In essence, this model focuses on the behavioural outcomes of learning. The worth of any curriculum is validated through the explicit performances of students. The idea underpinning this is that the curriculum is instrumental in leading to an outcome – the exam pass. This curriculum model is widely assumed and enforced through Ofsted, which, at the time of writing (2019), has embedded notions of learning outcomes and assessment within curriculum design, delivery, and impact (Ofsted, 2019). This

model is something in which all students and teachers are deeply invested, and whilst it may make standardised comparisons between institutions easier, it also may imply receptive passivity amongst learners (Biddulph, 2014).

By contrast, a content model of learning focuses on what is included within prescribed areas of knowledge and in this sense, the content model shapes the product model. From this perspective, curricula are best understood as distinct types of delineated discourse and varieties of claims to truth (Hirst, 2010). This model is related to a classical humanist ideology, which sees the curriculum as responsible for the 'transmission of wisdom' (Armitage 2007, p. 187). In the case of English literature, 'wisdom' refers to a canon of 'literary texts' that have been established as important and relevant to society. Texts that belong in this canon, such as the plays of Shakespeare and the poems of Chaucer, appear across different exam boards and syllabuses at A/S and A levels. It may be argued that a classical humanist ideology pervades current policy in England from the Department for Education to exam boards.

In 2011, the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, directed English literature exam specifications to include 'authors from the more traditional canon' (Atherton, Green and Snapper, 2013, p. 117). Gove seems to belong within Ball's (2003) 'Cultural Restorationist' tradition. At odds with Bourdieu's conception of cultural capital (previously discussed), Gove's definition encompasses only texts from a long-established national heritage. It is no accident that Ofsted, under Gove's supervision, invoked Matthew Arnold when it described 'cultural capital' as 'the best that has been thought and said'. In this regard, Beadle argues that Ofsted is 'presenting the ruling class culture entirely uncritically as being superior to any other version of culture' (2020, p. 12). Privileging established 'superior' texts, on 9 April 2014, Gove issued a written statement to ensure that all exam boards at AS and A2 include pre-1900 texts and that a minimum of one text should be Shakespeare (DFE, 2014). 'What Gove has done … (is to claim that) … knowledge is intrinsically valuable, and that some forms of knowledge, some contents, as it were, are intrinsically more valuable than others' (Yandell, 2014, p. 149).

In contrast to product and content models, which emphasise the curriculum as *what* is to be learnt, a process model focuses on learning as an activity. Armitage (2007) cites Stenhouse (1975) as the originator of this model. Two kinds of processes can be discerned. Firstly, there are individual processes of learning that are allied to constructivist accounts, such as those of Bruner (1915–2016) and Piaget (1896–1980). From this perspective, the curriculum must first

be driven by how people are able to understand and make sense of the world through age-related cognitive skills. In this respect, teachers are important because they have the responsibility to understand and relate the concepts and principles of their subject to the capacity of the learner. Secondly, situational models look at how the context of the wider political forces, the college as an institution, classroom resources and so forth, 'become a key determinant of its [the curriculums] eventual shape' (Armitage, 2007, p. 189).

Different models of curriculum illuminate different aspects of students' learning experiences. Process models are particularly relevant for my research. This is because they link to the social constructivist focus of my work and centre the experience of the curriculum on the classroom to suggest that students and teachers constitute a learning community. Within the learning community of the classroom, knowledge is not only reproduced it is reconstituted. This means that whilst the content and product of the curriculum may be prescribed, what students bring to the class and the pedagogical choices of the teacher (e.g., discussions, debates, and instruction) matter. Mercer argues that to understand how this communicative process dimension works in the classroom the idea of 'control' is more useful than that of 'power'. Within the classroom power is often contested, both through speech and silence, and 'we should not assume that powerful people necessarily control the ways in which knowledge is shared and considered' (Mercer, 2000, p. 95). This might particularly apply in further education classrooms where emergent adult identities of students may seek to test the boundaries of behaviour and knowledge acceptable to the teacher.

2.10.2 Key Points and Implications for My Research

The concept of curriculum is a contested one involving layers of definition, power, and influence. All three definitions offered above illuminate different aspects of my research.

The product model directs us to the official content of the A/S and A2 English Literature exams, as they were revised in 2015. It reminds us that teachers and students are constrained to a large extent by the prescription of the exam and that this final assessment may pressure both parties to approach teaching and learning poetry in particular and narrow ways.

Intrinsic to the content model is the assumption that certain types of text are of more value than others. In common with exam assessment, government has a strong influence. Since 2010, the

Office of Qualifications and Exams Regulation has defined the broad content aims and objectives of A/S and A qualifications in England. At a level below this exam boards delineate content about the prescribed course of study through issuing syllabuses. These, in turn, are chosen by colleges at departmental level in relation to the perceived strengths and aims of the college. It can be seen, therefore, that the content and the context of A/S and A level English Literature courses are related.

The process model of curriculum relates directly to question 4 of my research: *How is the process of constructing and articulating personal responses to poems reconciled with the need to pass exams?* Teachers and students actively construct the curriculum each time they engage with content. As Yandell asserts, 'Even in unfavourable circumstances, pupils are engaged together in complex acts of meaning making … [and as this happens] … What gets transformed is both the learners and knowledge itself' (2014, 152). Common practices and understandings of texts will emerge through the shared readings, discussions and responses of teachers and students. The curriculum is therefore in some senses an active and organic social construction. I return to this theme later in the section *The Further Education Classroom as a Site of Learning.*

I would argue that the product and content aspects of the curriculum limit the process model. A key limitation is the exam structure. Teachers, students, and college departments are all invested in this product aspect of the curriculum. How the product, content, and process dimensions of the curriculum are negotiated is explored through my empirical research.

Ball (1985) has said that the history of English as a subject is fraught with division and discussion about the content and purpose of the curriculum and the practice of that curriculum. With this in mind, the following section explores the historical roots of English literature and poetry, specifically in English state education.

2.10.3 Historical Overview of Poetry in the Curriculum

The English education system in the mid-19th century can be characterised as based on social class and muddled (Lawson and Silver, 2007). Thompson (1963) discusses how the early 19th-century Methodist movement supported the spread of literacy but not all types of reading. This meant that whilst preachers supported mass printing, 'poetry was suspect, and philosophy,

biblical criticism, or political theory was taboo' (1963, p. 811). This charge of poetry as 'suspect' has cultural roots reaching back to the classical world of Plato. It also has resonance today. It might be summed up as seeing poetry as an unreliable, not-to-be-trusted form of literature, its appeal romanticised and rendered potentially powerful in a negative way. I now begin with the contribution of Matthew Arnold (1822–1888), as he is a key figure in the development of English literature as a subject area.

2.10.3.1 Matthew Arnold

By the 1860s, English Literature was emerging as an alternative subject to the study of Latin and Greek. The latter enabled the sons of the upper classes to complete entrance exams to the universities; English was fit for the sons of the expanding middle classes. (Lawson and Silver, 2007).

In *Essays on a Liberal Education* (1867), Arnold brought together a collection of scholars and teachers to discuss and define curricula, pedagogy, and the purposes of education. Arnold argued for a national system of education, teacher training and a broad curriculum. He reserved a special place for literature as this was seen to have a moralising effect on the manners of those engaged in the field of sciences (Curtis and Boultwood, 1960). He believed in the redemptive power of certain types of literature to reconcile the failings within and between social classes. He expounded his view in essays and lectures, amongst them 'Literature and Dogma' (1873). In this, he discussed the loss of religious certainties and the rise of science leading people to question what grounds there are for establishing 'truth'. Arnold declared 'the old traditional scheme of the bible is gone … the so-called educated classes (do not) yet have anything to put in its place'. He recommended the 'remedy of culture' (xiv, 1873) as this would promote generosity of spirit and eternal truths. He seems here to be proposing a plural inner life in place of a religiously public outer life: the experience of personal meanings may constitute a kind of panacea to modern life. Furthermore, an internal life informed by the 'right kind' of literature may have a socially protective effect, as it could stem the rise of anarchy and breakdown of social order.

Arnold's position is paradoxical, being both inclusive and elitist. Culture, in principle, is open to all, but what constitutes 'culture' is familiarity with a particular canon.

> ‘Arnold doesn’t see any problems in deciding upon what should be included and what should be excluded from such a canon… [and]… the combined effect of familiarity with the books of the canon and the open-minded free play of thought is proposed as the formula for a renewed social harmony and unity’ (Goulimari, 2015, p. 112)

In this way, Arnold helped to establish an idea of literary culture that is free from conflict and the ‘multiplicity of modernity’ (Goulimari, 2015, p. 112). From a Marxist perspective Eagleton (2005) believes that Arnold is significant for propagating an enduring ideology about the role of English literature. This ideology of moral improvement positioned English literature as a site of liberal humanism and hegemonic consensus about national identity.’Like religion, literature works primarily by emotion and experience, so was admirably well fitted to carry through the ideological task… [of defining national identity] where religion left off’ (2005, p. 22). The middle class substituted their role of clergy to become teachers: ‘natural educators and initiators’ (2005, p. 21) of culture for the working class. The view that ‘English literature’ constitutes a cultural heritage and the value of English as an improving socially sensitising subject comes from this origin (Goodwyn, 2021).

2.10.3.2 From the 1902 Balfour Education Act to the Newbolt Committee

At the turn of the 20th century, the state of English in the curriculum might be described as literacy for the working class and literature for the middle classes. The Forster Education Act of 1870 secured primary education as a right, but the only route to secondary education for working-class children was through scholarship, and in 1900, just 5,500 were nationally available (Hendrick, 1997).

The 1902 Education Act established 381 local education authorities, and with this began a regulated national system of education (Lawson and Silver, 2007). Secondary education was established as grant-aided and fee-paying but without mandatory attendance. Thus, the divide between the experiences of working- and middle-class children remained. This may have been a direct reflection of the architect of the 1902 Act, Balfour, whose ‘strong sense of social hierarchy’ led him to doubt the abilities of the masses to benefit from secondary education (Lawson and Silver, 2007, p. 366).

The Board of Education (1904) privileged English literature and language in the curriculum, and for the first time, minimum times were set up for studying the subject. Learning poetry at this time consisted largely of whole class recitation. Martin (2012) has noted how the mental drill of recitation paralleled physical drills in the Edwardian classroom. Both forms of drilling were prominent on Empire Day when poems from the Oxford Book of English Verse were recited alongside hymns. Poems were often unashamedly patriotic, exalting boys to arms through firm use of meter and rhyme. In this, we can see the twin themes of poetry being used to support national identity and the development of a canon of acceptable poetry.

By the 20th century, English Literature was established as a university subject, and a route into the subject was established from schools. The extent to which English was accepted as a secondary subject at this time is evidenced by the Board of Education Circular (1910/735). In the tradition of Arnold, the circular established a canon of Romantic poetry, which was felt to be 'character forming' (Davison, 2009). In 1917, the importance of English in the curriculum was consolidated by the introduction of School Leaving Certificates. These required candidates to pass five or more subjects in three obligatory groups, of which English was one (Lawson and Silver, 2007).

2.10.3.3 Newbolt Committee (1921) on 'The Teaching of English in England'

Immediately following World War I, Sir Henry Newbolt undertook the first major review of English as taught at national level across all age ranges. The report referred explicitly to 'the requirements of a liberal education' and invoked Matthew Arnold's claim that 'Culture unites classes' (Newbolt 1921, p. 4). In the traumatic aftermath of the war, Newbolt emphasised the role of English in developing a 'humane culture' and promoting national unity (Ball, Kenny and Gardner, 1990). By this time, the position of poetry had moved from being an object of cultural suspicion to acceptance as a legitimate component of an established curriculum subject.

The Newbolt Committee declared that 'every teacher is a teacher of English' (1921, p. 63). It saw the teaching of English at the centre of a national education system and hoped that better access to English language teaching would 'bridge the social chasms that divide us' (1921, p. 6) and provide a ladder of social mobility. According to Gardner, in an era where there was no national curriculum, Newbolt encouraged teachers to 'seize professional responsibility'

(Gardner, in Aldrich 2002, p. 127) for teaching and learning. It can therefore be assumed that that what constituted content and engagement with the English curriculum widely varied. This is in strong contrast with the development of the subject of English Literature in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, where content and pedagogy are centrally controlled and advised.

The Newbolt report commented explicitly on pedagogical tensions in the teaching of poetry. These comments are worth quoting in full:

> 'It has been the custom in the past to attempt the teaching of the Classics from two points of view simultaneously. The student has been required during one and the same lesson to treat the work of a classical author from the point of view of science and of art; in a passage of the *Aeneid*, for example, to study simultaneously the structure and idiom of the Latin language and the personal expression of Virgil's mind in his poetry. This made the task a severe and distracting one for both teacher and pupil; success was only achieved in a small minority of cases.'

Recommendations are made:

> 'we are strongly of opinion that in dealing with literature the voyage of the mind should be broken as little as possible by the examination of obstacles and the analysis of the element on which the explorer is floating. This last is a purely scientific study and can be to a great extent separated from the study of the literary art, as the chemical analysis of water can be separated from the observation of the sounds and colours conveyed by it.' (Newbolt, 1921, pp. 10–11)

The emphasis here is on English literature as a holistic personal experience. Literature is described in sensory and physical terms associated with 'sounds and colours'. These are explicitly contrasted with a notion of 'scientific study'. This suggests several things: a strong distinction between the arts and sciences, the importance of aesthetic experience and the value of personal meaning. This contrasts strongly with later reports and policies – see below.

Goulimari sees Newbolt as representing a cultural shift. She notes that 'The Newbolt Report firmly moves Classics aside for English Literature' (2015, p. 212). Moreover, it is concerned not only with the preservation of literature for the middle classes but the extension of it: 'The

Professor of Literature in a University should be … a missionary … he has obligations not merely to the students … but still more toward the teeming population outside the university walls' (1921, p. 259). In one sense, therefore, English literature as a subject is seen to have democratic force – it is there potentially for everyone. In another sense, the legacy of Matthew Arnold is clear. The value of English literature lies in the development of national character and the experience of personal feeling and response is allied to this. It is also, as Henshall comments, 'grounded … in the discourse of individuality' (2001, p. 69).

2.10.3.4 Interwar Years: The Rise of Close Reading and Leavis as the Inheritor of Matthew Arnold

In the interwar years, poetry in the curriculum moved from being concerned with recitation and national character to becoming the object of detailed reading and the 'cultivation of taste' (Peel, 2000, p. 88). The practice of 'close reading' is associated with the University of Cambridge and, in particular, the work of Leavis (1895–1978). The origins of close reading are allied to the work of I.A. Richards and *Practical Criticism* (1929). Morris remarks that Richards' 'experimental focus on 'the words on the page' and interest in how readers fill hermeneutic gaps [sowed] the seeds of American New Criticism and Reader Response' (2006, p. 166), so there may be in this period some antecedent of the work of Rosenblatt. However, Leavis's approach to reading was more rigid than this. It demanded that the reader pay critical attention to the complexity of individual works – the structure and form of the text on the page. Broader considerations of historical context or author intention were seen as superfluous. Close reading is, in effect, an analytic focus on words as they work rather than the broader aesthetic experiences of reading. However, in contrast to American New Criticism, Leavis's position on reading also emphasised the cultural value of a body of literary works (Morris, 2006).

In *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture* (1930), Leavis outlined his views on the rise of mass production and consumption, allying this with a cultural decline. He saw the role of literature as a bulwark against the commodification of life, reflecting 'his opposition to an industrial order which was governed, so he felt, by abstraction and utility' (Eagleton 2007, p. 9). In this respect, Leavis appears as a descendant of Arnold, arguing for the 'moral goodness' of English literature in the increasingly fractured world of the 1930s.

Leavis believed only a minority of the population are capable of fully appreciating art and literature. However, 'a small minority, though a larger one … (than the discerning elite) … are capable of endorsing such first-hand judgement by genuine personal response' (1930, p. 12). Personal response seems here to be understood as a sort of secondary 'hand clapping' show of appreciation. It has no integrity of its own but is confirmation of belonging to a social stratum below an elite who are capable of appreciating and defining what is, or is not, truly art.

The impact of close reading practices on the study of poetry in the university sector was profound. The growth of formal literary criticism turned poems into objects of study in and of themselves. During the 1930s, English as a subject reached its height as a humanistic antidote to Fascism and Stalinism. The supposition was that 'the good individual was the good citizen … and people were to become good individuals through… English' (Peel, 2000, p. 91). Morris (2006) attributes the persistence of close reading practices into the mid-20th century to its seeming 'scientific rigour', which made it suitable for developing institutionalised exams for large evening classes post-World War II.

2.10.3.5 Post-1944: Challenges to the Curriculum

The Butler Act (1944) established secondary education for all, stratifying the system into a tri-partite shape. When technical schools were not fully realised, grammar and secondary modern schools became the norm. Children were assessed at age 11 to decide which they should attend. Grammar schools offered a route into higher education and secondary modern schools into vocational training and work by the age of 15 (Gillard, 2011).
It was in this context that A level English was devised 'to provide a means of selecting and assessing the small percentage of the school population ready and willing to proceed to a university education' (Barnes, 2001, p. 155). The curriculum was essentially concerned with a literary canon in preparation for study at university (Barnes, 2004, p. 39).

Whilst the curriculum *as content* may at this time have been conservatively devised, there were challenges to pedagogy: curriculum *as practice*. One important professional body in this respect is LATE (London Association of Teachers of English), founded in 1947. Gibbons (2008) has explored the work of LATE, arguing that from its inception, it constituted a critical 'community of practice' concerned with 'placing the child's experience at the centre of education' (2008, p. 120). Aims were established in the LATE manifesto *The Aims of English*

Teaching (1956). This promoted the value of the children's language and the importance of discussion and debate in the classroom. Included are specific mentions of poetry with a 'stress on the importance of reading poetry aloud and … clear warnings about the study of poetry being dominated by poetical devices or biographical detail' (Gibbons, 2013, p. 143). The indication here seems to be that poetry should not be only about technical skills or the appreciation of a literary canon. Rather, poetry should be heard aloud and responded to by children making sense of it through their own linguistic and cultural practices. In this way, 'personal responses' were encouraged as a central development of literacy, in clear contrast with close, analytical reading.

Influential figures in this movement were Harold Rosen (1919–2008) and James Britton (1908–1994). Ball, Kenny, and Gardner (1990) characterise this group as an 'English Language lobby … (which) … sought to shift the canonical tradition from the centre of the English stage and replace it with the pupil, the learner' (1990,58). Their approach 'elevated the importance of personal expression and creative uses of language seen as the capacity of all human beings' (Goodwyn, 2021, p. 229). This, in turn, raised questions about what a language and literature curriculum might mean in practice for children and teachers. It also established an enduring affiliation amongst teachers for this 'personal growth' model of English (Goodwyn, 2016). In my research, I explore whether and how teachers share this model.

2.10.3.6 English Literature in the Curriculum, Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries

From the 1970s onwards, politicians of all political hues became concerned with questions about standards in education. From Callaghan's 'Great Debate' speech at Ruskin College in 1976 to the Black Papers, which argued against progressive 'child-centred' education, successive governments sought control over teachers, teaching, and the curriculum (Maclure, 1990). Arguably, this was the beginning of the current dominant ideological and political approach to education.

The Bullock Report (1975) examined literacy. Its remit was broad, with a focus on the development of language from the early years through to the teaching of English literature at A level (Gillard, 2011). The committee recommended increased monitoring of attainment, improvement in resourcing for schools and organised national policies to raise standards in language learning. The report whilst appealing to a 'personal growth' model of English also

‘reasserted the economic and political role of English teaching in relation to capitalist society’ (Ball, 1990, p. 68).

Higher education expanded throughout the last years of the 20th century. Partly as a response to this, the established A level English curriculum was reviewed by the Higginson Committee (1987), which was asked ‘to consider the principles that govern A level syllabuses and their assessment’ (Barnes, 2001, p. 155). Foreshadowing the Tomlinson Committee (2004), Higginson argued for broadening the A level curriculum to make it more like the European Baccalaureate. It asserted the value of sixth form education and the importance of clear assessment methods (Gillard, 2011).

In terms of English Literature A Level, the content of the curriculum is shaped by the borders of school and university teaching. The introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 led to centralised planning for what should be taught in English at schools, and this, in turn, affected the A level curriculum. Similarly, changes in university teaching have exerted influence over the curriculum, teaching and assessment (Flint, 1982). Barnes (2004) argues that in the early 1980s, the ascendancy of literary criticism within universities pushed schools to explore the relative positions of texts and readers. In this way, liberal ideas of the inherent goodness of English literature were critiqued, and English at A level was ‘expected to provide insight into the way a society is constructed’ (2004, p. 40). Snapper (2018) has described English GCSEs in the following terms:

> ‘the reality of a crowded curriculum in a high stakes national examination system in which both teachers’ and students’ performance are measured by exam results is that only the specified exam texts are likely to be taught between the ages of 14 and 16’ (2018, p. 212)

I would argue that this also characterises broadly the current situation at A level.

Although the first years of the 21st century saw both Labour and Conservative governments in power, the development of educational curricula was one area in which continuity was stronger than difference (Yandell, 2014). Education at all ages and stages has been increasingly ‘marketized’ with emphasis placed on the value of education as a personal product and acquisition – a tool for gaining economic advantage (Harris and Haydn, 2012). This has led to pressure to increase pass rates at exams and to ‘fine grain’ distinctions between achievements.

Gibbons (2013) points out that pressure from international diagnostic tools such as PISA and PIRLS (Programme for International Student Assessment Programme for International Student Assessment and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, respectively), has meant that the English curriculum has become 'the focus for what seems like constant reworking' (2013, p. 138). At primary school level, this has meant, for example, the mandatory use of synthetic phonics and spelling, punctuation and grammar tests. By comparison and until 'Curriculum 2000', the further education sector's offer of GCSE and A level English Literature had been relatively untouched.

Reforms to A level known as 'Curriculum 2000' revised A levels through the introduction of A/S (Advanced Supplementary) levels. These were intended to promote a broader curriculum than the traditional diet of 3 'A' levels prior to going to university (Select Committee on Education and Skills Third Report, 2003). Between 2000 and 2015, students studied their subjects in a modular fashion. After year one, they were assessed at A/S level and achieved a standalone qualification. They could then terminate their studies or continue and achieve an A2 qualification. This increased the number of subjects students were able to study up to five subjects in their first year. Snapper (2007) argues that Curriculum 2000 had both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, it introduced choice and flexibility, and on the other, it led to fragmentation and 'increasingly consumerist assessment driven attitudes' (Snapper, 2007, p. 110). At the time of my data collection (2017–2020), A levels had reverted to linear qualifications, meaning that curriculum choices had narrowed and pressures to perform in terminal external examinations increased.

2.10.3.7 Poetry in the Current A Level Curriculum

At the time of writing, (2022) Ofqual (The Office of Exams Qualification and Regulation) regulates exam boards in England. This is a non-ministerial government department responsible for overseeing exams. Ofqual ultimately derives subject content and criteria from the Department for Education. The Department for Education prescribes the types of texts that can be used and the overall balance and type of assessments that may be used at each level. Control over assessed outcomes is centralised and 'top-down'. Goodwyn (2021, p. 234) has characterised the period since 1992 as a period of 'control, conformity and self-regulation', which has created resistant practice amongst teachers who feel an ideological commitment to a personal growth model of English (Goodwyn, 2010, 2016).

The current specifications for English literature provide a framework of knowledge, skills and understanding against which exam candidates are assessed. English is a consistently popular choice at these levels. Since 2015, A/S levels have been decoupled from A2, although a high percentage of those taking A/S English continued to A2 (Ofsted, 2015). More recently, the percentage of students taking English Literature or English Language and Literature at A level has declined slightly, but at the time of writing, they remain popular subjects at this level (Ofqual, 2019).

As noted above, by 2017, when I began collecting my data, A/S and A2 ceased to be discrete stages of learning. A levels became based on linear assessments throughout the two years, with unseen terminal examinations as the dominant mode of assessment. Students were expected to remain with three or four subjects for the duration of their college studies. The coursework element ('Non-Examined Assessment') was reduced from 40% to 20% of the final assessment, and this again emphasised the importance of exam assessments. Boards met the same learning outcomes but with considerable freedom in developing their own 'flavour'. For example, the Edexcel exam board included the option to not teach poetry for A level English Language and Literature. By contrast, the Oxford Cambridge and RSA board (OCR) stipulated that 16% of the A level unseen exam concerns 'Poetry and Stylistic Analysis' (NATE, 2015).

As a consequence of historical debates outlined above about the place of English in the examined curriculum, there is a perceived and, consequently, material hierarchy regarding the difference between English Literature and English Language and Literature. At the time of my research, The Russell Group universities booklet *Informed Choices* (2011) outlined 'facilitating subjects' at A level. Facilitating subjects were those which 'Russell Group' (leading research) universities preferred applicants to have studied at A level. English Literature was a facilitating subject, but English Language and Literature was not. Distinctions such as these reinforce the vocational/academic historical divide within English. Whereas English Language is valued instrumentally as a tool for communication, English Literature has been reinforced as a canon of work valued for itself.

Poetry is a compulsory aspect of all English literature A level syllabuses. The parameters of taught poetry are largely derived from the Leavisite position of Michael Gove (Secretary of State for Education 2010–2014), who in 2013 declared 'There is a Great Tradition of English

Literature – a canon of transcendent works'. This is prescribed by government and weighted towards a historically valorised set of works. It is intended to be 'specific and content rich' (Gove, 2013), although many have pointed out that its weighting toward the work of dead white English males is anything but this in the globalised 21st century (Okolosie, 2013).

This powerful canon arguably poses particular challenges for students in my study, many of whom are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Their cultural and economic backgrounds mean that they may not have been exposed to the pre-1914 exclusive canon of poetry, and they may lack the kinds of cultural capital that white and wealthier students have to read into historical texts. However, it is also true, as Pike (2002) argues, that not only contemporary texts are relevant to adolescents, inner-city minority ethnic students may bring rich personal readings to the indeterminate gaps (Iser, 1978) that such poems offer.

Purcell (2013) argues that during the first decade of the 21st century, assessment objectives for examining both English Language and Literature have become increasingly precise. The challenge for the subject, he argues, is to strike a 'balance' between 'judicious awareness of the ways credit can be gained and nurturing the creative personal response which for many of us has provided a lifetime of pleasure and professional satisfaction' (2013, p. 47). Purcell is articulating a longstanding tension and concern. The Acland Report warned as long ago as 1911 of the 'temptations' teachers feel to teach for exam credits. It argued that when teachers do this, they 'sacrifice not only his (sic) individuality but also that of his pupils' (1911, p. 75; cited in Gillard, 2011). Whether this idea of balance is accurate, and if so, the extent to which a 'balance' between personal response, meaning and exam accreditation has been realised in the current A/S and A level English specifications are discussed next.

2.10.3.8 Personal Meaning and Response in the Current A Level Curriculum

There is no single place where 'personal response' and 'meaning' lies in relation to the current curriculum.

Summarised below are the assessment objectives (AO) of English Literature and English Language and Literature at the time of my data gathering (2017–2020) as specified by Ofqual (2014). I have highlighted where each explicitly refers to personal response and reading for meaning and the allocation of marks for these objectives. In doing this, I do not exclude the

possibility that students may respond personally to other assessment outcomes. For example, Cushing, Giovanelli, and Snapper (2015) point out that AO5 English Literature A level, 'Explore literary texts informed by *different interpretations*' is a change from previous specifications which was to 'Explore literary texts informed by different *readers*' (my emphasis). They claim that despite this, the current specification still 'allows teachers and students to focus valuably on personal responses to ambiguity and interpretative variety' (2015, p. 25). This is an interesting point, but I also wonder whether replacing the word 'readers' with 'different interpretations' suggests a step away from the experience of reading in the classroom and toward the appreciation of literary theories.

To reiterate, Assessment Outcomes in England are the same for all examination boards. Whilst I did not collect data in GCSE poetry classes, relevant AOs are included and discussed because they provide context for the A level specifications.

Qualification	**Assessment Objective**
English Literature A level	AO1 ***Articulate informed personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression*** 20-30% of marks. AO2 ***Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in texts*** 20–30% of marks. AO3 Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received. AO4 Explore connections across literary texts. AO5 Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations.
English Language and Literature A level	AO1 Apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate, using associated terminology and coherent written expression.

	AO2 ***Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in texts*** 20–30% marks. AO3 Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which texts are produced and received. AO4 Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic and literary concepts and methods. AO5 Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways.
English Literature GCSE	AO1 '*Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to maintain a critical style and* ***develop an informed personal response*** *using textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations*' 35–40% of marks. AO2 '*Analyse the language, form and structure* ***used by a writer to create meanings and effects****, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate'* 40–45%.

As can be seen from above, the concept of 'personal response' appears explicitly in the outcomes of GCSE and A level English Literature exams. It does not appear at all in the outcomes of English Language and Literature courses.

At first glance, the lower level of GCSE seems to invite more freedom for expression of personal connection with texts than at A level. The specifications refer to 'critical style', 'informed personal response', and references and quotations can 'support and illustrate' individual interpretations and responses to poems.

There is historical precedent for this. In the mid to late 20th century, considerable room was made for open responses to poems (Warner, 2009). For example, the Cambridge Examination

Board at O level (the antecedent of GCSE) regularly included questions to candidates prefixed by 'what do you feel about ….' Or 'what feelings does this poem stir in you?' In 1986, the last year of the Cambridge Exam Board, students were asked to 'Write about whatever you find interesting in this poem' (Warner, 2009, p. 351). The phrasing of questions in the 21st century seems to be in sharp contrast, depending on the assessment of pre-determined outcomes through the extraction of meaning from texts. For example, the 2015 AQA GCSE unseen poetry paper asked the personally distanced question: 'How does the poet present the speaker's feelings about being in love?' (AQA, 2015).

Warner's position is developed by Cuthbert (2019), whose comparison of English Literature 'O' level and GCSE exams from 1957 and 2011 relates problems in experiencing and expressing personal meaning to the kinds of reading AOs encourage. Cuthbert argues that the pre-requisite that students would read whole texts and elements of choice in the 1957 exam question strongly implied 'space for personal engagement and response' (2019, p. 185). However, whilst the 2011 exam provides explicit instructions to provide a personal response, the fact that questions can be answered by partial reading of the text and that responses are expected to be linked to textual references increases the likelihood of 'technique spotting' and 'superficial engagement with the text' (2019, p. 186). This point draws attention to the centrality of the reading experience in forming personal connections with texts, which lies at the heart of my research.

In relation to GCSE and A levels, it appears that personal response is regarded in the specifications as a lesser skill, acceptable at GCSE level as long as it is shown to be 'informed' in some way by the text and supported by, for example, quotations. However, at A level, a 'personal response' becomes more problematic. As a concept, is it superseded in English Language and Literature specifications by more textually and historically informed ideas of meaning: 'ways in which meanings are shaped' alluding to authorial and cultural influence. AQA English Language and Literature, for example, states that the specification 'draws on the academic field of Stylistics' (AQA, 2015, p. 15). The priority is, therefore, the formal identification of expressive aspects of language, including aspects of grammar and literary criticism (Abdulmughni, 2019). Stylistics is concerned with what Bradford (2005, p. xii) refers to as the 'textualism' of language, and the implied theoretical perspective informing this syllabus is more related to Formalism and New Criticism than a reader response perspective.

Within A level English Literature AOs 'personal response' appears, but not alone. It is buttressed by further caveats, for example, that personal responses should be 'creative' and use 'concepts and terminology', which have been introduced during the course of study. There is a paradox here because creativity implies newness and innovation, whereas the limits and expectations of a timed exam necessarily circumscribe the personal responses invited in exam conditions. It is in the nature of standardised testing that known words, ideas and references are expected to be produced.

To understand such distinctions being made around personal response in assessment, we need to return to the ineluctable link between personal response and aesthetic experience. If, as I argued earlier, aesthetic experience is defined as one of 'felt freedom' which is external to our wants and desires- a kind of '*de-alienating'* experience – this poses problems for its place in a system of education. This is because an education system is a place where 'developing a greater ability to distinguish truthful knowledge claims from personal opinions has been one of its central public justifications' (Cuthbert, 2019, p. 187).

Personal meaning and response can be seen as inherently problematic for examined assessment. It could be said that the problem lies in that 'the personal' alludes to individual and subjective responses running free rein from 'truthful knowledge claims'. Such individual responses might be seen as tolerable at the lower level of GCSE but inadequate for assessment at A level.

However, if one understands personal responses to be idiosyncratic but also essentially culturally and socially informed responses, a more nuanced view of the role of the 'personal' is possible. Personally resonant meanings can be juxtaposed with other types of meaning making with texts. When we read aesthetically, we 'move between different levels of meaning: universal; the textual, and what we bring to our reading by way of prior knowledge, experience, expectations, cultural paradigms, prior political and ethical commitments' (Cuthbert, 2019, p. 191). The intellectual processes that are engaged in aesthetic reading are complicated. Through imaginative abstraction, we can experience important ideas about ourselves, our possible selves and how the world works, or indeed, might work, through such encounters (Phelan, 2018).

2.11 Key Points

Analysis of meanings is central to AO for both English Literature and English Language and Literature A level. Personal and creative responses are overtly stated for the former, but their actual role in the classroom and the extent to which these are recognised in college classrooms is moot and forms a key part of my research.

The objective that students should 'analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in texts' leaves room for interpretation and a variety of different practices. 'Meanings' are the subject of the sentence, but whether these are understood as shaped only by the author or also as shaped by the reader is ambiguous. It depends on what is meant by 'texts'. If 'texts' refers only to words on a page, then the implication is that reading is essentially a decoding exercise in which the student is expected to find meanings placed by the author and report them.

However, if the concept of 'text' is interpreted more widely to include, for example, performance, debate, and creative writing, then the shaping of that text is also understood as influenced by the students. In this situation, analysing meaning becomes a broader exercise related to student response as much as authorial intention. It seems reasonable to assume that a college department/teaching team or individual teacher may tend towards either interpretation. Whichever they make will affect how they teach the course and the kind of learning their students are engaged in. An exploration of these dynamics has been crucial to my discussion of collected data.

2.12 Poetry in Further Education

The scope of my research covers general FE colleges and sixth form colleges as both provide an alternative to school education for young people at GCSE and A level. However, academic courses constitute just one part of the complex work of further education colleges. Therefore, this section addresses what is distinctive about teaching and learning within the further education sector. I will begin with a brief overview of the historical roots of this varied sector to illuminate the context and culture within which courses such as A level English Literature operate. I then discuss further education classrooms as a form of community.

Please note: where general tertiary colleges are being discussed, I capitalise 'Further Education'. The use of 'further education' refers to both sixth form and tertiary colleges.

2.12.1 A Brief Overview of the Historical Origins of the Further Education Sector

The Education Act (1902) established technical colleges and adult education – some of the forerunners of further education. These were also funded by the newly established Local Education Authorities (LEAs) although most 'post school education was principally a night school affair' (Bailey, 2002, p. 55).

The 1918 Fisher Act was an important piece of legislation addressing education in the aftermath of World War I (Gillard, 2011). It raised the school-leaving age to 14 and, amongst other things, was concerned with access to further and higher education

> 'in preparing schemes under this section the local education authority shall have regard to the desirability of including therein arrangements for co-operation with universities in the provision of lectures and classes for scholars for whom instruction by such means is suitable' (Fisher Act, s. 3, cl. 2)

Fisher also proposed compulsory continuation schools, and although this was 'shelved during the post-war depression without ever becoming operative' (Cole, 1948, p. 368), we can see here some of the roots of today's system of further education.

The phrase 'further education' was first used in government regulations in 1926 (Bailey, 2002). Subsequently, Further Education colleges have played many roles, and the 'wide range of work of English further education institutions has been their distinctive characteristic from the early 1900s' (Hodgson, 2015, p. 8). Further Education colleges have at various times offered such broad provision as apprenticeship training, consolidation of elementary education (the forerunner of 'Basic' or 'Functional' skills classes), ESOL classes, training for those with special/additional educational needs as well as academic courses intended to prepare students for university (Hodgson, 2015).

According to Bailey (2002), the development of further education was, in general, 'permissive', meaning without centralised control or oversight of its development. Between 1902 and 1993, colleges were funded by LEAs that had powers, as opposed to duties, to provide further education. This led to wide regional variations of provision. In London, the Inner London Education Authority (1965–1990) pioneered access courses and provided financial

incentives to recruit from underrepresented groups, including ethnic minorities, women, and those from inner London (Maclure, 1990).

The range of provision across the country can be seen as both a strength and a weakness of the sector. A strength is that colleges could be responsive to local demand. However, Morrish (1970) states there were many unresolved arguments at national and local level in the mid-20th century about the value and function of colleges. For example, during the 'tripartite' era of grammar, secondary modern and technical education, the Crowther Report (1959) discussed the issue of wasted working-class talent. It recommended the expansion of Further Education to address this problem, but this plan, which would have demanded concerted national effort, was never realised (Gillard, 2011).

Whilst tertiary Further Education colleges traditionally offered a mixed diet of 'academic' and 'vocational' education, sixth form colleges focused on 'academic' education: 'The interwar years saw the sixth form established as the necessary anteroom to universities and professions and hence to success for the brightest students educated outside the expensive public school system' (Milikail, 1970, p. 11).

As with Further Education colleges, there were numerous reviews at local and national level concerned about the role and size of sixth form and further education colleges. This was because, as the Spens Report (1938) articulated, colleges were seen to be in potential conflict with the existence of school sixth forms (Maclure, 1990).

'By the 1960s the principle that a democratic society should educate all its young people rather than selected elites' (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 20) had led to the expansion of university, and therefore sixth form, education. At the same time, levels of unemployment and the decline of manufacturing industries from the 1960s onwards exerted a downward pressure incentivising colleges to expand their vocational provision. (Macrae, Maguire and Ball, 1997). The Robbins Committee (1961) anticipated that by 1973, there would be 51,000 students in further education.

This proved a significant underestimation, and by 1967, almost double this number were in colleges of further education (Hodgson, 2015). This massive expansion of a mixed sector

prompted Cantor and Roberts to boast of the 'infinite variety of backgrounds' from which students come to attend further education (1972, p. 212).

This upward trend of attendance at further education colleges has continued, prompted by incremental increases in school-leaving ages and pressure for jobs and qualifications (Tomlinson, 2005). In England in 2012–2013, almost twice as many 16–18-year-olds attended either a general Further Education or a sixth form college as attended schools. (Hodgson, 2015)

2.12.2 Funding as a Policy Driver

The Further and Higher Education Act of 1992 introduced a system of funding for all further education colleges (further education and sixth form) based on competition and output. In place of block grants colleges received money according to recruitment, retention, and achievement of students. 'This drove providers to compete for the limited supply of learners in their area' (Panchamia, 2012). It prompted the further growth of a 'stratified and hierarchical system… [within which students] … make a 'choice' … between what is essentially a 'three track system' of separate progression routes' (Macrae, Maguire and Ball, 1997). These were GCSE and A levels, vocational qualifications such as BTEC, or work-based education, such as apprenticeships and NVQs.

Following recommendations from the Wolf Review (2011), funding for all courses in further education and sixth form colleges (except for apprenticeships) came via a single body: the Education and Skill Funding Agency (est. 2017) and at a national rate. Funding is annually retrospective and based on student numbers. Students must work towards recognised qualifications that will lead to work or further study. There are adjustments for elements such as retention and area disadvantage. Unlike the school sector, the further education sector is not ring-fenced from government cuts. Further Education colleges experienced a cut to their adult skills budget of 24% in 2015/2016, and a standstill in funding for Sixth Form colleges has represented a cut in real terms to their budgets (Gallagher, 2018). In 2016, all further education colleges underwent 'Area Reviews' in a move intended to promote mergers and management of further cuts.

Area Reviews have led to fewer and larger Further Education colleges with more vocational specialisation. The impact of this was evident during my research. Crossroad Tertiary College

(anonymised) took over four other colleges between 2016 and 2020. In 2023, Eastern Sixth Form began considering academisation. This would entail forming an independent Multi-academy Trust, an arrangement which would relieve long-term financial pressures (Sixth Form Colleges Association, 2024). Writing in *FE Week*, the Association of Colleges representing Further Education colleges (2015) warned of the possibility of the end of adult education provision in further education, which would also reduce the provision of 'academic courses' such as English Literature A level. At the same time, the expansion of school Academy sixth forms and Free schools has challenged recruitment for traditional academic courses in Sixth Form colleges. In both parts of further education and in different ways, courses like English Literature A level can be seen to be under pressure. These pressures and, in particular, the impact of assessment and exams are now discussed.

2.12.3 Policy Context, the Impact of Assessment and Exams on Learning Poetry

Previous sections have outlined the history and current context of further education, including Further Education colleges and Sixth forms. This section explores the policy context more deeply, engaging with theoretical perspectives to show how policies and politics shape the curriculum and the classroom.

The context within which colleges operate is broad and deep, and colleges are affected by national and global initiatives and priorities (Ball, 2003; Giroux, 2011). It is argued that nation states across the world have moved from concerns about public welfare to become facilitators for the mobility of global capital (Ball, 2003; Mayo, 2009). Grounded in industrialised cultures of the early 20th century (Giroux, 1997), and especially since the 1980s, neoliberalism has reshaped public services (education, social care, etc.) into businesses and fundamentally weakened democracy. In this situation, 'private interests trump social needs, and economic growth becomes more important than social justice' (Giroux 2011, p. 133).

The impact of this on education, Giroux argues, is profound. Education has been refashioned to encourage selfish individualism and culturally has taken a 'positivistic turn'. In the UK, a Labour government was elected in 1997 after a hiatus of 18 years. The party declared itself reconciled with the neo-liberal policies of the previous Conservative government and accepted the role of the market in the public sphere (Crouch, 1997). Under the leadership of Tony Blair, the Labour Party styled itself as 'New Labour'. The government pursued instrumental

inclusion, and since 2010, the Conservative government has financially rationed education (Yandell, 2014). The direction of travel, whatever party is in power, has been remarkably similar. Reay (2022) describes governments across Europe, driven by international comparisons of standards, who are obsessed with 'what works' in the short term to measure and raise grades, and this is at the expense of any serious analyses of how power works and how education continues to reproduce social and economic inequalities.

The term positivism should not be confused with positivism as a philosophical movement. Giroux uses the term to describe a pervasive 'hegemonic ideology' (Gramsci, 1891–1937). Within this ideology, education 'becomes a form of social regulation that guides humans to destinies that preserve the status quo (Giroux, 1997, p. x). The ideology of a 'positivistic culture' is drawn from the logic of scientific methodology with its interest in explanation, prediction and technical control' (Giroux,1997, p. 9) and thus refers to the tendency to treat education as a product which can be weighed, measured, managed, and acquired. This is expressed in a number of policy initiatives which have changed the educational landscape incrementally. Initiatives include league tables, performance-related pay, investment in schools for profit, etc. These rest, according to Ball (2016, p. 1049), on three 'highly interrelated and interdependent components …Market, Management and Performance'.

Under the guise of competition and choice, students are positioned as consumers and education as an object for consumption and exchange (Mayo, 2009). School 'choice' is arranged around attracting parents, while college choice attracts young adults as well as parents. Marketing and advertisers such as Media Alive urge colleges to think in terms of 'audience', 'brand' and 'product', and digital media employs strong visual and written rhetoric to attract students.

As Lambirth (2020, p. 256) puts it, a positivistic culture 'builds upon the notion of objectivity and the crucial separation of values from knowledge and forms of methodological inquiry'. 'Facts' are treated as context and value-free statements about which there is no need for debate or discussion. This is deeply problematic and effectively disguises 'the relationship between 'valued' knowledge and the constellation of economic, political, and social interests that such knowledge supports' (Giroux, 1997, p. 49).

The problem is that in a positivistic educational culture, knowledge becomes objectified, and results become confused with the meaning of education (Yandell, 2014). Freire's (1921–1997)

notion of the ‘banking model’ of education is relevant here, in which the role of the teacher is reduced to a depositor of knowledge and ideas into students’ heads. This renders knowledge as the teacher’s property and students as passive recipients of information. It drives a culture of high-stakes testing in which teachers learn to ‘teach to the test’ (Cushing, 2018). Such an approach risks denying the critical reflection of teachers and students (Freire, 1996) and results in alienation. This alienation includes the loss of agency and voice for both teachers and students. Epistemologically, knowledge and knowledge production are alienated from social context. In this circumstance, cultural differences in relation to, for example, reading become a barrier rather than a bridge to understanding and knowledge.

Language increasingly narrows to reflect business concerns: ‘delivery’ of teaching, teacher ‘performance’, and so on (Pring, 2012). The pressure to be seen performing undermines teachers’ professionalism and creativity, forcing them to comply with targets (Ball, 2003). ‘It is not that performativity gets in the way of ‘real’ academic work or ‘proper’ learning; it is a vehicle for changing what academic work and learning are!’ (Ball, 2003, p. 226)

Building on Foucault’s metaphor of the ‘all seeing’ panopticon prison (1979), Page (2018) discusses what he terms ‘conspicuous practices’ of teachers who voluntarily take part in self-surveillance to produce acceptable selves. In a positivistic culture, teachers are ‘recreated as commodities and their own marketing agent’ (2018, p. 375). Compliant practices have a dual aspect. On the one hand, teachers meet targets to please managers and avoid sanctions; on the other, Page argues, these practices effectively veil other purposes and intentions, making space where teachers might reclaim professionalism or even just avoid work.

Moore and Clarke (2016) have adopted the term ‘cruel optimism’ originally defined by Berlant (2006, p. 24) as ‘attachment to compromised conditions of possibility’. They use the term to describe the abusive relationship engendered between teachers and their work. Teachers seek meritocratic aims, most genuinely wanting to improve the life chances of their students. At heart, however, the education system is an engine for a ‘socio-economic system (which) itself depends on inequality’ (2016, p. 4). This causes deeply felt conflicts for teachers, particularly as they currently work within a neo-liberal performative educational culture. Moore and Clarke also apply the concept to the professional knowledge of teachers, arguing that contested ideas about subject-based knowledge and pedagogy have been eroded. Debated practices have been replaced by managed and compliant behaviour. Teachers are caught in a kind of net – they

desire to be ‘good teachers’, but what this means is a ‘not infrequent tension between having to do what one is told and wanting to put into practice that which one believes in and thinks to be in the best interests of one’s students’ (2016, p. 4) This results in permanent tensions as teachers have to inhabit discourses and perform tasks that restrain and sometimes run counter to their better judgement. They must fit in with and believe, to some extent, policy rhetoric in order to belong and advance in their careers. This results in a state of ‘cruel optimism’ as teachers are obliged to desire and act in favour of illusory aims. These, in turn, form a barrier to their actual development, for example, trying to enact ‘the best lesson’ or the ‘perfectly behaved class’.

Where the curriculum is recast as a product, there are many possible consequences for what is learnt and how it is learnt. It is striking that, according to Schleicher, a manager of PISA, the UK has too much rote learning based on what it is possible to test, at the expense of deeper learning and connected knowledge (Hazell, 2018), and the curriculum is too narrow. Coffield (2014) has referred to the pressure of exams leading to what he terms ‘bulimic learning’, where students remember as much information as possible only to regurgitate it in prescribed ways under the pressure of time.

Consequences for the further education sector have been explored in the literature. According to Lambert (2016), the management culture in some FE colleges is extremely directive and based on fear and control. Additionally, the sector has been beset by financial scandals and accusations of cronyism. Over 20 years ago, Ainley (1999) argued that in Further Education, students were adapting utilitarian attitudes to their learning. Teachers were made to focus on demonstrating so-called key and personal skills, as this attracted funding at the expense of enabling students to learn more deeply. More recently, Coffield (2008) noted the cynicism of government in relation to FE teaching and learning as if something called ‘best practice’ is uncontested and can be agreed on and shared with ease. Business models lead FE colleges rather than educational models. What is at stake in all of this is the issue of trust, and old notions of professionalism have been replaced with commercialised ideas of professionalism (Whitty, 2000; Ball, 2016). Coffield argues for the need to develop the agency of learners, revive the independent professionalism of teachers and, above all, centre ‘the relationships between tutors and learners which is the cornerstone of success’ (2008, p. 5). Bocock (2015) notes that the semi-marketisation of FE colleges post-1992 led to increased enrolments at lower costs. This was to the detriment of the most disadvantaged students who were in larger classes with fewer

enrichment opportunities. In addition, Bocock argues that top-down managerialism in FE colleges inhibits important qualities such as intrinsic motivation and rewards short-term selfish interests, which damage further education. I now turn to the relevance of this to poetry learning.

I have previously argued that form and language in poetry work in disruptive ways to offer a particular kind of heightened experience of the world. If, philosophically, an aesthetic response involves a kind of heightened or 'felt freedom', this places it in opposition to the commodification of education and art must occupy an uncertain place in a system that values the production of certain types of measurable knowledge (Cuthbert, 2019). As previously discussed in the section *Personal Meaning and Response in the Current A Level Curriculum,* Cuthbert explored GCSE English to show how, in the 2000s, questions in exams make little presumption that students should engage with whole texts, meaning that the experience of the imaginative world of texts is degraded. Atherton, Green and Snapper (2013) argue that emphasis placed on exam-assessed work at A level can lead teachers in further education to teach poetry as a set of techniques. Since 2014, and at the time of writing, coursework constitutes only 20% of the final marks at A level (Ofqual, 2014). The poetry anthologies that students study include 14 poems, all of which must be studied for the exam, and students must be prepared to read and respond to two unseen poems in exams. 'Response', as previously discussed, is conceived in the A level curriculum as largely concerned with comparative analysis using prescribed concepts and terminology. Teachers have a maximum of five terms to prepare students for the entire qualification and, in the colleges I researched, between four and a half and five hours per week of face-to-face teaching time at A level. It may be surmised that the pressure to teach in relation to exams is even greater today for this group of students than in 2013.

From an American context, Simecek and Ellis (2017) discuss how the value of poetry in education is increasingly being explained in terms of the contribution of reading to transferable work skills such as critical thinking or problem solving. The wider pressure of exams in an 'accountability culture' pushes teachers towards efferent readings of poems, focusing on close critical reading rather than aesthetic experience (Dymoke, 2002; Hennessey *et al.*, 2011; Gordon, 2018). Furthermore, this is the case even when teachers want to engage aesthetically with poems (Hanratty, 2008; Hennessy, Hinchion and McNamara, 2010). Dymoke *et al.* (2014) note that an instrumental approach to teaching poetry effectively ruins the aesthetic purposes

of poems, creating profound dilemmas for teachers in terms of how to include and teach poetry in the curriculum.

Wherever in the curriculum, poetry exists to engage with the aesthetic possibilities of poems 'requires a radical shift in thinking and the intellectual tools used for perception' (Lambirth, 2020, 260). This is a tall order because, fundamentally, the pressure of exams in a positivistic culture may be seen to encourage efferent rather than aesthetic responses to poetry. Teachers may feel pushed to subscribe to a banking model of education in which they take responsibility for narrowly preparing students for tests, reproducing the status quo without critical engagement.

The Marxist concept of alienation, referred to previously in discussion of aesthetic experience (p. 49) is pertinent here. The concept has a long philosophical history, and a Marxist understanding of the term has its roots in a critique of Hegel's (1770–1831) use of the concept as a historically shaped but existential aspect of the human condition (Sayers, 2011). Marx anchored the concept of alienation to the economic realm, claiming that overcoming economic alienation embodied within capitalism is the key to overcoming alienation in other areas of life (Musto, 2010). His is a material rather than idealist account. Marx 'does not regard the alienation and disharmony of modern society as a merely negative condition. Rather its impact is contradictory' (Sayers, 2011, p. 28). The development of global capitalism and mass production dehumanises the vast majority who are forced to sell their labour as a commodity and are not able to realise the full value of that which they produce. Alienation is, therefore, a systematic feature of capitalism, but it also has seeds of connection and liberation within itself.

In relation to the above and from an educational perspective, McInerney (2009) argues that alienation and disengagement in education, particularly in relation to adolescents, is often cast as a psychological problem. However, from a sociological perspective, and using concepts from Freire's philosophy, he argues that 'notions of subjectivity, oppression and liberation are especially relevant … the phenomenon of student alienation can be understood, at least in part, in terms of the dehumanising forces operating within schools and society at large' (2009, p. 24).

Students become alienated from school when they have little or no meaningful connection to their studies and assessment practices which rely on individualised grading matched to external

tests can exacerbate this tendency. The consequence, according to McInerney, is a training model that underpins much of how schooling takes place. Ofsted (2012) confirmed this experience in schools when it reported on the narrow range of texts at GCSE and 'few opportunities for creative work in English' (2012, p. 23).

To overcome alienation, teachers must view students as 'constructors of their own knowledge and language' (McInerney, 2009, p. 30) and move away from deficit models while recognising the very real disadvantages and barriers many students face.

The landscape may seem bleak. There is longstanding evidence of deep student and teacher disaffection with poetry in the classroom (Bullock, 1975; Benton, 1999/2000; Snapper, 2013). Benton's (1999/2000) surveys of teacher attitudes to teaching poetry in secondary schools in the UK are particularly important. He showed a disconnection between how teachers value poetry as an art and their fears around teaching it. The difficulties teachers feel around teaching poetry have been more recently confirmed by Sigvardsson (2020).

Contrastingly, beyond the classroom, there is empirical evidence that growing numbers of people between the ages of 8–18 engage with reading and writing poetry for pleasure (National Literacy Trust, 2022). More generally, Miall and Kuiken's research (1994) found that because poems move form rather than content of language to the foreground (in formalist terms, they 'estrange' language), this evokes feeling in readers and makes room for personal perspectives and meanings. Spiro (1991) sees the prominence of the unseen poetry exam as a positive spur for aesthetic response. The reasoning is that when students make a personal connection to poems, it motivates them to have the confidence to read and respond under pressure.

The challenge for lecturers in further education colleges is to prepare students to think about poems critically 'without losing sight of … aesthetic purposes and pleasures' (Atherton, Green and Snapper, 2013, p. 28). The good news is that there is potentially strong adolescent interest to be built on *if* this can be realised by teachers and students in further education classrooms.

Crucially, teachers need to make spaces for student expression and find 'teachable moments' connecting to students' worlds. Encouraging 'personal' responses to poems in English Literature classrooms and exploring these in discursive classrooms is one way of establishing such connections.

In summary, pedagogical practices are anchored in and shaped by wider social and cultural forces in the education system. Education can be understood as a vital site of social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1993) and in our deeply unequal society, this creates profound tensions between stated aims of inclusion and achievement and the realities of exclusion and differential life choices. At the time of writing, education is shaped by neo-liberal philosophies of individual competition and the power of the free market. This can be seen in many ways at work in the sector of further education and sixth form colleges, for example, in the rhetoric of choice and financial pressures for students to succeed at completing high-stakes and predominantly externally assessed qualifications. The climate of a positivistic culture shapes how teachers see and enact their role so that, to paraphrase Marx, they make choices but not in circumstances of their own making.

2.12.4 Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges as Contemporary Contexts for Teaching English Literature

Notwithstanding current pressures, contemporary further education colleges offer GCSE and A level courses as a key part of their provision. The former offer a second chance for 16–19-year-old students who have not succeeded at school, and A level courses are available for those who decide to attend a different place for their A level courses from their school. Further education colleges have been characterised as the most diverse sector in UK education (Peart, 2014), and this may be especially the case for inner London, where my research is set.

In general colleges are less regulating of student behaviour than schools (Orr, 2013), and this may be an attraction for both students and lecturers. Macrae, Maguire, and Ball have argued that this is particularly the case for ethnic minority students (1997), and this position is supported by more recent statistics, as cited below. The relative social freedom that colleges offer in comparison with schools may be a consequence of two distinct pressures.

Firstly, whilst there has always been competition between providers for post-16 education, the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) made colleges in England independent of Local Authorities. This, as previously discussed, has led to a hugely competitive market (Hodgson and Spours, 2019), and within this, colleges appear to position themselves as places for adolescents. Whilst all the colleges in my study cater for adults and school students (14-16) as

well as adolescents, it is the images of the latter which dominate their websites. A widely made cultural assumption is that adolescents need freedom as they seek to develop into 'autonomous adults', and this is reflected, for example, in the marketing materials for the colleges I have researched. Photos on in college prospectuses predominantly feature adolescents aged 16-19. To attract applicants, colleges emphasise 'support' as well as 'freedom', for example, telling applicants they will be 'treated like a young adult' (London Tertiary website) or 'treated more like an adult' (Crossroads Tertiary website). I explore these themes further in relation to the perspectives of teachers in my research in *Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion.*

More substantially, in terms of formal policy, Further Education tertiary colleges were the first places to be addressed as sites for inclusive education. The Further Education Funding Council commissioned the Tomlinson Report (1996) to explore education for students with disabilities and make recommendations to improve provision in colleges. However, the results of the report had wider implications than those for students with disabilities. Tomlinson argued that further education should match the needs of learners rather than match learners to courses. Tomlinson argued this approach 'would benefit all and, indeed, represents the best approach to learning and teaching yet articulated' (1996, p. 4). How far his vision has been realised is a moot point but intended direction of travel is clear. The further education sector has long been positioned as a flexible and responsive provider willing to try to be many things to many people. Government, employers, and learners are all important interest groups in the sector, holding, at times, different and conflicting needs and opinions (Panchamia, 2012).

Like most further education colleges (whether sixth form or tertiary), the four colleges included in my research offer a wide range of courses for many purposes. A level provision represents a relatively stable and respected component of their work. In contrast with the school sector, students in further education occupy spaces that often include adult, school-age, and adolescent students from a variety of schools. This, arguably, makes for a broader and richer learning environment than the school sector. Some sections of the population are more represented than others in further education, and this reflects unequal and contested educational experiences. Research has shown how ethnic identities have informed student and parent decisions about which colleges to attend (Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 1998). 'Class and 'race' (are) unspoken but powerful filters through which students are allocated and distributed across the spread of routes and courses' (Macrae, Maguire and Ball, 1997, p. 93). Ethnic minorities constitute 20% of students at further education colleges in England compared to 15% of the general population.

Sixteen per cent of those attending further education colleges claim free school meals compared to 9% of school and academy sixth forms (Hodgson, 2015).

2.12.5 The Further Education Classroom as a Site of Learning: Situated Learning and Communities of Practice

From a social constructivist perspective learning can only be understood fully as it is embedded in social and cultural contexts. As Gay (2018, p. 8) puts it, 'culture is at the heart of all we do in the name of education'; in essence, it facilitates whether, what, and how we learn. People's lived experiences of classrooms vary, and whilst further education classrooms can foster a culture of collaborative learning, it is also possible that learning is reduced to rote learning and 'teaching to the test.' In the final section of this chapter, I consider strategies for teaching poetry, including the pedagogical moves that teachers might make and contemporary research about these. However, first, I think it is important to focus on the wider issue of how learning in colleges may be framed and shaped by a culture of 'schooling'.

I now turn to the idea of the classroom as a community and related concepts of situated learning (Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989) and communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). These offer important ways to understand what and how learning might be in further education classrooms.

The concept of community has evolved through the 20th and 21st centuries and includes many dimensions, including kinship, place, work, and imagined belonging (Steward, 2004). Rovai and Lucking (2000) theorise the educational community as having the following dimensions: spirit, trust, interaction, and learning. Spirit relates to secure membership of the class and trust to safety issues such as the ability to express oneself freely. Interaction can be driven by the completion of tasks or social-emotional interaction: a socialising element, and learning refers to the active construction of knowledge. It seems to me that the first two relate to what could be characterised as teacherly pastoral responsibilities. The second two characteristics, interaction and learning, match well with a social constructivist framework as they draw attention to the need for both teachers and students to be active and accountable in a variety of ways for learning and teaching.

This idea that 'learning is a consequence of engagement in social practice' (Curzon and Tummons, 2013, p. 121) is central to the concept of 'situated learning' as outlined by Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) and Lave and Wenger (1991). Situated learning complements and extends previous discussion of language and meaning outlined in part 1 of this chapter. This is because conceptual knowledge, like language, can be compared to a tool. Only when a tool is used in context can its properties and potential be developed:

> 'Conceptual tools …reflect the cumulative wisdom of the culture in which they are used … appropriate use is not simply a function of the abstract concept alone…Activity, concept, and culture are interdependent. Learning must involve all three.' Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989, p. 304).

This suggests that, in principle, knowledge cannot be abstracted from its use in context. Learners must be engaged in the purpose(s) of areas of knowledge/subjects in order to fully engage with their cultural meaning and possibilities. Just as mechanics need to engage with mending, adapting, and developing machinery, those learning poetry need to engage creatively with the experience of the art form.

Building on Brown, Collins, and Duguid's insights, Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning, rather than being seen as an individual cognition or behaviour, is better understood as social engagement within communities.

> 'Conventional explanations view learning as a process by which a learner internalizes knowledge, whether "discovered", "transmitted" from others, or "experienced in interaction" with others … learning as internalization is too easily construed as an unproblematic process of absorbing the given, as a matter of transmission and assimilation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 47)

In line with historical precedents such as Rousseau (1712–1778), Vygotsky (1896–1934), and Dewey (1959–1942), Wenger states that learning is more than a mental act, it is 'the development of our practices and our ability to negotiate meaning' (1998, p. 96). From this perspective, learning does not occur in a neat, orderly fashion, and teachers cannot 'transmit meaning' to students as if they are empty vessels. Rather, both teachers and students engage in learning as 'lived experience of participation of the world' (1998, p. 3). Lived participation

means engagement with a community of learners, their history, cultural tools, language, objects, activities, and values. 'Knowledge emerges as a result of these elements interacting simultaneously. Thus, knowing is interminably inventive and entwined with doing' (Besar, 2018, p. 51).

Wenger (1998) offers a way of understanding how situated learning works through the concept of 'community of practice'. Communities of practice occur in many parts of society, including work, leisure, and education, but wherever they occur, communities of practice have three key dimensions. These are, briefly, joint enterprise (the negotiated purpose of the community; mutual engagement), how people interact in the joint enterprise, and finally, shared repertoire (the means through which people interact, their words, discourse, etc.). These three features are interdependent and interlocking, so change in one dimension can trigger change in another. Communities of practice, as understood by Wenger, are not always harmonious or emancipatory in outcome. They are, however, purposeful, and people engaged in communities of practice invest in them because the community of practice shapes who they are and what they may become.

The question becomes, what kind of learning community is the A level classroom? At one level, students attending colleges have actively chosen to join a community that defines itself as being apart from school. An example of this can be seen at Eastern Sixth Form (anonymised), whose 2020 learning contract defines students and teachers as one single 'learning community' with commonly expected standards of behaviour. Because most students join colleges for only two or three years, colleges are keen to actively build a sense of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and repertoire through a variety of means, such as tutorial groups and a wide range of enrichment activities. From Lave and Wenger's perspective, this institutionally defined 'college community' is not the same as a 'community of practice'. The problem is that '"Locating" learning in classroom interaction is not an adequate substitute for a theory about what schooling as an activity system has to do with learning.' (1991, p. 54).

Schooling as an activity system (including college 'schooling') is paradoxical because it is 'predicated on claims that knowledge can be decontextualised' (1991, p. 41) while simultaneously providing a specific context for learning. In short, schools are their own distinct form of social practice. The social practices of schools and colleges involve 'subject learning' through instruction and pedagogy. The role of the teacher is seen as key, and individual

assessment is used to measure individual learning. Students learn knowledge for assessment and access to higher-level courses, and this leads to the commodification of knowledge. Teachers and students are encouraged within this 'activity system' to focus on the exchange value of knowledge (high grades) rather than the use value (what does this mean to me) of knowledge. These features map well to the characteristics of the A level classrooms explored in my research.

The significant point here for my research is that colleges can offer conditions in which to learn *about* poetry. However, this may lead students to become part of a community of 'schooled adults' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 100) rather than part of a 'community of practice.' This is because, it will be recalled, communities of practice are 'sites where people jointly construct, transform, conserve, and/or negotiate the meanings of practices' (Brouwer *et al.*, 2012, p. 348). The model for exploring this kind of situated learning is more popularly understood to be an apprenticeship model (Clancey, 1995) rather than a formal school or college setting.

I have previously identified, in *Policy Context, the Impact of Assessment and Exams on Learning Poetry*, tensions in the teaching of poetry with respect to the culture of the classroom. In essence, the professional necessity for students to pass exams has the potential to push learning poetry toward memorisation of abstracted knowledge. This may be in spite of teachers' professional knowledge about and personal experiences with the potential of poetry to evoke aesthetic responses. My exploration of communities of practice helps to explain these tensions more deeply. The social practices of further education classrooms do not fit neatly within the definition of 'communities of practice'. For example, A Level classrooms do not fit the criteria of joint enterprise as collective and ongoing negotiation (Brouwer *et al.*, 2012). Similarly, it can be argued that repertoire and discourse are regulated and limited by the syllabus and exam.

However, Hoadley (2012) points out that the concept of a community of practice has been used in more than one way: as 'an explanatory framework for learning and as a metaphor for how instruction should take place' (2012, p. 370). In terms of a metaphor for instruction, the concept addresses people who have a concern or passion for what they do and want to improve their practice over time (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In broad terms, these features can be matched to aspects of teaching and learning poetry at A level.

Classroom learning, as negotiated by adolescent students and their teachers, sits at the heart of teaching in further education colleges and is the focus of my research. Many teachers have multiple identities as members of communities affiliated with further education (Gleeson *et al.*, 2015), and this is reflected in the further education lecturers who participated in my research. My sample included ex-schoolteachers, an ex-higher education lecturer, a lecturer who trained in adult non-advanced education, and one who came to teach as a mature student who had worked in publishing. Students who took part in my research live in a variety of locations and belong to many other communities in relation to, for example, ethnic and religious origins and identifications. This, along with adolescent growth of cognition, previously discussed, means that there is potential in further education for a great variety of different connections and negotiated meaning making to take place with poems.

Earlier in this chapter, I explored meaning making from the perspective that this is at once both a personal and cultural phenomenon. Wenger claims that education 'in its deepest sense and at whatever age it takes place, concerns the opening of identities- exploring new ways of being that lie beyond our current state' (1998, p. 263). In English Literature classrooms, 'new ways of being' and 'opening of identities' can be experienced when students engage with poetry at the level of personally felt meaning. I believe that at the level of interaction, further education colleges may offer new, potentially collegial and democratic spaces where adolescents can engage with 'genuine shared enquiry as opposed to didactic teaching … (which has) … been shown to enhance cognitive and affective learning' (Hang-Cheong Cheung *et al.*, 2020, p. 1) However, such rich experiences are an aspiration rather than something to be assumed.

In my study, adolescents in colleges doing A levels will have proficient use of the English language and discourses at home and in the community. They will also have gained some cultural capital through attaining GCSE English Language and English Literature. Students may or may not read a wide variety of printed books, but all will use English on the internet and other digital devices. They all, therefore, have a deep investment in the medium of expression of poetry in a way in which they may not, for example, in the concepts or language of Maths or natural sciences.

Students in my study will have been made familiar with the content of the A level exams. For example, they will know that there is an expectation for them to read novels, poems and plays, and they will need to be able to write answers under timed conditions to succeed. However,

this does not mean that the 'funds of knowledge' (Moll and Gonzalez, 1994) they have previously negotiated from home and school contexts will translate smoothly to the college classroom. Teachers and students bring differing knowledge bases, and the potential for these to compete is high when, as in my study, students and teachers are from backgrounds contrasted by age, ethnicity, and social class.

It is the role of the teacher to induct students into the language, practices, and content of their courses. They are invested in this process professionally and personally although this is not straightforward for them. There are competing pressures on teachers. Amongst other things teachers want their students to gain the cultural capital that success at A Level will confer. From a social constructivist perspective, teachers must also, to some extent, connect with what students know to build on their abilities. Finally, they are obliged to teach for assessment even as they may know and enjoy poetry as a 'personal' experience.

The issue, in the context of my research, is to explore how far teachers and students are able to engage with poetry in a way that draws on the insights of situated learning to increase the experience of poetry as art. This involves more than teaching abstract content; it means engaging students to 'do things' with poetry. To address this, it is important to turn to relevant research on teaching and learning strategies.

2.13 Teaching and Learning Poetry

2.13.1 Introduction to Strategies for Teaching Poetry

The final parts of my literature review focus on research studies which explore strategies for teaching poetry. Strategies for teaching poetry relate to both my earlier discussion on differing theoretical positions in relation to reading and to wider learning theories such as 'scaffolding' and 'third spaces'. Following this, I review recent developments in research relating to reader response theory in the 21st century.

Popular pedagogical sources suggest a variety of techniques to promote poetry in the classroom. Many of these are from a primary school context (e.g., Corbett, 2008; Phinn, 2009) and emphasise the importance of creating a climate within which children can be introduced to reading and writing poetic forms. A useful example from a secondary school perspective is

Naylor and Wood (2012), who recommend using Benton's (1988) frames of discussion to stimulate questions in the classroom about poetry as form, story, and work of an author. In terms of pedagogy, this book, rooted in reader response theory, models a wide variety of techniques for teaching poetry, such as drama and debate. Beach *et al.* (2011) have addressed how to teach adolescents literature. They highlight some of the challenges adolescents face growing up in the United States in the early 21st century and widely held ambivalent social attitudes toward this period of life. They recommend practical strategies for teaching in schools, particularly the need to engage in multi-textual reading practices to motivate adolescent readers.

In 2001, Hanauer asserted that empirical data on how people read literature and, in particular poetry, was limited but beginning to grow. Mason and Giovanelli (2017) note that many researchers have taken a reader-centred approach to research. This involves 'an epistemology of reading in classrooms that is rooted in understanding response and interpretation as dynamic, complex and socially oriented' (2017, p. 318). Sigvardsson (2017) reviewed international research on poetry reading pedagogy in secondary schools between 1990–2015. This located a total of 28 articles from the UK, Canada, Ireland, Australia, and the USA. Sigvardsson found that research on poetry in secondary classrooms is largely drawn from educational and psychological perspectives using combinations of theories. While some of the research drawn from psychological perspectives uses experimental design, most educational research is carried out using mixed methods, action research, or case studies. There is an absence of large quantitative studies in this field. The dominant theoretical approach is reader response, and the methodological approach is largely qualitative. Although the research reviewed by Sigvardsson is located in secondary schools, only 4 of the 28 articles refer directly to the experiences of adolescents or teenage students, and this gives me confidence that whilst there are precedents for my research, this is not a saturated field.

In this section, I give an overview of primary research, predominantly from the 21st century, which specifically considers pedagogical approaches for teaching poetry to child and adolescent students in the classroom. In completing this section, I have drawn on peer-reviewed research relating to learning and teaching poetry using Library Search at the University of Greenwich and Google Scholar. I used a variety of interchangeable search terms, including 'teaching strategies/methods/practices AND adolescent/student/teenagers'. I also widened my search terms to include not only 'further education/sixth form/ college' but also include research in 'secondary schools'.

I have grouped my findings under five broad headings: *Role of the Teacher as Co-Creator of Knowledge and Learning Collaborator*; *Use of Spoken word/Rap and Song Lyrics*; *Memorisation and Performance of Poetry*; *Group Discussion and Dialogue*; and *A Multimodal Approach.* My organisation is, I hope, a useful guide, but I note its artificiality, and there are many overlapping areas of interest between these categories.

2.13.2 Role of the Teacher as Co-Creator of Knowledge and Learning Collaborator

A number of studies have highlighted the importance of the teacher as significant in promoting personal and aesthetic connections with poetry. Dias and Heyhoe (1988) tracked reading practices by asking students to think aloud as they read and found that many adolescents bring an efferent stance to reading poetry. However, Pike's (2000) small-scale longitudinal study of adolescent poetry readers in a British secondary school found that when teachers use the text as a stimulus to debate and model their own reading processes, even reluctant adolescents can become keen readers of pre-20th century poetry. Pike coined the term 'responsive teaching' to describe a pedagogy that begins with the pupil's own responses to poetry and then actively teaches cultural contexts and poetic forms. The crucial pedagogical principle is to begin with a genuine appreciation of the pupil's ideas and to work outwards from there.

Pike's findings are supported more recently by the work of Sigvardsson (2020), who carried out a small-scale qualitative study of 15 experienced teachers of poetry teaching adolescents aged 16–19. She found that whilst none of the teachers in her sample used the term 'personal response' to describe their teaching strategies, all of those who were effective in engendering pupil enjoyment of poems shared key features in their teaching. These were that they all share poems that they enjoy with their students, create an atmosphere where ideas are valued and shared, and openly discuss concerns students had about reading poetry. Finally, effective teachers of poetry deliberately draw on mood and feeling. In essence, they foreground poems as aesthetic experiences that work at the level of emotion.

In the context of Maltese education, Xerri (2013, 2016) explored the experience of teaching poetry. His research is relevant to my work as it is in the post-16 sector and is concerned with small-scale research of response to poetry. Xerri emphasises the importance of teacher and

student shared beliefs about poetry, which are all too often seen as difficult and in need of teacher-centred 'decoding'. Adoption of teacher-centred exam-based practices can 'undermine students' engagement with poetic texts and hinder the reading of poetry for personal pleasure' (Xerri, 2016, p. 1). To increase student engagement with poetry, he argues for 'more inclusive approaches to assessment' (Xerri, 2016, p. 17) rather than high-stakes exams.

This theme of teacher role is supported by Harris's (2018) PhD dissertation. Using a mixed-method phenomenological framework, her dissertation explores the practices of five exemplary teachers of poetry in secondary classrooms in Boston, USA. From a reader response perspective, Harris found that whilst teachers use a variety of pedagogical approaches and many modes of representation to teach poetry, the key to their success involves the sharing of power in the classroom and making pedagogical aims and strategies explicit to students.

> 'The most resonant finding was the centrality of the student-teacher relationship to the poetry teaching endeavour. The study found that 'being an exemplary teacher of poetry is as much about how one is in and out of the classroom as it is about what one does in the classroom' (Harris, 2018, p. vii).

There are many actions that teachers, as co-creators of knowledge, can take to support learning. From a reader response perspective, Cairney (1996) has argued that teachers who make intertextual links encourage adolescents to respond personally to literature. Lockney and Proudfoot (2013) explored in a small-scale study in a British secondary school how collaborative poetry writing can enable students to feel part of a community, putting 'themselves in the shoes of writers and giving/receiving responses to/from peers, in order to help them articulate ways in which they make meaning as writers and readers' (2013, p. 148). More recently, in small-scale qualitative research, Davis (2023) explored the impact of teachers reading poems aloud daily to promote personal connections among adolescents in Chicago.

Using a psychological experimental approach, Peskin and Wells-Jopling (2012) explored some of the challenges of understanding symbolic meaning when reading literature. They found that when teachers scaffold symbolic meaning using shared imagery, adolescent appreciation and enjoyment of symbolism and poems rise.

From a reader response perspective, Mason and Giovanelli (2015) have undertaken case studies with children at the start of secondary education to explore how they read literature. They apply the term 'authentic reading' to the experience of reading a text for initial personal engagement and interpretation. They also emphasise the importance of teachers knowing when and how to facilitate open discussion and warn against teachers imposing interpretations on student response.

Enright, Torres-Torreti, and Carreon (2012) have underscored Pike's focus, cited above, on the importance of spontaneity and the 'realness' of the teacher. Their in-depth case study of a Californian high school tracked dialogue in adolescent English classrooms to show how often teachers do not promote dialogue and how frequently responses are scripted – with the exam leading to 'right answers'. Intrator and Kunzmann (2009), summarising evidence from a variety of literary research projects with adolescents, comment that: 'What students seek- and what they need to grow as learners and people – is a *dialogical* encounter with adults.' (2009, p. 43)

2.13.3 Use of Spoken Word/Rap and Song Lyrics

I found that much of the research in this area is from a North American context, perhaps reflecting the cultural origins and popularity of this form of expression. From a social constructivist perspective, Dyson (2005) discusses the power of spoken word in the following terms: 'In naming and articulating the everyday, young people take responsibility for 'answering to life''. Weinstein and West (2012) researched and analysed the development of spoken word poetry among American youth. They argue that spoken word poetry lies at a 'deeply generative intersection in which aesthetic, personal, and social needs are being met in overlapping ways' (2012, p. 291). Burton and Van Viegen (2021) have explored how the musicality of spoken word workshops validates and develops the voices of secondary school English language learners in Canada. This suggests that spoken word poetry may make a strong contribution to introducing personal perspectives and responses to the classroom. Drawing on the cultural experiences and artefacts of young people may act as a bridge to reading poetry, which is prescribed for exams.

This premise is supported by primary research such as Ladson Billing's (1995) study of eight exemplary African American teachers of English. The teachers in this study found that the use

of spoken word and rap improved the achievements and experiences of students in the classroom. From an American context, Jocson (2006) and Asadi (2021) have independently researched the importance of 'intersecting literacy practices' (Jocson, 2006, p. 231) in supporting both reading and writing of poetry amongst urban youth. Lapp and Fisher (2009) undertook action research with American teenagers developing their reading skills in school and reported positive outcomes with the use of poetry raps. These were found to increase engagement and interest in reading.

Weaven and Clark (2013) undertook small-scale action research based in Victoria, Australia, exploring the difficulties teachers experience when teaching poetry to adolescents. Whilst this work is chiefly about the barriers teachers face, even teachers who were reluctant to teach poetry could see the possible benefits of using rap and performance poetry in their lessons because they understood that 'poetry is already in their (pupils) lives' (2013, p. 209). This finding is supported by the work of Sigvardsson (2020) (referred to above), who also found that the use of song lyrics is a popular strategy for teachers in Sweden who work with adolescents.

Young's doctoral dissertation (2016) used the qualitative approach of an interpretative phenomenological analysis to interview five high school English teachers. The aim was to understand their experiences with poetry pedagogy. She concluded effective teachers of poetry do not see students as deficient in their poetic experiences. Rather, they need to relate poems to their own aesthetic, and for many, this means music and lyrics.

> 'Scholarly knowledge is important and should not be discarded, but appreciation for the language art form and its critical purposes allows students to see poetry as something more appealing and meaningful, just like the music they listen to on their way to class' (2016, p. 131).

Research into rap and spoken word poetry confirms that appealing to adolescents' own funds of knowledge and using their cultural experiences can bridge a way into engagement and understanding of poetry. It supports the socio-cultural presumption of my research that personal responses may be individually felt, but they are, essentially, culturally informed.

2.13.4 Memorisation and Performance of Poetry

Although memorisation of poems was promoted by Arnold and commonplace in English classrooms at the start of the 20th century, by the end of the century, memorisation was criticised as an outmoded practice associated with a model of transmission teaching and rote learning (Dias and Heyhoe, 1988; Robson, 2014). The value of memorisation has, therefore, been contested, and the practice of memorisation calls into question not only what is being memorised but how and why it is memorised. In terms of this point, Sedgwick (2003) draws a useful distinction between different types of memorisation. Remembering by heart implies the engagement of feelings and, therefore, an aesthetic experience, whereas remembering by rote invokes ideas of mechanical recall without any felt engagement. Any teacher wanting to explore memorisation as a pedagogical technique must, therefore, be alert to why and how they are using this method and what its value is to their students.

Following the reinstatement of the memorisation of poetry in the primary curriculum in 2012, there has been revived interest in the practice of remembering by heart. The *Poetry By Heart* and *Poetry and Memory Project*, initiated by the University of Cambridge in 2014, sought to explore empirical evidence for the memorisation of poetry and much of the following research is drawn from this source.

Research preceding and including the work of academics at the University of Cambridge has suggested the experience of meter in poetry boosts not only memory but also aesthetic appreciation of poetry (Van Peer, 1990; Jaques and Whitely, 2019). In terms of pedagogy, Pullinger (2012) undertook a small-scale purposive sample of English teachers at all levels and types of education in the UK, which showed that many teachers do not use this method. This may be connected to the fact in the current education system, performance is largely separated from knowledge of poems, Pullinger and Whitely (2016). I would contend this is particularly likely to be the case in A level English, where assessment is the end product of a high-stakes learning experience based on written exams. The role of memory and memorisation of poems is briefly discussed in *Analysis and Discussion.*

Drawing on large-scale mixed-method research across the UK, Pullinger and Whitely (2016) reported that people, in general, have many rich experiences with memorised poems. A purposive sample of 500 people from a broad demographic reported memorised poems as

existing within a 'web of deeply personal association' (2016, p. 317) and as a 'personal and embodied experience' (2016, p. 319). This clearly suggests the potential of memorisation to promote aesthetic connection with poems. In Vygotskian terms, it could be argued that through memorisation of poems, people psychologically introject poems, actively making them part of their inner cultural life.

The potential of poetry memorisation in the classroom is supported by Cliff Hodges (2016), who undertook small-scale qualitative research with trainee teachers. She found that choral reading for class performance 'impels students to debate the poems' meanings and the ensuing dialogue is usually reflexive because participants make connections between the poetry and their wider knowledge of life in order to understand what each poem means' (2016, p. 378).

Cliff Hodges's work is important as a reminder that memorisation intimately relates to performance and drama, whether performed for an external audience or solely in the head of the person who has memorised the poem. The regard teachers have for different kinds of poetry performance is reported in Pullinger and Whitely's (2013) research cited above. They undertook in-depth interviews with poetry teachers from a variety of educational contexts: Key stage 1 – higher education level. Most of those interviewed for this small-scale but wide-ranging research worried that focusing only on written poetry 'may short-circuit sensuous, embodied and emotional apprehension' (2013, p. 162)

In summary, research from the University of Cambridge's poetry project reveals interesting and contradictory attitudes toward memorisation of poetry. Teachers at all phases of education feel that poetry is written to be heard, and therefore, an emphasis on performance in some way is important. However, as a method, memorisation is neglected, perhaps because of its historical associations with learning verse as a form of educational discipline (Martin, 2012).

Finally, I briefly turn to drama because it constitutes a powerful medium (Naylor and Wood, 2012) through which students can explore poems. Although popular books and websites support the use of dramatic devices to teach poetry, at the time of writing (March 2022), the Poetry Society offers just one free online resource at A level, and this relates to going to the theatre rather than using drama in the classroom. I did not find primary research relating to the use of drama to teach poetry at A level in the UK.

In a tangential but, I would argue, relevant piece of research, Vodickova (2009) explores her own English as a Foreign Language classroom in which students interpret a poem through the use of drama. Vodickova argues that the value of dramatic interpretation of poetry lies not in performance but because it is active and 'everybody is an actor and also observer at the same time' (2009, p. 150). Dramatic exploration, I would argue, has the potential to strongly complement a reader response perspective because drama in the classroom based on imaginative role-taking necessarily has a tolerant approach to diverse interpretations of texts.

2.13.5 Group Discussion and Dialogue

Earlier in this chapter, when scoping out theoretical approaches to reading, I discussed the importance of dialogue in relation to making meaning and responding to poetry. Dialogue is significant from a Vygotskian perspective because it draws on internal and external language practices and the power of discourse. In pedagogical terms, teachers often act as 'more knowledgeable others' to support dialogic learning in whole and small group discussions.

Probst (1996, p. 136) cited the use of individual journals as they set up dialogue with texts. This is because 'the task of writing entries draws the reader into collaboration with the text in the making of meaning'. Turning to the concept of internal dialogue, Sumara (2001) researched the use of journaling using what he calls a 'Commonplace book' with high school students in the USA. This involved students annotating a literary text with drawings, associations, and questions – in effect, creating an individual dialogue with the text, which was then shared externally with peers, after which students re-read the book to reinvestigate the text. The aim was to encourage both individual and shared aesthetic responses to literature.

I now turn to research which focuses on group discussion because, from a social constructivist perspective, discussions have an enormous capacity for building connections to poetry in the classroom. Wilhelm, in his book of practical advice for teaching adolescents literature, writes that teachers should 'leverage the social context of peer teaching' (2016, p. 40) to draw on small group reading and discussion.

Two large-scale studies are pertinent to this theme. First, in a mixed-method study of literature classrooms, Marshall *et al.* (1995) studied how language is used in the classroom, exploring both large and small group talk. They found that student responses in both large and small

groups are profoundly shaped by the permissions and modelling of the teacher. Most significantly they found that in small groups adolescents respond personally to texts, making connections between their lives and texts to make sense of the story. This contrasts with whole class interaction where the teacher tends toward a monologic and directive role; student responses tend to be informative and, therefore I would argue 'efferent' in nature. Whilst this research is not specifically about poetry it is reasonable to assume that this supports the use of small group work as a useful dialogical tool for teaching poetry.

From a Russian context Mironova (2019) undertook quantitative experimental work in a large secondary school. The research drew directly on the insights of Bakhtin and dialogic methods of teaching referred to earlier in this chapter. Researchers intervened in the teaching of poetry using what they describe as 'psychodidactic methods'. This is explained as 'the area of educational that integrates psychological, didactic and subject knowledge, while shifting the emphasis to students' personal development' (2019, 135) The research essentially involved emphasising discussion and creative interaction with an intervention group and transmission teaching with the control. Mironova reported significantly more creative interaction and active meaning making with the discussion group again, suggesting small groups are an excellent way to leverage peer learning.

'Think aloud' protocols, originating with Dias and Heyhoe (1988) in which students read and vocalise their experiences and ideas about poems as they read have been used by many in small-scale qualitative studies exploring students from 12 -18 years e.g., Peskin (1998), Eva-Wood (2002/2004). Researched benefits include greater pleasure and understanding of poems reported by students (Eva-Wood, 2004), which suggests that aesthetic and cognitive benefits complement each other.

In relation to this, Brett (2016) undertook small-scale research for his doctoral studies to explore *what kind* of discussion strategies allow for attention both to understanding technical elements of poems and empathic responses. Brett coded transcriptions of student discussions to find points where students engage with what he terms 'authorial empathy'. These are important moments of balance, according to Brett, because when students find 'authorial empathy', they are able to work with the text of the poem not only to understand its technical prowess but also to explore how the author takes decisions to invite different kinds of readings. In authorial readings, students can move between the craft of the poem and explore the social and emotional impact and relevance of the work to them.

2.13.6 A Multimodal Approach

A multimodal approach to learning refers to embodied learning which draws on multiple senses and activities of the learner (Massaro, 2012) in the belief that physical engagement supports cognitive processes. Lennox, Small and Keeling (1978) undertook small-scale quasi-experimental research at two all-male high schools in New Zealand to comparatively test different approaches to teaching poetry. They aimed to increase both understanding and enjoyment of poetry. Written in 1978, the researchers do not describe their research as multimodal. However, the activities the intervention class undertook, such as responding to poems using any medium available and undertaking varieties of different types of reading do, I believe, qualify it as such. The research found that whilst this rich mix of teaching and learning did increase understanding of poetry it did not make a very significant difference to enjoyment of poetry. The authors speculated that this may be because the intervention took place over three months and attitudes may take more time to shift than this.

In small-scale research, administering questionnaires to undergraduates, Hilscher and Cupchik (2005) explored different types of reading. They wanted to find out if there are differences between different modes of reading. They found that a majority of students engaged more with poems and reported greater satisfaction and connections with poems when they read them to themselves rather than hearing others read them. This finding suggests that not all modes of engagement are equal in relation to poetry and that reading may be a more significant component of meaning making than, for example, watching a video of someone else reading a poem.

In related work, Unrath and Statz (2011) describe exploratory research into multimodal approaches to teaching a novel in higher education. Fourteen teachers of literature and teachers of visual arts collaborated to explore visual as well as discursive responses to their reading. Learning was subsequently taken into their graduate classes. Unrath and Statz report that,

> ‘risk taking and creativity … transformed (their teaching and) … we came to understand the importance of giving our students opportunities to demonstrate different ways of knowing’ (2011, pp. 33–34).

This strongly suggests the benefits of a multimodal approach to not only pedagogy but to teachers and students.

In an Australian case study, Bowmer and Kirkwood (2016) explored the use of digital and popular culture to enhance teenage students' understanding of and connection with Romantic poetry. They discuss the art of 'remixing', defined as the 'practice of taking cultural artifacts and combining them in new and creative ways.' (Curwood, 2013, p. 84). Bowmer and Kirkwood found that remixing greatly increased student interest and creative responses to poems, concluding that engagement with 'today's cultural tools and multimodal texts (makes) … poetry meaningful and relevant for students.' This conclusion has been supported in an English context by Yandell's research into GCSE English classrooms (2008/2014), which extends the notion of multimodal to include the body in movement, gesture and voice as a cultural tool. Remixing has also been researched in the teaching of A level English by Collyer *et al.* (2020), who used vlogs with adolescent students to explore responses to Blake's poetry. They found that vlogs could promote engaged learning but also caution that teachers should 'not assume that incorporating popular culture into lessons is automatically more appealing for pupils' (2020, p. 56).

Multimodal approaches to teaching and learning particularly relate to the concept of 'third spaces' in education (Pahl and Kelly, 2005). This concept is originally associated with Lefebvre (1901–1991) and post-colonial studies of Bhabha (1994), who applies it to liminal spaces between social worlds where different discourses and unequally competing ideas meet and might become transformed. Third Spaces have been referred to by Gutierrez (2008, p. 148) in Vygotskian terms as 'a kind of ZPD': places where teachers and students can explore texts relatively flexibly and realise literacies and meanings that are not privileged in the classroom. Moje *et al.* (2004) researched adolescent discourse and literacy practices in science courses. They argue that there are a number of ways of seeing the purpose of third spaces. For example, they can be seen as ways of becoming familiar with different discourses or as a way of bringing together discourses to create new ones. For Moje, a further necessary purpose of third spaces is to build bridges between home and school knowledge (in my case college knowledge). Third spaces can be virtual or physical, such as through the internet, playgrounds or clubs and what marks them out is that they are at the intersection of dominant institutions such as home, school or college. According to Moje *et al.* (2004), third spaces can create new and transformative types of knowledge.

In educational terms, ‘third spaces’ are associated with critical approaches to literacy (Street, 1994), which emphasise literacy not as a set of individually acquired skills (the autonomous model) but as a set of many intersecting and unequally valued social practices (the ideological model). Where third-space learning is realised, a merging is possible between the cultural practices of home and school. Potter and McDougall (2017) characterise this as ‘dynamic literacies’. In educational research, ‘third spaces’ have been explored in many ways. For example, Wilson (2000) explored literacy and prisoner identities and Levy (2008) applied the concept to children learning to read.

2.13.7 Key Points

This section discussed a variety of strategies that are supported in recent research as enabling students to make meaning with poems. McGuinn (in Dymoke *et al.*, 2014) entreats students and teachers to ‘loosen up when they engage with poetry’ (2014, p. 15), and there are many eclectic approaches to promote engagement with poems that lecturers in colleges may take. The strategies that teachers adopt can be seen to depend on whether they focus on knowledge or learning. If the former is adopted, the task of the teacher is seen to be passing on ‘something to be preserved, transmitted from generation to generation, not something to be made’ (Yandell, 2014, p. 147). Strategies may then become about rote learning and reproduction of transmitted knowledge where active engagement is unnecessary. However, if one accepts that knowledge is inseparable from knowing and is endlessly recreated through learning then active strategies are essential. The ideological positions teachers take in relation to teaching poetry are explored in my research. Different types of active reading and discussion set by teachers are significant, but given that adolescents can take a meta-view of their own learning (Benton, 1988), introducing perspectives on reading and enabling reflective choices around these seem to be a valuable use of limited classroom time. A further common theme that runs throughout pedagogical research on teaching poetry is the importance of drawing on student’s own cultural knowledge and experiences to make meaningful connections with poems. Finally, Atherton, Green and Snapper (2013) advise that when reading poetry, it is important for students to appreciate its ambivalent inclusion in the curriculum and understand that poems and the experiences they offer are not, in essence, ever intended to be confined within the classroom.

This section on teaching strategies has shown that there is little research specifically concerned with strategies for teaching adolescent responses to poetry taught at A level in the further education sector. In this respect, my research seeks to add to new knowledge. A neighbour of my research is that of Small (1990/2009). From a reader response perspective, Small tracked, using written responses, the aesthetic engagement of adolescent students reading poems. However, his research took place 25 years before mine in a different social and political context to today's high-stakes examination environment. Furthermore, Small's research was based on an intervention workshop with a small number of students from one institution. His aim was to devise an analytical model for tracing types of response. My own research is innovative because it takes place across four colleges, capturing teacher and student verbal responses to poetry as it is taught in class. My research is also distinctive because it seeks to triangulate findings drawing on teacher interviews and student focus groups. For these reasons, I can claim that my work has the potential to offer new insights into how students and teachers in further education colleges currently read poems for 'personal meaning'.

Having offered an overview of strategies in relation to teaching and learning poetry, I now hone in on recent developments in the field of reader response and indicate their relevance to my research.

2.14 Recent Developments in Reader Response

Reader response is not a unified field. Theorists and researchers emphasise the relative importance of the text and the reader differently. The following reviews recent developments in the field undertaken this century. As previously discussed, the foundations of reader response theory were established in the 20th century, beginning with the work of Rosenblatt (1938). Benton (2004) reports that some of the first explorations of reader responses to literature involved adolescents. For example, Squires (1964) categorised responses to short stories, finding a correlation between personal involvement in reading and increased literary judgements. In the late 20th century reader response theories were extended, for example, by Iser (1978), Fish (1980), and Rabinowitz (1998). In the 21st century, there have been empirical explorations of adolescent reading in international contexts, some of which have been discussed in this chapter, for example, Peskin and Wells-Jopling (2012), Enright, Torres-Torreti and Carreon (2012), and Xerri (2013, 2016).

Willis states the parameters of reader response research in the following terms: 'The interpretative practices of contemporary real-life readers, their affective responses and the things they can do with texts, cannot be inferred from those texts, but must be studied in their own right' (Willis, 2018, p. 88). Studies take many forms. In order to review recent research in the field, I have divided what follows into three areas: research using experimental approaches, research situated in the classroom, and more recent theoretical innovations relating to concepts of 'attunement' and 'resonance'. I relate the latter to the role of music in adolescence.

2.15 Literature Reviewed

In *Reception*, Willis (2018) provides a conceptual and thematic overview of the field. This text proved useful for providing a bird's eye view of contemporary debates about how texts are received and interpreted. Willis contextualises the rich history of reader response theories as they relate to each other and the broader sphere of reception studies, which is concerned with matters as diverse as historical reading practices and resistant readings in a digital age. According to Willis, reception studies transforms 'the whole field of literary and textual analysis, by transforming the way in which we conceive of the text as object … (to) … challenge and undermine many of the assumptions, definitions, and practices of 'straight' literary criticism' (2018, p. 166).

Reading Willis led to further reading of research articles and journals. A search of the EBSCO database was undertaken using recent data parameters and key search terms around 'reader response', 'research and theory', and 'schools and colleges. The *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* was particularly useful.

I surveyed recent PhDs using the online tool ETHOS. There have been many reader response studies this century from a wide variety of contexts. My search confirmed that no primary research has been conducted at this level, which centres on adolescents reading poetry in classrooms since Pike's *Keen Readers* research in 2000. In 2017, Iordanaki explored children reading wordless picture books from a socio-cultural perspective of reader response, and the literature review in this has been a useful resource for finding related work, for example, Brooks and Browne (2012). In 2018, Udowiczenko conducted an exploration into teaching Romantic poetry to 'teenagers'. Her perspective is that the ideals of the Romantic poets represent a pedagogical challenge for teachers to create a liberal and 'liberalising' educational

experience for teenagers. Udowiczenko's research borders mine as she explores the impact of the commodification of education in England in relation to the teaching of poetry. However, her methodology is based on grounded theory, and the research takes place in schools. In addition, from a liberal perspective, her work does not problematise the concept of 'personal response'. For these reasons, I conclude this is further evidence that my study is making an original contribution to knowledge.

2.16 Research Using Experimental Approaches

Experimental approaches to research rely on designed interventions which explore cause and effect between phenomena (Coe *et al.*, 2017). Miall (2007) summarised this approach. Studies in this tradition rely on the manipulation of one factor in the reading experience, such as the context of the reading or the use of particular 'defamiliarising' language to track how people feel and think as they read. Many rely on recent technological innovations such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) This field of research is, therefore, not concerned so much with interpretations per se as it is with the act of neuro/psychological interpretation itself. Examples include Kane's research (2004), which explored the role of the right hemisphere in processing poetic features of language and Diessner *et al.* (2008), who devised 'The Engagement with Beauty Scale' to measure how people respond to 'natural' 'artistic' and 'moral' beauty. More recently, the poet Helen Mort explored the interface between neuroscience and poetry (2015). Research in this area is outside of my socio-cultural perspective on reading in the classroom. However, research in this field is important because it articulates that feeling is related to cognition, which clarifies and confirms my understanding of Rosenblatt's terms for *aesthetic* response. Miall, for example, argues that feeling has a primary role in how we read:

> 'At the highest level the goals and beliefs of the self are instantiated in the feelings; thus it seems likely that feeling plays a determining role in cognitive processing (perception memory and reasoning) when this is performed in the service of the self.' (2007, p. 48).

Miall accepts that feeling as a subjective force is difficult to track and yet has enormous power to direct reading for three reasons. Firstly, feeling is self-referential; readers move toward texts to make sense of them in terms of their own meanings and experiences. Secondly, feelings are cross-domain; they allow us to connect different and unfamiliar elements in the text. Finally, feelings are anticipatory, suggesting our stance toward the next part of the text we encounter.

This was a helpful dynamic to remember as I traced responses to poems unfolding in the classroom.

2.17 Research in the Classroom

In 2003, Pike theorised that different types of readers have different capacities for experiencing an aesthetic response. He explored adolescent journals kept to record responses to poems taught in classrooms. From this, he developed a model of six types of readers: associative, investigative, speculative, affective, cognitive, and passive. Associative readers who make links between the text and their own lives and who seek to connect events with themes and gaps in the text are the most likely to actively experience an aesthetic encounter with poems. In what ways and to what extent readers can be prompted to make these connections has been explored in subsequent research.

Using a quasi-experimental approach and instructional intervention Levine (2014), explored the value of teaching affective evaluation of literary texts. A group of students in an American high school were taught to purposefully draw on and evaluate their own interpretative responses to a poem and extract from a novel. Although the sample was small analysis of student responses showed richer interpretation and greater ability to understand abstract and symbolic language amongst the intervention group. Affective responses to poetry amongst UK undergraduates have also been explored in a small-scale qualitative study by Rumbold and Simecek (2016). They found that promoting affective responses supports students' capacities to analyse and value poetry.

Using grounded theory, Brooks and Browne (2012) attempted to theorise how culture enables the interpretation of literary texts. Their focus is on the experiences of early adolescent (11–14-year-old) African American students responding to African American texts. Taking hook's (1990) concept of 'homeplace' -the cultural and social 'sense of self, personhood and identity' (2012, 83), as a starting place, they develop a typology of cultural influences. They argue that key influences on how adolescent readers interpret texts include ethnicity, peers, community, and family. I note that there is no direct mention of economic status or social conception of class anywhere within the study; rather, this is implied as a subsidiary effect of other cultural influences. This is something with which I would take issue because, from a Critical Realist perspective, economic and social class is a key aspect of educational experience.

Where Brooks and Browne's study is most significant is in their reporting that tracking and classifying adolescent responses is difficult because 'responses are overlapping, transient and often revised, as is consistent with the nature of cultural practices and the fact paced give and take of discussions' (2012, p. 83). This demonstrates the difficulty of understanding the shifting and invisible process of reading and some of the limitations of imposing a framework in advance of the interpretations students make. As the works of Pike and Brooks and Browne illustrate, there are many possible taxonomies for classifying reading practices.

This issue of transient and varied responses and the difficulty of research has been investigated more recently by Simon *et al.* (2019) in Toronto, Canada. From a similar socio-cultural perspective as Brooks and Browne, they study how meanings are constructed by closely tracking reader response inquiry groups made up of trainee teachers and secondary students. A key premise of the research is that reader response has 'reoriented pedagogies of reading' away from taking meaning to making it. In the light of this, teachers should promote the teaching of theoretical lenses for reading (e.g., post-colonial, queer or feminist perspectives). They conclude that in our fragmented and divisive political landscape, collective reading is unlikely to emerge from shared discussion of texts. Excerpts of their transcripts of student responses show how people make meaning not only from their personal perspective but from the perspectives of characters in novels and how the flow of conversation enables 'a dizzying array of issues raised in their transaction with the novel' (2019, p. 184). They conclude that rather than search for completed interpretations, researchers should understand that reading is 'cosmopolitan' and there is a 'precarity and open-endedness … (to) … collective deliberation' (2019, p. 180). Researchers must accept that themes are fleeting and emergent, and we should abandon any search for typologies of meaning. Understanding the world of the text 'is not just an interpretive transaction that individuals navigate – it is the opening of a shared political project' (2019, p. 181). This is an interesting discussion about the nature of differences in interpretation and the impossibility of certainty in relation to interpretation. However, the research does not take account of the limitations imposed on teachers by the exam regime and the difficulties encountered by teachers in reorienting reading from taking to making meaning.

Other recent research has centred around what teachers can do to develop 'personal responses' to literary texts. The premise of primary research relating to pedagogy and reader response is that reader response can foster 'critical readers and thinkers because they are not simply told

how to think about a text, but must justify their multiple interpretations of a text using textual evidence and support' (Woodruff and Griffin 2017, p. 108)

There is little agreement, however, about the extent to which readers can be prompted to make connections in a classroom where reader response approaches are prioritised. Spirovska (2019) developed a typology of reading to explore dimensions of response to literary texts. Her research with English Literature undergraduates in Macedonia found that whilst many could personally respond to novels using empathy and imagination, an ability to connect at a 'higher critical stage', one which recognises the role and relationships of author and reader 'exploring their identities as a readers' (2019, p. 26) is much harder to attain although discussion and debate has the potential to facilitate this connection.

More optimistically, perhaps, Louie (2005) argues that in the context of secondary students in the USA, a reader response approach to reading enables students to connect and empathise with texts that are outside their immediate sphere of experience. In this small-scale qualitative study, teachers used multimodal texts such as simulation, film, posters, and discussion to prepare students for reading an unfamiliar text. The role of discussion was found to be crucial for constructing empathic and diverse responses. Louie's research is set in a secondary school, but the importance of teacher interventions and the use of multimodal texts with students aged 16–18 is relevant to my study.

A more recent study to use the concept of 'adolescence' is Park (2012) in her qualitative, yearlong exploration of girls reading novels in a voluntary book club in the USA. Parks' research reinforces the power of communal reading: students in this study said that they changed their understanding of themselves through reading and relating to others reading in the club. In common with Spirovska, Park finds that whilst adolescent students are capable of insight into texts, they are not always capable of critical reading, and she suggests this may be a developmental issue. This dovetails with my own approach which cites Kegan's psychological and developmental model as an understanding of how adolescents think. Park's work recognises that 'reading communities existed outside of the classroom and were often invisible to the teacher' (2012, p. 208). Her work, in common with that of Moje *et al.* (2008), which reviewed in a mixed-method study the reading habits of adolescents, challenges the deficit model that some teachers attribute to adolescent readers. In this study, adolescents self-

report poetry reading as more popular than comics, religious books, biographies, and non-fiction.

Both studies recognise the social capital that adolescents build through informal reading networks. Park proposes that teachers of adolescents need to move 'beyond valuing individual responses and personal connections to literature, and instead create opportunities for students to insert themselves – their ideas, questions and stories – into a community of readers' (2012, p. 193) In my research I explore where teachers make similar bridges for their students.

2.18 Recent Theoretical Innovations: 'Resonance', 'Attunement' and the Importance of Music

Resonance, as defined by Stockwell (2009, p. 27), 'refers to the readerly feeling that certain powerful literary texts leave a long-lasting and ineffable sense of significance'. I argue that this concept of resonance is useful for understanding aesthetic connection, particularly as it has been recently explored by Rosa (2019).

Dimock (1997) relates the concept of resonance to poetry in a discussion about the ways in which poems move across time and place. Against a conservative proposition that poems survive in a canon because of their integral greatness, Dimock argues that the reason poems survive is not because of their fixity but because of their mutability. 'Across time, every text must put up with readers on different wavelengths, who come at it tangentially and tendentiously, who impose semantic losses as well as gains' (1997, p. 1061). The power of poems, she argues, lies in what she calls the 'timeful unwieldiness' of their sound and the ways that they are recreated in aural effects. The bodily experience of sound and speech are therefore anchored, in Dimock's view, to how poems are recreated and experienced.

On this theme, Korsemya (2007) writes that in the early 21st century, there was a 'bodily turn' in the study of philosophy. This is a radical disavowal of Enlightenment dualism: the idea that mind and matter are separated. She states:

> 'Attention to advances in brain science, renewed interest in evolutionary theorising and perhaps increasing discomfort over the qualifications that are required to refer to anything as 'mental' has led philosophers to speculate … that bodily phenomena play a larger role in

understanding traditional philosophical problems than was previously believed' (2007, p. 53).

This, she argues, has led to a re-evaluation of how we understand aesthetic experiences so that, as Dimock suggests, they involve the response of the whole body, sensations beyond the ear and eye.

Rosa (2019) develops this idea in his discussion of the 'sociology of the good life'. He draws attention to the ways in which modern capitalist societies have hugely accelerated our relationships with the world, between each other and to resources. He argues that the current pace of exploitation has disrupted systemic relationships between ecology, democracy, and economy. This has psychological consequences as the relationship between self and others becomes dysfunctional. Rosa argues we are obsessed with ownership and drawn to experience the world, ourselves, and our relationships as resources rather than creative opportunities. 'If acceleration is the problem, then resonance may well be the solution' (2019, p. 9). He defines 'resonance' as a capacity learnt in early childhood attachments. It is essentially the ability to connect to the world differently through, for example, love, art, nature, and intense discussions. Rosa's juxtaposition of resonant experiences with alienated ones is important as it recontextualises an aesthetic encounter within the accelerating pace of today's capitalist societies and reinforces previous arguments concerning systemic pressures faced by teachers and students in colleges.

Felski further describes resonance as the ability to have an encounter with another in which resonation is more than an echo. 'Resonance is a process of becoming attuned to something that alters one's being in the world, and that has cognitive, affective and bodily dimensions' (Felski, 2020, p. 407). In this sense, she likens 'resonance' to the developmental concept of 'attunement'. This developmental concept states that 'infants begin life in a relational state, gradually organising a sense of embodied selfhood out of experiences of attuned interactions with other people' (Davis, 2019, 369). Rosa (2019) says that resonance is the opposite of alienation; when we resonate, we feel moved and connected to the world. This resonance can be found in many places, and like the philosopher Hume (1757), Rosa sees it as a common human capacity and resource. The experience of resonance may be 'elusive, uncertain and often unpredictable' (Felski, 2020, p. 413), but it can be found in many places, including art, food, and poems.

Dyson (2019) and Bickman (2020) have begun to explore resonance in relation to teaching literature courses to young adults. Reflecting on her experiences of teaching undergraduates, Dyson cites the problems of close critical reading, which she says 'all too often denies the ties that bind readers and texts to the world' (2019, p. 541). She believes it does this through the use of exclusionary language and impersonal positions, which 'can be passive aggressive, demanding a specific orientation to the text while limiting readers sense of urgency' (2019, p. 539). Her recommendations are for teachers to read 'sideways', for example, by exploring the meaning and production of book covers, reading collaboratively and imaginative responses such as reviewing novels in a haiku. These, she hopes will restore reconstructive and productive voices to the classroom.

In a recent polemical review of reader response, Bickman (2020) supports this view. He argues that reader response needs to move from being a point of academic debate to 'a reconceptualization of what we could do that could change the structures of authority in the classroom' (2020, p. 239). An important starting point is the recognition that there is dissonance between the fact that whilst many teachers accept postmodern values of relative and varied interpretations, they are tied to old practices of quantitative grading through linear essays. He calls for teachers to 'really listen to students and one another, letting our work change the shape and nature of education rather than vice versa' (2020, p. 239).

In my research, the concept of 'resonance' is an addition to understanding student response because it draws attention to the bodily aspects of personal engagement and aesthetic response. Dimock reminds us that sound is an important aspect of meaning making and that texts can emerge and re-emerge across time and place in different ways as their sounds are recreated.

In terms of sound, there is a considerable body of research showing that music is especially important for adolescents Saarikallio, Randall and Baltazar (2020). Engagement with music has been seen to have significant and varied developmental impacts (Miranda, 2013).

Primary quantitative research has shown that 'music has profound psychological connotations for adolescents' (North, Hargreaves and O'Neill, 2000, p. 270). Lincoln's (2005) qualitative research explores how adolescents manipulate music to shape their daily lives and how enjoyment of music has been positively correlated to good mental health among adolescents

(Laiho, 2004). Music has been described as an important resource for adolescents, which they enjoy and exploit in order to explore their 'possible selves, rehearse social roles, manage intergroup dynamics and envisage future orientations' (Miranda, 2013, p. 12).

At an individual level, Elvers (2016) has theorised the role of music as 'self-enhancing', capable of evoking deep emotional connections and increasing self-confidence. I would suggest this may be of particular relevance to adolescents. The work of Panksepp (1995, p. 171) is also significant as he explores the 'powerful emotional effect induced by music ... a shivery, gooseflesh type of skin sensation (commonly called 'chills' or 'thrills'), which may reflect the brain's ability to extract specific kinds of emotional meaning from music'. Panksepp's studies of college-age students demonstrate the power of both 'sad' and 'happy' music to impact mood. Finally, North (2000) and Sarrikallio (2007) suggest that music is adolescents 'go to' aesthetic art form because it supports self-exploration, identity work and emotional regulation. In this sense, music can be seen to play a key developmental role in adolescence, increasing their senses of self-agency and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982).

2.19 Key Points

I conclude that there is no common agreement in recent research about the ways in which adolescent readers in formal education experience aesthetic reading. Reports seem to vary according to whether researchers use a descriptive schema or not. There are some common themes running across recent research in terms of the kinds of activities that teachers might engage in to promote opportunities for aesthetic or 'resonant' readings, and this includes activities such as moving from purely essay writing and engaging in what Dyson (2019) calls 'sideways' activities which encourage creative and reconstructive activities across multimodal texts.

Dimock's point that texts endure because of their ability to engage with different audiences at different times does not address how poems enter a canon or how powerful social interests may shape that canon. In my study, students are asked to read, experience, and ultimately analyse poems regardless of whether these subjectively resonate with them, and this forms the context for my research.

I believe that the cultural divide around the experiences of reading studies such as those explored by Parks (2012), Brooks and Browne (2012), and Simons (2019) are significant areas for my research. Like these studies, I have researched the cultural capital that students bring to their reading and the bridges that teachers make to enable connections to be made. These are explored within the context of the classroom and in relation to possible 'third spaces' discussed above. The concept of resonance and its relationship to music is also important for my study, as the literature suggests that adolescents make important connections with music. Whether and how this relates to poetry was investigated in my research through lesson observations and focus groups.

Whilst Bickman (2020) offers a rallying call for reader response 'resistance pedagogy', he does not address teacher perspectives on the possible limitations of this in the current managerial curriculum and assessment regime. My research intends to contribute to understanding these pressures by drawing on teacher interviews and observations.

Finally, the studies I have cited above, with the exception of Spirovska (2017) and Udowiczenko (2018), take place in North American contexts. This further supports the relevance and originality of my research, which was conducted at London colleges.

2.20 Chapter Summary

Part 1 of this chapter has presented a review of literature relating to poetry and poetry reading, adolescence, personal meaning, and aesthetic response.

I understand poetry to be a versatile art form that works through the careful evocation of language. I take the social constructivist perspective of Vygotsky (1978, 1896) to argue that language is both a shared cultural tool and a means of expression which is deeply and personally inhabited. In this way, the concept of 'personal meaning and response' is located as both individually experienced and culturally shaped and produced.

Poetry offers experiences with language that are capable of evoking varied and significant aesthetic responses. Aesthetic responses to poems occur when people are creatively engaged within the world of the poem. When we have an aesthetic response, we experience heightened

attention to and entanglement with the experience of reading. There is a kind of 'gestalt' sense of completeness to meaning (Rosenblatt, 1994).

Aesthetic response is one of many possible responses to poetry, and therefore, I have reviewed what it means to read poetry through a variety of theoretical perspectives. A reader response perspective provides a lens through which to understand how adolescents in Further Education colleges experience personal meaning and responses to poems. Theorists such as Rosenblatt (1938, 1994, 2005), Iser (1978), and Fish (1980), who emphasise the importance of readers as culturally informed and active participants in the process of reading, are a good theoretical fit for my research. Rosenblatt's (1994) spectrum of reading stances from efferent to aesthetic is especially useful. This is because it provides both a theoretical understanding of aesthetic response and suggests a means through which to track adolescent responses. In my methodology chapter I discuss the relevance of Sipe's (2000) framework for understanding literary responses in the classroom. This framework, first introduced in 2000 and fully explicated by Sipe in 2008, maps to Rosenblatt's spectrum of reading stances and is a useful basis for understanding literary response in the classroom.

I have identified the concept of 'adolescence' as a social construct rooted in biological and neurological changes. During adolescence, humans undergo significant physical and psychological changes, which are contained and shaped in different ways by different societies. I have drawn on literature from a variety of sources, including neurological (e.g., Giedd, 2008; Blakemore, 2018), psychological (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Bandura, 1982, 1995), and social developmental studies, in particular Kegan (1994), to explore both internal and external challenges that adolescents face in contemporary society. I conclude that adolescents are well-placed to experience poetry in new ways. They are capable of making significant 'personal meaning' with poems and responding to them aesthetically.

In my research the possibility of personal and aesthetic responses to poetry are shaped by the context of the A level English curriculum and the context of inner London further education colleges and classes. These are explored in part 2 of my literature research.

I have discussed historical changes to and the current position of poetry in A level English Literature and English Language and Literature. Poetry is a compulsory element of study but is currently weighted toward a conservative canon of literature prescribed by government. 'The

canon' constitutes a particular kind of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1993) which students must engage with in order to pass exams. I anticipate that for students and teachers in my study, there may be tensions between the cultural capital they bring to the classroom and that which is validated through assessment. I note that in terms of assessment outcomes, the concept of 'personal response' to poetry is very much secondary to analytic and thematic exploration.

I have shown how our present positivistic culture of education (Giroux, 1997) relies on the production of measurable, quantifiable knowledge as evidenced through exams. This is contrasted with the disruptive ways in which poetry draws attention to meaning and experience. Poetry, therefore, occupies an uncertain space within our education system (Cuthbert, 2019). There are deep tensions for, and between, teachers and students. Literature shows that they have to adopt efferent reading to pass exams whilst also perhaps being invested in different ways, and to a different extent, with the aesthetic possibilities of poetry and the value of 'personal response' (Hanratty, 2008; Hennessey *et al.*, 2011; Dymoke, 2014).

Finally, I have given an overview of the varied further education sector in England and considered further education classrooms as sites of situated learning. I have considered how teaching and learning strategies may encourage or inhibit adolescent students to respond personally to poetry at A level.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Introduction and Research Questions

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the overall philosophical approach adopted in this research. It outlines the theoretical framework and research approach within which this research is situated, sets out the research strategy and justifies the research tools. The context, strategy, and design of the study are also discussed. Data collection process, principles of analysis, ethical issues, and trustworthiness of the data are also discussed.

The following research questions frame the present study.

The main research question of this dissertation is: In what ways do adolescents studying English in the further education sector engage with poetry at the level of personal meaning and response? Subsidiary questions include:

1. How is the concept of 'personal response' defined and situated within the curriculum?
2. What teaching strategies do teachers use to prepare students to read for personal meaning?
3. What experiences and knowledge do students draw on in the construction and articulation of a personal response?
4. How is the process of constructing and articulating personal responses to poems reconciled with pressures to pass exams?
5. In what ways might knowledge of these processes lead to the enhancement of adolescent experiences of learning poetry?

The aim is to explore and interpret the different ways in which adolescents at sixth forms within London engage with poetry at the level of personal meaning. In particular, I investigate if and how students value and engage with poems for aesthetic satisfaction. This is explored in the context of an English education system, which focuses on meeting the requirements of an external exam. The role of teachers within this process is also explored as it supports or does not support students making and articulating 'personal responses' to taught poetry.

3.2 Philosophical Perspective and Overview

Hitchcock and Hughes (2001) define paradigms as systematic sets of beliefs that are underpinned by metaphysical claims to certain types of truth. Claims to truths are based on differing ontological and epistemological positions. Ontological truths relate to first principle ideas about the philosophical location of 'reality', and in terms of my research, this concerns the nature of the social world. Two polarised notions about social reality may be contrasted. Objectivism, or Realism, assumes reality to have an independent existence beyond consciousness, whereas a subjective, idealist approach assumes reality is constituted through and by consciousness shaped within a social world (O'Leary, 2017).

'Epistemological' statements refer to the means by which we can know anything (Hitchcock, and Hughes, 2001) and therefore inform methodological choices. Crudely characterised, social research from an 'objectivist' standpoint aims to uncover generalisable truths about social phenomena often through hypothesis and deduction, whereas research from a 'subjectivist' standpoint seeks to understand social phenomena in particular contexts using inductive methods (Coe *et al.*, 2017). Subjectivists consider that reality is relative and all knowledge essentially interpretative. Objectivists tend to be allied with quantitative methods, and Subjectivists with qualitative methods. However, it should be noted that whilst the contrast I am presenting represents fundamentally different ways of thinking about the social world, these are simplified positions. Holliday (2007,2) reminds us that 'social research is a complex area and attempts to divide it into hard categories will always suffer from oversimplification'. Research paradigms themselves are theoretical constructs and are, therefore, always contestable (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Ontological and epistemological positions are related conjectures – where a researcher assumes reality to lie informs how she goes about her research (Scotland, 2012). I decided to take a pragmatic approach to the apparent divide between perspectives and be guided by my research questions. My research questions involve understanding process, experience and meaning making. I want to understand the ways in which A level students based in North and East inner London colleges engage with poetry at the level of 'personal' meaning and aesthetic response.

3.3 Ontological Statement

I take the ontological position of Critical Realism as initially expounded by Bhaskar (1944–2014), which argues that reality exists objectively and independently of the minds of people. Critical realism takes a position which is distinct from what it judges to be the naïve realism of positivism and the excessive relativism of a wholly subjective approach. Reality, from a Critical Realist perspective, is not one-dimensional, nor can it be fully understood by empirical means. The social world is seen as stratified, complex, and liable to change (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020).

'Stratified' implies vertical layering, and Bhaskar (2008) identifies three domains, or levels, of reality which Buch-Hansen and Nielsen (2020) label as 'empirical', 'actual' and 'deep.' The empirical domain consists of that which we experience and observe. The actual domain is that which we experience, plus events and phenomena which we may or may not experience or see. Underpinning these two is a deeper reality which includes causal structures and mechanisms of social life. This is a vast area of reality which includes material as well as non-material things for example, technologies or social structures. The crucial point is that much that shapes our lives may not be directly experienced or observable. However, underlying causal mechanisms have the potential to affect reality at the empirical and actual levels.

From this perspective, human knowledge 'captures only a small part of a deeper and vaster reality' (Fletcher 2016,4). These considerations apply to both natural and social sciences. However, whereas natural sciences do not encounter the active intentions of the objects under study, social research must always contend with the consciousness, intentions and active understandings of the people involved in research. To some extent, social reality includes, therefore, intersubjective and dialogic accounts of an 'understood world of shared meaning, interpretation and culture' (Bogna, Raineri and Bell, 2020, p. 463). To explore any phenomena, whether natural or social, researchers must be informed by theory (Collier, 1994). Consequently, interpretative consciousness has to be explored along with theoretical and empirical data relating to social structures. This has important implications for my research.

My understanding is that the reality I am exploring has double-sided and mutually dependent aspects. Teaching and learning are both historical and cultural, embedded in the institutions

and practices we are socialised into. They are affected by present actions, which, in turn, are informed by these deeper realities.

A Critical Realist perspective allows me to explore both structures and the agency of people since these are both understood as key processes in the generation of reality. It releases me from what Danermark, Estrom and Karlsson (2019,2) call the 'dualistic … either or' approaches to research outlined in my introduction. Starting from a Critical Realist ontology, I can use different methods to explore the processes at work in the lived experience of the classroom whilst respecting the personal agency and ideas of people as they may aesthetically encounter poems.

In terms of the research process, CR draws me to the 'double hermeneutic' process (Danermark, Estrom and Karlsson, 2019) involved in my exploration. I must recognise my participants' and my own interpretations of the data generated. This matches well with the work of my project and encourages me to attend to the trustworthiness of my work (see *Credibility and Trustworthiness*, p. 139). I must be reflective and reflexive in how I work, and these features are specifically addressed in sections *Methodological Reflections* and *Reflexivity* toward the end of this chapter.

3.4 Epistemological Statement

Epistemology, from a Critical Realist view, is chosen in terms of its usefulness in the context of research aims rather than because it is a 'right' methodology. As Syed, Mingers, and Murray (2010, p. 8) state, 'Since CR accepts the existence of a variety of structures-material, social, conceptual- it also accepts that we need a variety of research methods to access them.'

In this way, ontological realism leads to epistemological relativism; how one researches depends on what is being researched and the extent to which human intervention impacts on and shapes the research. All knowledge is potentially fallible and liable to updating, 'while there can be justified beliefs … there can be no final theory, unsusceptible to revision and improvement' (Collier, 1994, p. 23). To summarise, as a paradigm, CR takes issue with both positivist and social constructivist understandings of knowledge. This is because positivists limit what can be known to empirical research, and social constructivists limit knowledge to the activities of language and discourse. As Fletcher argues, 'Despite the seeming opposition

between the constructivist and positivist perspectives, each reduces reality to human knowledge, whether that knowledge acts as lens or container for reality' (2017, p. 182).

In terms of my research in the social world of education, reality is understood as a continuous and emergent social construct; direct knowledge of what goes on in classrooms is not possible – there is no way to directly infer 'actual' and 'real' domains of life from empirical data alone (Collier, 1994). I need to attend to the social construction of knowledge within the structures of the college and the relationships of the classroom.

Critical Realism recognises the importance of historical structures of power and how these can influence and constrain the meanings people bring to their experiences (Howell, 2013). It seeks to work from and generate critical theory, which is critical 'in the sense that it attempts to distil the historical processes which have caused subjective meanings to become systematically distorted' (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p. 137). This chimes with the present research because, although students and teachers will bring many types of knowledge to bear on the construction of personal responses to poetry, some may be privileged above others. The high-stakes pressures of exams in our education system may lead to the production of some types of responses to poetry and the negation or suppression of others. My purpose is to illuminate, discuss and attribute plausible and defensible theoretical understanding to these processes and meanings.

3.5 Research Approach

My ontological and epistemological positions have led me to choose a predominantly interpretative approach for my research design, drawing on qualitative methodology.

In contrast to a positivistic outlook, which prizes 'explanation', the purpose of interpretative research is to understand, interpret and reconstruct. (Coe *et al.*, 2017) and this speaks powerfully to my research questions. From an interpretative perspective, the knower and the known are inextricably linked. Research findings are, in some ways, always created by the researcher in the process of researching, for example, through the framing of questions or the selection of data to present. The aim of my methodology is to initiate a process of hermeneutic understanding using interpretative research methods.

The interpretative tradition has a clear fit with the present research which explores how students create and articulate personal responses to poetry with their teachers at London colleges. This research is concerned with learning activities in the classroom as they are co-created by teachers and students in a local context. How students and teachers express their experiences and knowledge is the means through which engagement with poetry for personal response will be understood.

3.6 Qualitative Methodology

This is a qualitative research project. Qualitative research is commonly characterised as being concerned with the verbal or written representation and perspectives of those being researched. By contrast, quantitative research is associated with data and numerical representation. Hammersley (1992) argues that differences between the two have been distorted by convenient dichotomies of realist/idealist and inductive/deductive. This is misleading because it 'obscure(s) the breadth of issues and arguments involved in the methodology of social research' (Rogers 1989, p. 162) and leads to what Pring calls a 'false dualism of educational research' (2000, p. 44) Researchers, Pring argues, should work within the methodological framework most suited to their enquiry. Similarly, Mackenzie and Knipe argue that at the level of practice, a researcher should not identify as being a qualitative or quantitative researcher. Rather, 'a researcher may apply the data collection and analysis methods most appropriate for a particular research study' (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006, p. 199).

Taking a pragmatic view as advised above, my research methods follow a qualitative approach, which is most suited to 'local' and 'naturalistic' research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Holliday characterises qualitative social research as that which seeks to find out about specific actions and events and 'invites rather than tries to control the possibility of a rich variety of variables' (2007, p. 4). According to Silverman (2006), qualitative research also foregrounds questions about language and the role of social organisations. The purpose of these features is to draw a rich depiction of what is being studied and express differing perspectives of those engaged in the research.

Schreier (2001,51) suggests 'exploratory, inductively oriented … (studies) are suitable for identifying factors which influence text reception'. This speaks to my research, which explores how students and teachers construct meanings through the reading of poetry on Advanced

Level English courses. Rosenblatt's theory of reader response and Fish's work on communities of readers underpins my research. Both theories privilege the activities and expressions of groups and individuals as they read texts and construct meanings. I take the position that the negotiation of meaning through language and in debate and discussion is a matter of social construct rather than individual inspiration. In order to closely unpick and analyse these negotiations I have revised Sipe's (2000) framework, for exploring responses to literary texts. This is summarised on page 124 and in Appendix A.

To summarise, perceived advantages of qualitative research are summarised by Miles and Huberman (1994) and include deep exploration of a topic; a focus on lived experience; thick, rich descriptions of phenomena; and the advantages of the researcher perspective improving reliability. This last point highlights that qualitative research is reflexive, meaning that 'the inevitable role of the researcher in the research process … should be highlighted' (Hammersley 2004, p. 25).

3.7 Qualitative Design

At the level of design, there are many possible types of qualitative research depending on the questions that are being addressed (Aurini, Heath, and Howells, 2016). Merriam (1998) describes five types: a generic qualitative study, a case study, Ethnography, Phenomenology and Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory and Phenomenology were dismissed as possible designs. This research draws on existing theories and research to illuminate the neglected field of students studying poetry in further education colleges. It intends to generate new theories about aesthetic experiences of poetry, recognising that these – apparently personal experiences – are deeply grounded in language and social context. My research is also not entirely focused on the meanings given by small groups of participants, which is a hallmark of phenomenological enquiry (Creswell, 1998). Ethnography is a more attractive design in that this approach is 'a particular orientation to reality' (Yates, 1987, p. 62) concerned with meaning created from social interaction. However, ethnographic projects demand long periods of immersion in people's daily lives, gathering many types of data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This was not feasible for me to consider from my work context or the context of those participating in my research. Framing my research as a case study was considered as an option insofar as I am researching further education colleges. However, as my research took place over an extended period (three years) and across different types of further education colleges,

it does not present as an intensive study of bounded cases where cases from 'an integrated system' (Stake, 1995, p. 2).

My research is best characterised as generic and qualitative (Merriam, 1998). As an educational study, it draws from concepts, models and theories found in sociology, psychology and literary studies, as explored in my literature review. Ideas about language, thought, reading, aesthetic response and meaning making are all important and frame what I research: interactions in the classroom and participant accounts of those experiences from student and teacher perspectives. The methods that I decided are best suited to my research are observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. These are discussed under the heading *Research Methods*.

3.7.1 Analytical Tool: Adaptation of Sipe's (2000) Framework of Analytical Response to Literature

As discussed in my literature review, since the middle of the 20th century, researchers have explored child, adolescent and adult responses to poetry in a variety of ways. Sipe provides a framework for understanding literary responses that speak to my own research. Here, I describe his framework and my adaptation to it.

Sipe's original framework (2000/2008) was originally developed in a small-scale study with children aged six-eight in order to explore their responses to picture books read by a teacher in a classroom. It has since been applied to older primary student responses to storybooks (Braid and Finch, 2015). Until this research, it has not been applied to adolescents. Sipe's description of five literary impulses is partly derived from and can be broadly mapped to, Rosenblatt's efferent and aesthetic poles of reading. An abbreviated summary of Sipe's original framework (2000/2008) is below.

Aspect of literary understanding and response	**Stance, action, and function of text**
Analytical (hermeneutic/efferent impulse)	Child relates within text to analyse features Text as object
Intertextual (hermeneutic/efferent impulse)	Child relates across texts to link these Text as context

Personal (neither aesthetic nor hermeneutic)	Child relates to and from text to personalise. Text is stimuli
Transparent (aesthetic impulse)	Child enters the text to merge with it Text as identity
Performative (aesthetic impulse)	Child responds to text to perform or signify Text as platform

For the purposes of my research, I have revised Sipe's framework to better understand adolescent aesthetic response in the classroom. This is for two reasons. Firstly, I acknowledge that our reading contexts differ. In Sipe's research, children are read to and respond to one teacher reading a literary text (story). In my research, students are preparing for an exam in which they are read to, read alone, and are asked to read poetry in groups. In practical terms, the different contexts and purpose of reading may change the kinds of responses readers make. For example, I would anticipate greater and more sophisticated peer dialogue in my research. Secondly, and more significantly, I have argued that adolescents' range of life experiences, cultural tools, and, crucially, the kinds of thinking that they may bring to texts make their impulses more nuanced in terms of Rosenblatt's efferent/aesthetic poles.

Sipe's original typology of impulses toward making meaning from reading is compared with my revised framework, including illustrative examples (see Appendix A). What follows is a short description of his framework indicating where I propose adaptations for my research.

Sipe describes the first two aspects of literary response as analytical and contextual (see above). Both of these he labels hermeneutic readings which are concerned with the 'desire to master the text' Sipe (2008, p. 189). These responses can be mapped to Rosenblatt's 'efferent reading stance'. Sipe notes further that analytic reading is a dominant way of exploring texts and is actively encouraged by teachers introducing children to storybooks in groups. For younger children, Sipe argues that analytic reading includes mastery of both textual and non-textual features of story books, for example, the relationship between words and pictures. I believe this categorisation aligns with the dominant analytical assessment outcomes on English Literature and English Language and Literature A levels. This kind of reading may be seen as akin to the literary tradition of close analytic reading.

Sipe also designates a third aspect of literary response, which is intertextual reading (e.g., comparing a book to a film) as essentially hermeneutic. In Rosenblatt's terms, this matches to efferent reading. This is my first point of departure from the original framework. I would emphasise that intertextual readings for adolescents, especially in relation to music, are experiences which can also evoke Sipe's 'transparent' dimension of aesthetic response. The meaning of a 'transparent response' is discussed below; however, in this respect, my revised framework notes that intertextual readings may lead to hermeneutic *and* aesthetic reading experiences.

The third aspect Sipe classifies as a personal response, and this is concerned with actively experiencing the text in terms of the self in the world. Sipe explicitly describes this kind of reading for young children as neither hermeneutic nor aesthetic but concerned with identification. Children may connect their own experiences with items in the text or connect items from the text with their lives. For example, they may see a picture of a football and recognise playing football with a Saturday team. However, Sipe also offers the following caveat: 'it may be that (personal connections) represent the very beginnings – the crucial foundation – of an impulse which, as children grow older and develop more sophisticated literary interpretation, will become increasingly important for both their enjoyment and their understanding' (Sipe, 2008, p. 153). He seems to be saying that identification with a literary text can become a bridge to both hermeneutic and aesthetic reading responses. I would argue that for adolescents who are deeply engaged in identity work and have growing sophistication of thought, personal impulse can be seen as especially significant. In contrast to young children adolescents are able to problematise their own selves and question what constitutes reality (Kegan, 1994). Together, these factors may lead to rich, personalised responses to poems. I, therefore, have adapted Sipe's framework and conceptualise personal impulses as potential bridges into both aesthetic and efferent experiences of poetry.

I anticipate that adolescent personal connections with poetry at A level can act as a ladder into either efferent or aesthetic reading stances. In my revised framework (see Appendix A) a personalised response may work in two directions. Firstly, relating texts to life may lead to rejection of the text as an aesthetic experience. This has been described as a 'kinetic response' (Bogdan, 1990), essentially a refusal, which can be, for many reasons, to embrace the 'secondary world' (Benton, 1985) of the poem. However, adolescents may also find elements of aesthetic response through personalised reading. For example, they may recognise wished-

for aspects of themself in poems and become deeply emotionally moved by some aspect of the work. A personalised response, in this sense, would go beyond 'I like this' or 'it reminds me of' … to lead to transparent moments of recognition and response. In short, adolescents may see themselves in some way anew and experience a decentred aesthetic experience.

By contrast, in Sipe's framework, this kind of 'transparent response' is a discrete fourth literary response: Transparent reading within the word of the text can be mapped to Rosenblatt's aesthetic stance. It is my supposition that transparency may be newly experienced in adolescence because strong neurological, psychological, and social changes are happening within and about adolescents. Furthermore, and as outlined above, transparent connections in my revised framework can be prompted by personal readings.

Sipe's fifth aspect of literary response is 'performative', which he also maps to Rosenblatt's aesthetic response. Here, the text is manipulated for creative purposes. In a primary classroom, this may provoke 'a carnivalesque romp' (Sipe, 2000, p. 268). In college classrooms, I argue that this response may be present but harder to see, as adolescent students are likely to show greater social restraint.

Having outlined the framework of five responses, it is important to note that I agree with Sipe that these impulses intersect and blur – he thinks of them like whirling blades on an interconnecting axis. This means moments of engagement can be slight and changeable. For this reason, I see my adapted framework as a helpful but not exhaustive tool.

Sipe is a starting point for exploration, but not all features of lessons fit neatly into each category. In my lesson narratives, I also highlight paralinguistic features and pedagogical moves in relation to, for example, discussion, cultural bridges and barriers and multimodal learning, which have previously been discussed. Nevertheless, the categories give me a consistent and theoretically grounded lens through which to trace reader responses in the classroom. Sipe maps the analytic impulse to efferent response (in Rosenblatt's terms) and transparent and performative impulses to aesthetic response. I broadly concur with this with the caveat, explored in my literature review, that the *range* of responses adolescents may offer within these categories is likely to be different from that of children (Flavell, 1977; Piaget, 1990; Berzonsky, 2000)

3.7.2 Research Sites

My research was carried out at four London further education colleges over a three-year period between January 2017 and January 2020. The colleges are situated in North and East London, and for the purposes of this research, their names are anonymised. They were relatively large, all having more than 2,000 students on roll. Students were disproportionately from minority ethnic backgrounds. At the time of my research, each college received a financial uplift based on deprivation indices (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2015).

All colleges were well-established institutions with regular 'feeder schools' providing students. Three of the four colleges had 'Good' recent Ofsted assessments. However, in a constrained fiscal climate, many colleges in England merged at this time to conserve resources (Hodgson and Spours, 2019). As a result, staff, and jobs at the colleges I researched were under pressure. Two of the four colleges where my research was carried out (Crossroad Tertiary and London Tertiary) underwent mergers between 2016 and 2017. At the time of writing (June 2024), Eastern Sixth Form is considering becoming an academy for financial reasons. River Sixth Form is in the process of merging with a large FE colleges group.

The four colleges offered relatively stable contexts within which to research, and it was possible to revisit teachers, students, and departments over a three-year period until the outbreak of COVID-19. All had distinct English departments, and many of the staff members had worked in their colleges for over five years. This meant that staff had experience to draw on in interviews, and most were enthusiastic to talk about their teaching in interview. Vignettes of each college are included below.

I was familiar with the colleges because of my previous employment as a lecturer in further education and my subsequent work within teacher training. This meant that I had knowledge of the culture of further education and relevant gatekeepers to contact. I consider myself well-placed to understand some of the cultural norms and values of college life, although, as discussed later in this chapter under *Reflexivity,* my position was not without challenges.

The colleges that I researched all included A level English Literature and A level English Language and Literature as part of their curriculum offer. One also included Creative Writing A level. The colleges taught from a variety of syllabuses, which increased the range of content

in the lessons observed. The qualifications I observe in each college are named below. Staff teaching these subjects were employed within broader humanities departments, and whilst some staff exclusively taught English, others were also engaged in teaching subjects such as Media Studies. What follows are vignettes of each college.

Eastern Sixth Form: the most suburban of the four colleges, this is a sixth form based on a single site in a residential area. It has a roll of approximately 2,000 students. The college is a 16–19 institution with a broad curriculum offer of vocational and A level subjects. Most of the students come from schools in the borough. The college underwent a major refurbishment immediately prior to my research. The management structure is fairly flat, and there are eight programme areas, of which Humanities is one of the largest. At the time of my research, the college had recently received a 'Good' Ofsted report. I observed lessons based on Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) Eduqas English Language and Literature and AQA English Literature specifications.

London Tertiary: this sixth form is a dedicated area within a larger Further Education college. It is located on its own site and managed by a separate principal from the wider college. It is in a non-residential, urban area. It attracts students from the local borough but also those from out of the borough, perhaps because of its strong transport links, being close to tube as well as bus stops. The sixth form offers exclusively A level subjects as vocational routes are based on another site, and the college explicitly states that its purpose is to prepare students for university courses. At the time of my research, the college's most recent Ofsted report judged it to be 'Good'. I observed lessons based on OCR English Literature, OCR English Language and Literature, and AQA Creative Writing specifications.

River Sixth Form: this college occupies a single site that, until 2002 was part of a larger Further Education college. It is situated in a mixed urban and residential area and has approximately 1,000 students. The vast majority of these are drawn from the borough within which it is situated and one other neighbouring borough with which it has good transport links. It offers a mixture of vocational and A level subjects. In 2016 the college received an Ofsted report which stated that it 'Requires Improvement'. At the time of my research, there were significant changes to management, culminating in a new principal taking over at the end of 2018. At the time of writing (June 2024), River Sixth Form was planning a merger with Crossroad Tertiary College. I observed lessons from OCR English Language and Literature specifications.

Crossroad Tertiary College: this is the largest of the four colleges, with an approximate total of 5,500 students, 2,000 of whom were 16–18 years old at the time of my research. It is a Further Education College offering a broad vocational and academic education from ages 14 to adult. During my research, I discovered that it was the chief partner in a merger with a college in a neighbouring borough. The site where A levels were taught was shared with a range of other courses, the college being open to adults as well as 16–19 students. By the end of my research, A levels had been decanted to a separate site marketed as a 16–19 A level centre. Both sites where I researched are based in mixed urban and residential areas next to an area of prolonged and extensive redevelopment. Students are mostly drawn from local feeder schools within the borough. In 2016, the college had received a 'Good' Ofsted report. I observed lessons based on AQA Literature and Edexcel English Language and Literature specifications.

3.7.3 Sampling

In common with most qualitative researchers, I relied on non-probability sampling (Aurini, Heath and Howells, 2016), looking for English departments that taught substantial blocks of poetry in the examined courses. My intention was to find typical cases representing the norm (Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle, 2006) of college teaching and learning within London. Originally, I was interested in including English Literature at GCSE as well as A level in my sample, but problems related to the reduction of time for teaching poetry at GCSE and the pressure of retake GCSEs in colleges led me to exclude this. Therefore, I sought colleges teaching poetry as part of English Literature and English Literature and Language A levels. This was an opportunistic sample (Patton, 2015) to the extent that the colleges which responded to my request to take part happened to be based in North and East London. These were easily accessible for me to visit from home, which was helpful as my research took place on a part-time basis.

3.7.4 Participants

To attract participants for my research I approached six heads of department via the approval of college principals who I wrote to. Five of these responded positively. I then visited the colleges during departmental meetings to introduce my research to staff within the

English/Humanities departments. In these meetings, and sometimes via subsequent emails, I answered initial questions about the purpose, design, time commitment and ethical issues related to my research. I also asked lecturers initial questions about their work and perspectives on teaching poetry. The voluntary nature of the research was emphasised, and the time commitment explained. College lecturers are busy people, and it was essential that those taking part felt comfortable with my intrusion into their work. This was not a smooth process. Despite the initial interest of heads of departments at two colleges, the lecturing staff declined to take part because they perceived my research to be too onerous on their time. At one of these colleges (Crossroad Tertiary), lecturing staff who were not at the department meeting later agreed to take part in the research. I withdrew from the other college, and it did not form part of the research sample. A short (anonymised) description of participating teachers is included in Appendix B.

3.7.5 Pilot Study

My pilot study was carried out at Eastern Sixth Form in November 2016.

There are many reasons for carrying out a pilot study, but essentially, they are 'an excellent way to get your feet wet and work out the direction and focus of your project' (Aurini, Heath and Howells 2016, p. 17). The term pilot study can refer to both a full-scale trial run of a project and the practice of trying out research instruments (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001). The main purpose of my pilot study was to practise observing classes. This was because, at the time of beginning data collection, I had recently conducted student focus groups and undertaken interviews for other research purposes. I felt reasonably confident about using these research instruments and refining my practice with them as the project developed.

However, my prior experience of observing teachers and students in classrooms had been in the role of assessor rather than researcher. The assumption of a competent and consciously understood role is key in qualitative research (Flick, 2014). Therefore, I understood it would be essential to practise observations as a researcher so that I could reflect on my changed role. An early stage in the process of observation is to refine what is to be considered in the data Denzin and Lincoln (2005). This was a crucial point of learning from the pilot study, as classrooms are hugely complex environments within which to research (Loughran, 1999). Finally, a pilot study enabled me to identify logistical problems in undertaking observations.

I observed two A level English Literature classes in November 2016 at Eastern Sixth form. No data from the two classes I observed are included in the analysis although both were extremely useful in identifying themes that were to recur throughout data collection. These included issues around the position and experience of students as readers of poetry, and dilemmas expressed by teachers about the domination of exams. This was exemplified in a comment made to the class several times by Gloria (anonymised teacher) during her lesson: *We know that the board loves it when…*

The observations alerted me to the problem of reactivity, 'the process by which participants react to being researched' (Aurini Heath and Howells, 2016, 163). My first experience of this was when a group of students I was sitting near turned away from me and lowered their voices when they were asked to discuss poems in a small group. I imagined they might be worried that I would judge their responses. Reactivity is an unavoidable feature of social observations the effects of which must be managed and minimised. I did this firstly by becoming cognisant of my position as an observer. I decided that I would position myself as an 'observer-as-participant' (Flick 2014, p. 309). In essence I would not actively participate in the lessons and tried to be as unobtrusive as possible. However, I did not avoid answering questions when students asked me about their work (usually by referring them to the teacher or material covered in the lesson). Secondly, I realised the need to keep good field notes and to actively reflect on the observations, recording these in writing and, at times in voice-recorded notes.

Logistically, the process of observation made me realise I needed to invest in a good voice recorder as my phone was insufficient for recording and vulnerable to data breaches. It also led me to prepare an observation sheet on which I could record significant factual information such as topic and duration of class/seating plan, number of students in the classroom, and so forth. This was extremely useful both as an aide memoire and in allowing me to make distinctions and comparisons between classes, for example, in terms of syllabus. A copy of a completed observation sheet is in Appendix C. Finally, the observations forced me to consider exactly how to introduce myself and the most effective way to secure written consent from students present in the classroom. More is discussed in relation to this in the section headed *Ethics*.

3.7.6 Data Collection

Data collection consisted of observations of 17 lessons, nine interviews with lecturers and four focus groups with students. It took place between January 2017 and was substantially finished by May 2018, with one outlying interview and observation in 2020. I sampled poetry lessons from English Language and Literature and English Literature A level across four different syllabuses as well as one lesson in Creative Writing A level (discontinued in 2017). Of the eight texts that students in my research studied for the English Literature and Language and Literature A level, at least three had to be published pre-1900. The poetry anthology published by the Welsh WJEC board for study in England was entirely pre-1914. The AQA board anthology entitled *Love Through the Ages* included only poems from pre-1900. The majority of poets, in all cases, are from the UK.

Data collection was carried out concurrently as the data sources were independent of each other. I tried to observe teachers before interviewing them because this allowed them to draw on examples from their practice in our discussion about teaching, but this was not always possible. Zara, for example, at Eastern Sixth Form, was interviewed by me before she taught, although we also spoke about her classes on subsequent occasions when I visited the College, and I made extra notes quoting her verbatim when she commented on anything pertinent to my research. Unfortunately, circumstances made it impossible to interview Tom using an audio recording as the equipment failed. I therefore, made notes as we spoke and checked what I had written with him in a subsequent phone call and email to ensure as much veracity as possible.

The table below summarises numbers in relation to each site, and vignettes are offered to give a flavour of each college environment. Appendix D is a more detailed table showing lessons observed by qualification, date, college and teacher.

Table Showing (Anonymised) Research Sites and Primary Data Collection

SITE	Number of Observations of Teaching	Number of Teacher Interviews	Focus Group

Eastern Sixth Form	10	4	4 students from year 2 March 2018
London Tertiary	3	3	5 students year 1 May 2018
River Sixth Form	2	1	5 students year 1 May 2018
Crossroad Tertiary	2	3	5 students year 1 July 2018

It can be seen that most data were collected at Eastern Sixth Form: this comprised ten lessons and interviews with four lecturers, all of whom I saw teach. There are two reasons why a lot of data was collected at this site. Eastern Sixth Form contained a large English department with seven full-time staff members dedicated to teaching English as their main subject. Moreover, the college taught English Literature and English Language and Literature at A level using three exam boards: OCR, WJEC and AQA. This meant that of all the colleges, it provided the greatest number and the most diverse opportunities for observation. This was also a site where I had prior connections as a further education teacher trainer, and therefore, I had pre-existing connections with staff that I could leverage. The benefits and risks of this connection are discussed in the section *Reflexivity*.

London Tertiary provided the opportunity for three lesson observations and three teacher interviews, one of which was with a class and lecturer engaged in Creative Writing at A level. This was an interesting outlier, deviating from A level English Literature/Language and Literature as lessons concerned the teaching of writing and reading poetry. This (sadly now obsolete) A level included a learning outcome which required students to: 'Respond to existing published work as a source of learning, stimulus and creative strategy in producing own writing' (AQA, 2013, p. 19). I therefore speculated that this observation and interview might offer an immediate and consciously 'aesthetic' approach to poetry teaching, complementing and highlighting elements of experience I might see in the other A level classrooms.

River Sixth Form provided two observations and one interview as, at the time of my research, the lecturer was the only lecturer teaching English at A level in the college. She was the least experienced lecturer in my sample, having been in her job for two years at the time I conducted

my research. Perhaps because she was working as the sole English A level lecturer in her college, Amelia's contributions were amongst the most engaged of my sample. She was keen to ask about practices in other colleges, showed me many of her resources and lesson plans, and talked extensively about her own relationship with poetry.

Crossroad Tertiary was the most difficult site to access as a result of disruption around a merger with other colleges with which it was engaged at the time. As previously noted, mergers were common in the sector at the time, with a peak of 29 college mergers taking place in 2017 (Association of Colleges, 2021).

For this reason, the lesson observations, focus group and interview that I undertook at Crossroad Tertiary were the final ones to occur, taking place between April 2018 and January 2020. Exceptionally, and because this was a difficult site to access, I interviewed three teachers, although I observed only two lessons. This was as a result of a discussion with my supervisor. We agreed that it would be useful to extend the collection at this site, particularly as the 'extra' interviewee was a newly retired lecturer and ex-head of the English Department with extensive experience teaching poetry.

Finally, I should note that of the two lessons observed at Crossroad Tertiary, I was only able to fully digitally record Anna's lesson. Students in Ayesha's class refused to give consent for recording. Because the lesson consisted of them presenting ideas about poems in small groups, students may have felt too self-conscious to want to be recorded. In this instance, I kept notes of what I was seeing.

A focus group was carried out with the students at each college. I invited students from classes that I observed to take part in a focus group over a lunchtime period. I timed the focus groups so that the maximum number of students would have the opportunity to take part, generally coming back to the college to conduct the focus group on a Wednesday because this is traditionally a half-day of teaching in colleges of further education.

Having briefly introduced and described the data collection, I now turn to the methods used. The following section includes my justification for the use of each method and some illustrative discussion of my experiences with data collection. As a qualitative researcher, I believe that all

methods are a particular prism for collecting evidence, and each method has weaknesses as well as strengths (Van Niekirk and Savin-Barden, 2010). These will also be discussed.

3.8 Research Methods

3.8.1 Interviews

Interviews are commonly used in qualitative research as they evoke meanings from the interaction of the researcher with participants. Unlike surveys or questionnaires, which generate textual answers to specific questions, semi-structured interviews are arguably an ideal tool for exploring peoples' verbal interpretations and understandings of their experiences in context (Merriam, 1998).

I chose to use face-to-face semi-structured interviews with teachers to understand their perspectives and ideas about teaching poetry to their students. A schedule of largely open questions and topics was organised, and a copy of this is included in Appendix E. The average duration of an interview was 45 minutes. The longest was one hour and ten minutes, and the shortest ten minutes, which was followed up by email and phone conversation to explore and clarify ideas.

'Transcribing and analysing interviews can be a lengthy and arduous task' (Atkins and Wallace, 2012, p. 86) and this can present an obstacle to understanding and interpretation. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by me. This was for two reasons. Firstly, to maintain the voice of the interviewee since transcription services may not represent this accurately particularly where jargon is used. Secondly, and more importantly, because transcription constitutes the first act of interpretation (Reissman, 1993). In the transcription, I retained hesitancies and some non-verbal signals, for example, groans or laughter, in case these aided later interpretation. As Cohen *et al.* clarify, 'the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p. 349).

In this respect, I consider the status of my data to be a narrative account constructed in the presence of the interviewer (Reissman, 1993). It is a social exchange. This is both a strength and a possible weakness of the method. Weaknesses include problems such as issues of trust,

possible misunderstandings and withholding of information or ideas on the part of either party. Semi-structured interviews take skill to carry out effectively, and there are many factors, such as how a person is feeling or the time of the day that an interview takes place, which are not under the control of the interviewer. However, the strength of what Kvale (1996) calls an 'inter-view' is that meanings can be probed, clarified, and explored in some depth. Moreover, if interviews take place with other methods, a process of triangulation can confirm/dispute findings, adding breadth and perspective to the data (Denzin, 1978). To add to this triangulation, I kept brief written notes and comments about the interview as it took place, as well as audio recordings. This was useful for alerting me to key issues and reflection in action (Schön, 1983).

3.8.2 Observations

Rooted in anthropological and ethnographic traditions, observations are an established method of gathering data in qualitative enquiries that recognises the role of the researcher as central to the study (Lichtman, 2013). I decided early on that observations were a necessary tool for seeing meanings being made in action in the context of the classroom and relationships between students and teachers. There are many precedents for this in previous research relating to poetry teaching in both schools and colleges (e.g., Dymoke, Lambirth and Wilson, 2013; Xerri, 2013 and 2018). Instruments for observation were myself, my field notes and an audio recorder, which has the advantage of being relatively unobtrusive.

As previously stated, I saw my role as an observer to be an overt 'observer-as-participant'. Flick (2014) notes there are inherent tensions between distance and closeness in the act of observation, and my participation was negotiated according to two things. These were the activities in the classroom and my relationship to teacher and student responses. In relation to the first point, I decided, when observing whole class, teacher-led activities, to take a seat slightly to the side of the class, some way toward the back of the class. This gave me scope to turn and see a variety of engagements and responses. Observing small groups was a trickier exercise as it involved more explicit choices of inclusion and exclusion. A reflective note made in Feb 2017 illustrates this dilemma: '*seems unsatisfactory, I feel clumsy and self-conscious, need to move around the room more*'. To maximise observational data with small groups, I decided to place the recorder with one group of students to record their conversations while I sat with another to take notes and observe. To try and ensure similar quality of data, I switched

my attention periodically from the group I was observing to that which was being audio recorded so I could make notes in relation to anything I thought was of significance.

My role as an observer was influenced by the activities of the teacher and students I was observing. Phillip, who I saw teach on more than one occasion, asked me directly to comment on a Yeats poem the students were having difficulty interpreting. My response moved me from observer to teacher: '*ermm those first four lines? Well perhaps if you think of looking up at the sky you might get an idea of where that imagery comes from.*'

These two points illustrate two difficulties of carrying out classroom observations, namely, the difficulty of honing in on what to observe and the unavoidable impact of the observer on the field (Cresswell, 2009). These are unavoidable challenges because the observer is not extricable from the context of the observation. Therefore, detailed notes, schedules, diaries, and reflection are necessary to support the process and support defensible interpretations of events (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To this end, I kept an observation schedule recording what I regarded as essential information about lessons, such as date, time, topic, number of students, classroom layout, and so forth. I also kept contemporaneous notes of each lesson, an audio recording of each lesson and a reflective diary. Reflections were mostly kept on paper, but occasionally I voice-recorded diary reflections after observations. (See Appendix F for examples of reflective notes made in lessons).

3.8.3 Focus Groups

Focus groups were carried out at each of the four colleges engaged in my research. An open invitation was issued to students whose classes I had observed. I requested a minimum of four and a maximum of eight people in each group, believing this would enable participation and diverse opinions without it becoming impersonal (Onwuegbuzie, 2009). The focus groups were held at lunchtime to maximise opportunities for a self-selecting sample to attend. I provided pizza and sweets so that participants were not disadvantaged by missing their lunchtime meal. Each focus group took approximately 50 minutes. As with semi-structured teacher interviews, each focus group was audio recorded and transcribed by me, and I also made contemporaneous and reflective notes after each group.

In my discussion schedule (see Appendix G) I asked open questions about attitude and experiences of poetry before coming to college, then focused on student experiences at college and their feelings and thoughts about studying poetry.

Focus groups generate emic data at three distinct levels: the individual, the group and the interactive level (Cyr, J, 2019). The benefits of focus groups include that they encourage dialogic and exploratory talk within which people can constructively hear and build on each other's ideas (Wegerif *et al.*, 2009). They are 'relatively naturalistic …[and]… offer social contexts for meaning making … [which can] … shift the balance of power away from the researcher' (Wilkinson 1999, p. 221). They have, therefore, been seen as an unthreatening method (Krueger and Casey, 2000). All these features may be especially well suited to adolescents who, as research participants, are relatively powerless and particularly invested in peer relationships (Schlegel and Barry, 1991).

Butler (1996) argues that focus groups also make space for spontaneous ideas. This was certainly something I experienced. On more than one occasion, students played music from their phones to expound on the experiences they had with poems, while others related lines from poems to lyrics from songs. It is also the case that spontaneity carries risk and that researchers need to be thoughtful about the potential for sensitive issues arising in the course of a focus group (Hopkins, 2007). Patrick, a student at River Sixth Form, related poems and lyrics to the recent death of a friend, an association which visibly upset him and which I had to manage respectfully in the context of the group discussion.

Potential problems of focus groups include the complexity of the data and the loss of being able to follow up on ideas from one person, 'articulation of group norms may silence dissent' (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 300). I reflect on these issues later in this chapter in the section *Reflexivity.*

3.8.4 Credibility and Trustworthiness

As previously discussed, my research is a qualitative project grounded in a Critical Realist ontology. It seeks to take account of the multiple perspectives and experiences of people (participants and myself) living in a stratified and relatively open, material, and social world. Perspectives include those of teachers and students, observed teaching and learning, teachers explaining their practices and philosophies in interviews and students discussing their

experiences as they explore poems, teaching and learning in focus groups. It also includes my own perspectives, which are discussed in more detail in the following sections of this chapter: *Methodological Reflections* and *Reflexivity.*

In line with the precepts of a Critical Realist paradigm, Hammersley states that 'we do not need to abandon the concept of truth as correspondence to an independent reality' (1990, p. 62). However, we do have to accept that, epistemologically, knowing is a construction. This, in turn, means that in a naturalistic enquiry such as mine, it is crucial to discuss how the knowledge I have constructed can be assessed. Lincoln and Guba suggest criteria including credibility and dependability, authenticity, and trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba 1985; 1989; 1994). I now turn to a discussion of these in relation to my research.

Credibility refers to 'confidence in the truth of data' (Im and Chee, 2006, p. 267) and is therefore related to dependability. There are many ways of ensuring that research is credible and dependable. Firstly, prolonged engagement in the field (Flick, 2014). My research took place over three years, sampling at irregular intervals as I was invited and able to attend research sites. This length of time enabled me to see a range of students at four colleges reading different poems at different times of the year. This enabled me to 'search for salient features' in the research (Bassey, 1999, p. 76). I was able to focus on possible tentative interpretations and discuss them with my supervisors.

This scrutinising process constitutes a key act in building trustworthiness into the findings (Stahl and King, 2020). It is an aspect of confirmability (see *Methodological Reflections* and *Reflexivity*) which ensures that findings come from the data and not my personal bias (Shenton, 2004). These discussions took place with my supervisors from the outset of my data collection throughout the writing up of my research.

Triangulation is another aspect of credibility and dependability in qualitative research. Triangulation refers to the desire to unearth different perspectives in a study, which 'can be substantiated by using several different methods and/or in several theoretical approaches' (Flick, 2014). A Critical Realist paradigm replaces positivistic 'law-like' understandings of causation with explorations of 'actual processes … [which result in] … specific outcomes in a context' (Maxwell 2012, p. 656). In my research, I explore how adolescent students experience an aesthetic response to the meanings they make in the social and cultural context of sixth form

classes. I aim to express this understanding of processes in terms of 'thick description and in-depth examination' (Aurini and Howells, 2016, p 40). To achieve credibility and dependability, my understanding and discussion must be grounded in coherent theoretical understanding. Therefore, in my literature review, I have drawn on a range of theoretical material from a variety of perspectives relating to psychology, development, and social and literary theories. I have produced a thoroughly researched literature review which draws on both theoretical concepts and recent research to support my work.

In terms of triangulating methods, observations, interviews, and focus groups enabled me to see many aspects of meaning making. From these multiple methods, I have been able to generate a level of authenticity that shows the different realities of different people's lived experiences (Polit and Beck, 2014). Observations, interviews and focus groups are frequently used tools within qualitative research, and there are many precedents for using them in comparable research (e.g., Louie, 2005; Park, 2012; Xerri, 2015). This strengthens the credibility of their use (Shenton, 2004) and enhances the trustworthiness of my research (Cope, 2014).

I further believe that the quantity of data I collected through these triangulated methods meets the criteria for 'saturation' and 'crystallisation', which are further aspects of credibility in qualitative research (O'Leary, 2017). That is to say that further observations, interviews and focus groups were not necessary for understanding the phenomena I am exploring. From the data I gathered I was able to build a clear view of my research question exploring 'student's engagement with poetry at the level of personal meaning and response'.

A further aspect of dependability relates to procedures for record keeping. When collecting data, it is important to keep clear notes which differentiate between my interpretation, ongoing questions about the research arising as data is collected, and the data collection itself. This was particularly significant when observing classes as this is a situation where many events happen simultaneously. I kept contemporaneous notes alongside the audio recording of each observed class. I made handwritten notes that narrated the lesson, allowing me to reconstruct the events after they happened; for example, '*Ayesha moves to the front of class, and groups are asked to present*.' Timings were kept in the margins of the A4 notebook so that I could match these events with the timed audio recording. This also allowed me to check for factual accuracy where I was not sure of what I had seen or heard in the field. Verbatim quotations from students

or teachers that may hold significance were recorded with a highlighter pen; my own thoughts were kept in brackets often with question marks by them. All field notes were retained, and examples are included in Appendix F. Member checking of interviews was undertaken where I had any questions about what an interviewee had said in their interview. For example, Tom told me in an interview that he had been '*dreading teaching Keats but it had been really good*'. At the time, I did not pursue this, but later, I asked him in a follow-up email if he could tell me more about what he had dreaded, and he replied, giving me a fuller answer.

To conclude, my research is emic, localised, and based on constructing a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the phenomena I am studying. I recognise that 'truth achieved within interpretive approaches will never be one final and unambiguous truth but rather is an ongoing and open process of knowledge claims correcting each other' (Sandberg, 2005, p. 12). The 'truth' of my research is concerned with the 'particular description and themes developed *in context* (their emphasis) of a specific site' (Creswell, 2009, p. 193). Transferability has meaning only insofar I have provided enough information for my readers to see relationships and 'fit' with other circumstances (Cope, 2014).

3.8.5 Methods of Analysis

My analysis was based on a thematic approach, meaning I took an active part as the 'instrument of analysis' (Nowell, *et al.*, 2017, 2), making decisions about how to contextualise, code reduce and represent data collected. Thematic Analysis (TA) in social research originated in the 20th century and is most often associated with Braun and Clarke (2006). There are many iterations of TA, and it has been seen as both a method in its own right and as a tool useful for qualitative research (Nowell *et al.*, 2017; Terry *et al.,* 2017).

Whichever way TA is understood, a central feature of this mode of analysis is 'reflective and thoughtful engagement with data and reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process' (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 594). To this end, I kept contemporaneous notes in lesson observations and reflected on observations, interviews and focus groups soon after data collection using a variety of written and voice notes to myself as was possible. Examples of data at different stages of analysis are in Appendix H.

Terry *et al.* (2017) outline a number of decisions researchers engaged in TA must take. These include decisions about whether to base interpretation on pre-existing theory and, therefore, take a deductive approach or to ground interpretation within data and take an inductive approach. Similarly, researchers must decide whether to use open codes, which develop as analysis takes place, or closed coding, in which case distinctions are made in advance of analysis.

My analysis is largely inductive and based on open coding. I drew on my organising concepts of reader response and personal and cultural responses to trace interactions in the classroom and decided on codes as the work developed. However, my approach to TA was also flexible and pragmatic, and when using my adapted Sipe (2000) framework for responses to poems, my analysis was more deductive and based on pre-existing codes.

Experiential orientation refers to a researcher conceptualising the language of participants as reflecting external reality. A critical orientation refers to a researcher conceptualising language as constitutive of that reality (Terry *et al.*, 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2022). From my perspective, I take the position that trying to reproduce and faithfully represent the thoughts and feelings of students and teachers communicated makes me experientially inclined. However, from my ontological CR stance, I also recognise that some realities exist independently of our lived experiences, and these are mediated and shaped by language (Braun and Clarke, 2022). In this sense, I take a critical orientation: language is culturally shaped and constitutive of experience, so it cannot precisely reproduce internal experiences. I also had to be alive to power relations in the classroom and recognise where and how they may shape or impinge on data.

I undertook NVivo training but found it awkward to use with the computer I had available at the time. The benefits and drawbacks of NVivo as a tool have been described by Ishak and Baker (2012, p. 102), who emphasise that ‘software cannot replace the wisdom that the researcher brings into the research’. I preferred to work manually using colour coding on Word files, pens, sticky notes, and maps on paper to explore and organise data.

I followed the six phases of TA as described by Braun and Clarke (2022), moving from semantic and descriptive levels of analysis to more interpretative levels of analysis related to theory. This was an iterative nonlinear process supported by discussion with supervisors.

Phase 1: Familiarisation

This stage of analysis included transcription of interviews, focus groups, and observations. I read these alongside field notes and the occasional phone note, which helped me clarify, for example, unclear aspects of recordings. Transcriptions were read several times, and comments were attached where I had further queries. I made a spreadsheet of teacher interviews to enable an overview of answers to questions. Here, I began to see initial similarities and differences in response to questions. At this stage, I noted the frequency with which teachers mentioned assessment objectives and those who referred to emotion/feelings when reading poems. I noted that students across focus groups referred to music when they spoke about poetry. Therefore, I began to see initial patterns in the data but at a superficial semantic level in relation to my research questions and literature review.

Phase 2: Initial Coding

I worked to look at segments of data and openly code them more specifically than in the previous phase. At this stage, I coded the data discretely for each data set. Examples of initial codes from focus groups were *positive and negative experiences with poems at school*, *reading to pass exams*, and *expressing pleasure in reading poems.* In combing through teacher interviews, I made labels such as *reference to literary theory*, *teaching for the exam pass* and the *importance of group work.* Lesson observations were more difficult to code initially because of the fluidity and complexity of whole class and group work. I discarded some of my earlier familiarising notes, such as *on and off task* or *teacher directs students to activity* and coded activities under broad headings, for example, *types of reading in the classroom*, which included *reading visual images, students reading aloud, reading silently, teacher reading.*

Phase 3: Generating Initial Themes

At this stage, I began to look at codes across the datasets to broaden my understanding of potentially shared themes. Braun and Clarke make clear that 'theme development is an active process' (2022, p. 36) reliant on researcher interpretation in line with research questions and theoretical standpoint of the research. A key concept in my research questions and literature review is *personal meaning,* and this is operationalised in my RQ 2: *What teaching strategies*

do teachers use to prepare students to read for personal meaning? I found it helpful to explore teachers' understanding of personal meaning in terms of interview data (whether and what they say about this concept) and lesson observations (what they do about reading and personal meaning). This allowed me to look at continuities and discontinuities between beliefs and actions around this key theme.

Phase 4: Developing and Reviewing Themes

This stage involved decisions about checking and collapsing themes and organising data to begin to weave a credible and justifiable narrative from theory and data. Yandell's (2014) distinction between reading as a type of activity and reading as personal response I found especially useful when considering data from lesson observations. It was relatively easy to differentiate between reading activities and consider comments from teachers, students, and my own notes made about these. However, I wanted an instrument to distinguish the ways students made meaning with texts in the classroom. Here, the work of Sipe (2000, 2008) became significant for my analysis. A key strength of this tool was that it complemented Rosenblatt's theoretical perspective of aesthetic and efferent reading and allowed me to identify moments of aesthetic response.

Phase 5: Refining, Defining, and Naming Themes

This stage is described by Braun and Clarke (2022) as 'fine-tuning'. Themes are demarcated, and some are discarded to further clarify core ideas in the research. At an early stage of analysis, I noted a tendency in one focus group for students to 'savagely criticise' and then forgive the approach their teacher took to reading poems. I found this fascinating and wondered whether this might constitute a theme concerned with 'teacher/student relationships'. However, ultimately, this did not add to the focus of my analysis and, therefore, was discarded.

In my experience, 'refining, defining and naming themes' was intimately related to Phase 6: Writing up. Through writing, discussion, and reorganisation, greater clarity was gained regarding the themes in my research. For example, the theme of possible reconciliation between poetry as experience and poetry as exam led to my *analogy of the weighted seesaw* discussed in *Conclusion and Recommendations.* Characterising teacher approaches toward reading poetry as *ideological stances* led to my decision to explore three lessons characteristic of each

stance in detail. Exploration of personal response led me to demarcate *resistant reading* as a sub-theme.

Phase 6: Writing Up

The writing-up process has been an integral part of my analysis. I began early drawing on my own transcripts of lessons, interviews, and focus groups. Initially I used spreadsheets, lists, and maps to make meaning of data. Gradually, through more lengthy writing and discussion, my analysis moved from particular semantic coding to more conceptually robust and theoretically supported understandings of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022). An example of this is the application of Moore and Clarke's (2006) concept of professional 'cruel optimism' to the dilemmas teachers experience in teaching poetry.

3.8.6 Methodological Reflections

My research questions are focused on understanding 'personal meaning' and response to poems in further education classrooms and I committed early on to an exploratory and interpretative approach to my research. However, although my approach is wholly qualitative, it would have been possible to conduct it in other ways. I considered at the outset the possibility of using mixed methods, perhaps to classify and compare student responses to particular poems or to add a questionnaire to my semi-structured interview schedule with teachers. Mixed methods can increase the triangulation and corroboration of data (Coe *et al.*, 2017). However, I discounted a mixed-method approach early on as unnecessary for the topic I wanted to study. Sipe's (2000) framework, which I found midway through my research, enabled me to explore student responses to poems without prior classification or superfluous formal numerical data.

I gave serious consideration to conducting my research as an exploratory case study/series of case studies, but this was decided against for two reasons. Firstly, because this would add a further frame to a research project that was going to generate a lot of data and was not a comparative study. Secondly, and as referenced earlier in this chapter, case study research depends on clear delimitation of the subject, context, or people (Merriam, 1998). I was not able to guarantee this in the uncertain context of further education. As previously noted, I sought access and permission to research in six colleges, four of which eventually responded positively. Recognising differences between colleges, such as syllabuses, choice of poems, and

timing of teaching poetry in the academic year, I decided a general qualitative approach to the research was more appropriate.

As described earlier, I undertook semi-structured interviews with teachers using an interview schedule. There are many advantages to these, including increased space for cultural complexity (Marshall, Brereton and Kitchenem, 2015), which I was keen to explore. However, as previously recognised in this chapter, the mechanics of semi-structured interviews can be difficult (Myers and Newman, 2007). At times, I found it hard to listen while constructing follow-up questions. This could lead me to think aloud during interviews with negative consequences. For example, while transcribing one teacher interview, I found that I had asked the teacher five overlapping questions. This unsurprisingly caused him to pause, reply with several ideas and then comment, '*I've forgotten the question*'.

I undertook semi-structured interviews with every teacher I observed to find out how they think about teaching poetry, and observations to find out what they do about teaching poetry. However, because of time pressures and teacher work commitments, about half of the interviews took place before and half after seeing them teach. I cannot account for whether or how this order may have impacted on how teachers taught. However, I had to be alert to the possibility that bias of order could impact my understanding of lesson observations and teacher interviews. For example, I interviewed Zara after I had seen her teach, and she made direct reference to the lesson I had seen in order to illustrate a broader point about the techniques she uses for teaching poetry. This had the effect of bringing theory and practice together, which I reflected had the effect on me of giving her point greater weight than if I had only observed or been told about her practice.

From my social constructivist perspective, I understand that meaning is generated through interactions in the social world (Cresswell, 2009). I would therefore argue that focus groups and observations provided a stronger lens through which to answer my research questions than teacher interviews. Using focus groups and classroom observations, I was able to capture meaning making through dialogue and discussion, although data collection in the hubbub of the classroom could become messy. To maximise opportunities to observe students, I sometimes left the digital audio recorder with one group while listening to another group and manually noting key interactions. Whilst this increased the spread and size of data it sometimes led to the creation of inconsistently kept notes or unclear recordings.

3.8.7 Reflexivity

From the perspective of qualitative research, '… truths are complex and fragile and need to be seen as places where issues of power, consent and negotiation are mediated by our own values and biographies' (van Niekerk and Saven-Baden 2010, p. 28).

In this section, I explore the assumptions and choices made and the strategies I used to complete my research. Qualitative research is heavily dependent on the interpretation and management of data by the researcher (Sutton and Austin, 2015) and it is vital for researchers to make their perspective and role in the research explicit so that the negotiated production of knowledge can be understood and evaluated (Berger, 2015). In my case, as someone who previously trained as a Counsellor, I felt attuned to the idea of trying to understand poetry from the perspective of 'other' people. Understanding the nuance of people's perspectives involves a responsibility to reproduce the many voices of students and teachers as faithfully and thoughtfully as I can while also recognising and interrogating my own perspectives and biases.

Patton (2015) argues that the ideal position of a qualitative researcher is to aim for 'empathic neutrality', not being too close to nor too distant from participants. I have to recognise that I oscillated between distance and closeness and found the keeping of notes and voice memos immediately after data collection helpful in this respect. One reason for my oscillation can be traced to my dual role as both an 'outsider' and 'insider' (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009) in relation to my research.

I am not now and have never been a teacher of English Literature. I did, however, work directly in further education colleges as a lecturer and programme co-ordinator for over a decade, and between 2002 and 2014, I worked to train teachers in FE. This meant I was situated in my research as both an 'insider' and 'outsider', and these dual positions are important to recognise. My inside role as a teacher trainer and experienced further education teacher helped me develop rapport and a high level of trust (Aurini, Heath and Howells, 2016) particularly with teachers. One advantage of this position was that I found that teachers who consented to take part in my research were keen and helpful with their time and resources. However, as a 'further education insider', I also sometimes found myself privy to detailed complaints about working conditions that were extraneous to my study. I hoped that by listening to these complaints, I might increase

rapport, but found it hard to hear frustrations over which I had no influence. Not being a teacher of English Literature located me as an outsider. In some respects, this was useful because I could not make assumptions about how to teach poetry at A level from my own experience. It also had drawbacks because despite making it clear to interviewees that I had never taught poetry at A level, I was occasionally confused by teachers assuming my detailed professional knowledge of, for example, comparative merits of syllabuses.

One of the key issues within interviews is power relationships, which Atkins and Wallace suggest 'should never be underestimated' (2012, p. 87) as they impact on the quality of the interview. Initially, I assumed naively that this would be minimal interference given my status as a lecturer with long experience in the sector and familiarity with the setting and role of further education lecturers. My first interview was a preliminary one with Will at Eastern Sixth Form to scope out and understand the syllabus and schemes of work that the college had adopted. Will was a highly qualified and experienced teacher with a longstanding role as an examiner. He had powerful views about the college, the department, and the exam boards, which he wanted to share with me at length. His answers became overwhelmingly detailed, including information and opinions about historical aspects of non-poetic sections of A level syllabuses. As a result, when transcribing this interview, I occasionally summarised rather than noted verbatim his comments. This is not something that I did in any other interview because, whilst all transcriptions are selective (Cohen, 2007), summarising in this way runs the risk of prematurely editing out relevant information and ideas. My reflective note made shortly after the interview, stated: '*I found it difficult to control and focus the pace here*'. Will wielded a high level of participant control in the interview (Schultze and Avital, 2011), and I struggled with what Myers and Newman (2007) have called the mechanics of interviewing, that is, listening, responding and constructing a follow-up question at the same time. Although unsettling, this experience was useful as it made me tighten up the schedule for my actual interview questions and be minded to firmly manage the timing and direction of interviews.

In lesson observations, as acknowledged earlier in this chapter, I broadly took the position of 'observer-as-participant' (Flick, 2014), keeping interactions with students and teachers minimal. As an observer, I began my research with a lot of prior experience in classrooms as teacher trainer. However, I realised during the pilot study that I had to acknowledge and challenge my mindset and practices in relation to observations. As a teacher trainer, I was used to positioning myself to oversee the class and make critical judgements about pedagogical

decisions. As a researcher, I had to learn to consciously focus more on student dialogue than I was used to and to position myself unobtrusively in the class. Dilemmas around my role did still occur. At Crossroad Tertiary, I made the following reflective note during a student group presentation on a poem: *Where are they getting their ideas? Oh no! misunderstood the meaning of 'meridian' = unsustainable interpretation. This is all one way – unchallenged students doing inaccurate chalk and talk.* Here is my judgemental voice, urgently worrying that the presentation was deeply flawed and concerned about the lack of teacher clarification. I wrestled with whether and how to discuss this with the teacher. I knew it was not my role to criticise her approach of not talking to the students during or immediately after their presentations, but at the same time, I felt a responsibility to draw her attention to their misunderstanding and discuss it with her. Eventually, I decided to introduce the subject by tentatively asking the teacher at the end of the lesson how and what she would feed back to students about their presentations. I realised from her answer she had not heard the misunderstanding I had honed in on, and I was able to refer to it in a way which was not judgemental of her practice but which I hoped supplied information relevant to her feedback. In this example and in several other lessons, where teachers directly asked me questions about the work in front of the students, I became more of a participant than observer. My experience in this respect chimes with Tracy's (2013) definition of 'play participants' – that is, those researchers who, at times, must improvise their role and take part in scenarios where they become engaged as a person outside of the given context of the work.

A further issue I encountered was social desirability and the possibility of participant biases. There are many kinds of possible participant bias. Social desirability bias is a broad term referring to participants answering questions or behaving in ways that they consider are culturally appropriate and/or pleasing to the researcher (Bispo, 2022). To avoid explicit bias, I was careful not to share the exact wording of my research questions with teachers or students. I introduced my research as broad interest in how students learn poetry at A level and what they/you enjoy and find challenging about it. This can be seen in examples of ethics forms in Appendix I.

On one occasion, a teacher tried to nominate students to join a focus group. The teacher said, '*you should ask X, they're a really good student and so is Y, they will be able to tell you lots about their experiences of poetry*'. I interpreted this as a form of 'social desirability bias' because the teacher in question had assumed I wanted to speak to those students who she

assessed as ‘good’ in some way and would align with a version of reality she assumed I wanted to see. This was problematic because it might ‘lead to overestimation of the positive and diminished heterogeneity in responses’ (Bergen and Labonte; 2020, p. 784). The teacher’s actions might also suggest a cultural misunderstanding on her part about the aims and techniques of qualitative educational research. I noted that the same teacher came into the room as I was beginning the focus group, causing me to wait for her to leave. This led me to wonder if she was motivated by anxiety about what the students might say and was seeking a level of control over the process.

An advantage of focus groups is the high level of control they afford participants (Schultze and Avital 2011). However, I was also aware of the underlying power imbalance between myself, the students and their teachers. I knew from personal and professional experiences that colleges often use focus groups as an evaluation tool and students might have previous experience of this as a commercially inclined process. I, therefore, took time to put students at their ease in focus groups and, when introducing ground rules, emphasised that any expressed views were entirely anonymous and would not be reported back to their teachers or anyone at their college.

To increase rapport, I began focus groups with self-introductions asking general open questions about how they were finding college and what they hoped to do after A levels. Focus groups have been described as ‘deceptively simple’ (Wilkinson, 2011, p. 168) and, at times, I found facilitation of discussion difficult. Once or twice, students were late to the focus group, and to welcome them, I suspended the conversation. This was not without consequence for my data collection. On one occasion, following a student talking about her love of music and poetry, I asked other students about their own experiences and whether any felt like her. As I asked the question, a student arrived late. His arrival broke the conversational thread as students speculated grudgingly on why he was late, and I explained to him what we were discussing. My decision to prioritise the arrival of the student over the group discussion was a value judgement on my part. I can trace my decision to my own role as a teacher concerned with group cohesion. However, when I transcribed the focus group, I realised my decision cost me the opportunity to widen the discussion about music and poetry. This was deeply frustrating to me.

3.8.8 Ethics

Ethical clearance was applied for and approved through the university in 2015 (see Appendix I). The application was based on British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines from the third edition of 2011, which was current at the time of my research. BERA published the fourth edition of the guidelines in 2018 at the tail end of my data collection. However, these revised guidelines, focusing largely on the growth of digital interactions, did not necessitate reapplying for ethical clearance in my own case.

A key principle of the 2018 BERA Guidelines is the research 'should respect the privacy, autonomy, diversity, values and dignity of individuals, groups, and communities' (BERA, 2018, p. 10). This involves taking an active and responsive approach to ethics throughout the duration of research, from planning to the point of publication. I followed principles of informed voluntary consent including a (deadlined) right to withdrawal throughout the research. I designed and distributed tailored information sheets for teachers, students, and college principals. Consent forms were gained from individual participants and kept in a locked cabinet. Ground rules were circulated and discussed at the start of focus groups. Copies of the relevant documents are in Appendix I.

General Data Protection Regulations specify that personal data must be subject to careful limitations of access and security (Data Protection Act 1998). Therefore, signed consent forms are kept in a lockable cabinet and transcripts of interviews, focus groups and observations are kept on a work computer and password protected.

I considered the ambiguity of the age range of adolescents and whether explicit consent of parents was needed for those aged 16–18. The BERA Guidelines (2011) cite article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). This states that children should be able to express their own views in matters concerning them 'in accordance with the age and maturity of the child' (UNICEF, 1989, p. 5). On this basis, my supervisors and I decided that these adolescent students could offer or withhold consent for this research. However, as a backup, the form signed by students included an acknowledgement that they had shared the information sheet and discussed the research with their parents/carers.

I actively considered issues of confidentiality and made it clear in writing and verbally that none of what was said in interviews or focus groups would be reported outside of the terms of the research. This was especially important in relation to teachers commenting on department or colleagues and for students who were commenting, sometimes on teachers or other class members in focus groups.

Flick (2014) discusses tensions between formal codes and daily practices in the field, and I found this to be the case. Two further education lecturers (Bella at Central Tertiary and Ayesha at Crossroad Tertiary) independently told me I '*didn't need*' to ask for student consent as they were '*always being observed anyway*'. As observations are part of routine inspection frameworks, I explicitly stated at every lesson I observed that I was not part of this process, and no judgement was being made about learning or teaching. All information I gleaned was solely for this research purpose.

I was aware of the power dynamics between myself and the students involved in the research and, therefore, verbally reiterated the option to opt out of the research at the start of each lesson I observed. At Crossroad Tertiary College, this resulted in a group of students who were presenting in class requesting to opt out of the research. I respected their agency, and no notes or recordings of their presentation to the class were kept.

The 2011 BERA Guidelines explicitly state the need to treat individuals participating in research sensitively, and the 2018 BERA Guidelines state that ethical judgements should be 'active deliberative, ongoing' (2018, p. 8) throughout the research. I experienced this need to be sensitive and monitor for harm during a focus group at River Sixth Form. One participating student became visibly upset when he associated song lyrics with the recent death of a friend. I needed to acknowledge that was difficult for him and checked later whether he wanted this contribution to remain in the data.

Finally, the anonymity of people and places was ensured when writing up the research, and pseudonyms were used throughout.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

To recap, my main research question is: In what ways do adolescents studying English in the further education sector engage with poetry at the level of personal meaning and response?

There are three subsidiary research questions which I answer through a collection of primary data, namely:

- Research question 2: What teaching strategies do teachers use to prepare students to read for personal meaning?
- Research question 3: What experiences and knowledge do students draw on in the construction and articulation of personal response?
- Research question 4: How is the process of constructing and articulating personal responses to poems reconciled with pressures to pass exams?

My final research question is research question 5: In what ways might knowledge of these processes lead to the enhancement of adolescent experiences of learning poetry? This is considered in Chapter 5: *Conclusion and Recommendations.*

As discussed in my methodology chapter, I triangulated data collection using teacher interviews, lesson observations and focus groups. There are three main parts to the chapter which answer different aspects of my research questions, and these are centred around the different research methods deployed. In what follows, I introduce each of the three parts of the chapter.

Part 1: An Exploration of Teacher Interviews (Research Questions 2 and 4)

First, I loosely categorise three teacher positions in terms of three broad ideological approaches to reading poetry:

1. Poems as efferent objects – we read for the exam.

2. Poems are problematic in the curriculum – we are bridges into meaning and also have to prepare students for the exam.
3. Poems as aesthetic expression – we must try to prioritise responsive reading in the classroom.

Second, I explore themes which are described in terms of the 'barriers and bridges' teachers perceive around reading poetry. I discuss how teachers hold dual perspectives concerning cultural deficits and cultural capital that students bring to the classroom.

All teachers referred to a number of conflicts between reading for 'personal response' and reading for A level English exams. I conclude that there is no final reconciliation between the exam and reading for personal response but that teachers try to manage this conflict in a variety of ways. For example, at the more efferent end of response, teachers in my sample can be seen training students to spot poetic techniques, and at the more aesthetic end of response, to appeal to mood and feelings. Such approaches have been confirmed by previous studies, for example, Pike (2000), Cuthbert (2019), and Sigvardsson (2020).

My main research question is concerned with how students as adolescents engage with poetry. This section on teacher interviews, therefore, ends by exploring what teachers told me about teaching adolescents. Except for one teacher, all teachers felt that the status of their students as adolescents shaped their teaching. Most teachers said they see adolescent students as needing agency in the classroom, and they seek to share the classroom space with students.

Part 2: An Exploration of Lesson Observations (Research Questions 2, 3 and 4)

I develop findings from teacher interviews to further explore teaching strategies in action (research question 2) and begin to answer research question 3: *What experiences and knowledge do students draw on in the construction and articulation of personal response?* I draw on three lessons, each taken from the loose categorisation of ideological approaches to reading poetry outlined in part 1. To maximise contrast, lessons are drawn from different colleges with teachers reading different poems. Continuities and discrepancies between what teachers say and do are discussed and excerpts of student/teacher interaction from a variety of lessons are explored in detail. The impact of the exam is seen in terms of how it affects all lessons (research question 4). In terms of research question 3, I adapted Sipe's (2000)

framework to explore adolescent literary impulses. Efferent and aesthetic responses to poetry (Rosenblatt, 1985) are traced across lessons, and the impact of the exam is contextualised. My research takes place through the lens of a cultural and transactional reader response perspective on poetry as described by Iser (1978) and Rosenblatt (1985, 1994, 2005). At the end of this section, I return to my main research question and focus on the role of small peer groups as they help or hinder adolescents from making meaning with poems at A level.

Part 3: Student Focus Groups: Adolescent Student Perspectives (Research Questions 2, 3, and 4)

A number of themes are discussed from focus group data. These include student perspectives on reading, which align to some extent with teacher views described in part 1, but also offer a more nuanced picture of adolescent experiences of reading poems. Cultural resources that students bring to reading poems are highlighted. Pressures of exams are discussed, and student personal responses are contrasted with the need to pass exams. In terms of personally responding to poems, students highlight the importance of three things. These are peer discussion, the role of sound, and the relationship between poetry and music. I argue that these are significant factors impacting adolescent students and their capacity to engage with poetry at the level of personal meaning and response.

Part 1: The Exploration of Teacher Interviews

4.1.1 Scope and Purpose of Part 1

In semi-structured interviews, 11 teachers were asked about their approach to teaching poetry and their preferred strategies for teaching poems. I asked them what kinds of reading experiences they ideally wanted students to have and whether and how the concept of 'personal meaning' features in their teaching. These questions were asked to give me some insight into each teacher's personal ideals and philosophy about teaching poetry. It will be recalled from the literature review that the 'personal growth' model of English has been seen to be an enduring approach among teachers (Goodwyn, 2016). The answers teachers gave provide an initial context for exploring research question 2: *What teaching strategies do teachers use to prepare students to read for personal meaning?* and research question 4: *How is the process of constructing and articulating personal responses to poems reconciled with pressures to pass*

exams? In the first section I categorise in broad terms what teachers said about their approach to teaching poems and whether or how they said they are concerned with students making 'personal meaning' with poems.

I then go beyond what teachers say in principle about their approach to explore their views using a closer lens. I discuss consistencies and inconsistencies in what they told me about barriers and bridges to reading and teaching poems in the A level classroom and the teaching and learning strategies they adopt. Finally, I look specifically at teachers' views on teaching adolescents.

4.1.2 General Approaches to Reading Poems in the Classroom

I will now describe three loosely categorised positions that the teachers said they take to reading poems in the classroom. I have mapped these to Rosenblatt's (1985, 1994) continuum of efferent (reading for information) and aesthetic (reading for pleasure) stances. This is an important theoretical perspective for my research, which is discussed in detail in the literature review. In some interviews teachers explicitly or implicitly referenced literary theories and where this is the case I acknowledge and discuss this.

Answers that I draw on in the following discussion were largely derived from general introductory questions I posed e.g., *Can you tell me something about how you prefer to teach poetry? What do you think are the most important things for students to learn when you teach poems for this course?* A copy of the interview schedule is available in Appendix E. The positions outlined below are by no means definitive, but they provide a starting point for navigating further comments, including inconsistencies and supporting statements regarding the views teachers expressed.

1. **Poems as efferent objects – We read for the exam (Anna, Crossroads Tertiary College; Barry and Bella, London Tertiary College)**

Bella, Anna, and Barry adopted broadly efferent stances. For Barry, this was a largely enthusiastic stance. He described poems wholly in terms of their use value:

> *They're really good texts for showing students how to do oral analysis ... poetry's a brilliant work out… I could pick one up and teach a lesson in half an hour if I had to.* Barry added that the exam meant *you can sometimes be reading with a quite reductive purpose.*

Barry described poetry reading in the following terms: *this poem is a clever little machine; let's take it apart and see how it functions.* He seems to be suggesting that, like a watch, we can take apart a poem to see how it works, but in doing so, it ceases to tell the time. It may be that personal and emotional responses facilitate understanding of the craft of poems (and vice versa), but as a matter of attention, we tend toward one stance or another as we read (Rosenblatt, 1994). In terms of literary theory, Barry's approach is allied to Practical and New Criticism, which emphasises close reading to discover meanings within texts (Goulimari, 2015). Barry declared a militant stance in terms of enjoyment: *liking or not liking poems is not up for debate in my class.* From this perspective, the value of poems is extrinsic. They exist in the classroom to help students develop their reading skills and to pass exams. Poems are also good for planning lessons because they can be fitted into a busy schedule.

Anna characterised the exam as *a beast,* carrying the inference that exams are brutal or savage, something to be feared and managed. Like Barry, her broad perspective aligns specifically with Practical/New Criticism and close reading. Anna discussed the pleasures of teaching poems in terms of their brevity: *it's discrete, so um – in practical terms, you can do a poem in a session.* Students find the reading, especially of short poems, *manageable.* Anna referred to her own pleasure and the pleasures she perceives students to have as being about reading poems *forensically … um, the forensic precision of analysis. And students enjoy that, actually; they really enjoy getting their teeth into poems.* Whilst the image of getting teeth into poems implies energetic and engaged reading, the main point Anna is making is that students enjoy forensic and analytical reading. Engagement in these terms matches well with Rosenblatt's concept of efferent reading, wherein students read for a purpose other than an aesthetic experience.

Bella also took an efferent approach, but in contrast to Anna and Barry, hers was more of a counsel of despair. For her, there is a direct conflict between reading poetry per se and reading it in order to prepare students to pass an exam.

> *I think, actually, although I would never say this to the students, that deconstruction can very often destroy essentially … for me, what works about poetry is how it works on a*

subliminal level rather than a 'pull it apart and think of things to say level' … .What I like about poetry is to read it a couple of times and leave it there and then let it sink in rather than – but that's not what you do in Literature [teaching].

In the above quotation, Bella identifies what she believes to be an irreconcilable difficulty between personally responsive reading and reading for an examined course. Bella's position that poetry *works on a subliminal level* is ideologically rather like that of Holland (1994) discussed in my literature review. On the spectrum of reader response theory, Holland posits readers as psychologically unique responders who respond in deeply subjective ways. For Bella, the logic of this position is that enjoyment cannot be facilitated within the classroom and students are liable to only experience poetry in the classroom efferently. In her view, students often find making meaning with poems *baffling* [but] … *they can feature spot* and try to make meaning with poems from that. This movement from parts of poems to a whole experience is, she said *really hard for them* [and that] … *if something really, really baffles them, I tell them what it means...and tell them they have to take that one* [*interpretation*] *on.*

Here, Bella is saying that she will tell students to remember an answer that they can reproduce for this exam. This is the opposite of reading for personal meaning and response and indicates, again, the dominance of assessment in leading teaching and learning. In Bella's opinion, over the last 18 years, the official importance of personally responding to poems has declined: *personal response has become less important than jumping through hoops.*

Collectively, the broad views of Barry, Anna and Bella might be summarised in the following way. Assessment shapes how to read poetry. The curriculum proscribes certain types of knowledge and performance. Poetry is essentially a tool for passing an exam and reading for personal meaning in the classroom is generally not possible.

It should be noted that although this characterises their broad views, the teachers in this group, in common with the majority of teachers I interviewed, asserted the value of different kinds of group discussion in their classrooms. Their approach, therefore, goes beyond a crude transmission model of education within which students are taught by rote. These teachers value the importance of student participation in the classroom as a teaching tool to enable students to pass the exam.

2. Poems are problematic in the curriculum – We are bridges into meaning and also have to prepare students for the exam (Will, Philip and Zara, Eastern Sixth Form College; Mick, Crossroads Tertiary College)

The teachers in this loose category are Will, Philip, Zara and Mick. In terms of literary theories, they were eclectic: Philip and Mick discussed Historicist and Authorial approaches to reading, and Zara talked about the importance of students 'relating to texts', which inferred an affiliation with reader response theories. Will referenced analysis and poetic devices, suggesting an interest in close reading. They all explicitly recognised cultural biases in the curriculum and the barriers these might create for their inner-city adolescents reading poetry at A level. They also expressed deep reservations about the pressures of assessment, which, in their view close down some experiences with poems. Will, for example, said somewhat despairingly *we* (the college) *are a kind of exam-taking machine.*

Will also mused at some length about working-class, ethnic minority students lacking the necessary, officially sanctioned cultural capital to engage with the texts that the exam board has chosen:

> *There's a paper on Venice, there's a paper on Corfu, there's a paper on France, Hadrian's Wall, etcetera, etcetera and walking through a market in Venice. And when you say, 'isn't this a bit biased?' they* [people in meetings at exam boards] *say, 'no – there's nothing here that wouldn't have come up in key stage one, two and three'. Mmmmm, but actually, it's not true. Every year before we do the Hadrian's Wall paper, I say to the students, 'Has anyone – what is Hadrian's Wall?' and we go through the list and 'have you been there and there?' and no. About 10% have. And it's a huge disadvantage, and that's exactly the same with the poetry.*

Mick cautioned *it's very easy to take things for granted that we know, but actually, a 16/17-year-old from a Bangladeshi background living in London doesn't – just doesn't know.*

Teachers in this group also talked about the cultural capital students bring from their locally acquired lived experiences - their 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, 2005) and talked about how they can work with this to make meaning.

In the following comment I think Mick can be understood to draw on the Vygotskian idea of students as a 'more knowledgeable other' when reading poems. It will be recalled (see part 1 of my literature review) that a 'more knowledgeable other' is any person who has a better understanding of a task, which can be leveraged to assist the learning of others. Mick talked about asking the students to read Grace Nichols' poems:

> *They said I sounded Welsh when I read* [laughs], *and I was like, 'ok, you do it then!' You know and that actually, they get that. It's that kind of Jamaican Bangladeshi Patois that is London-ese that students can do very, very well. And they're very proud and excited to be doing it as well.*

In the following quotation, Will describes how subversive freedom from institutional expectations and roles can facilitate aesthetic pleasure in poetry within and beyond the syllabus:

> *I think that attempts to get people to enjoy poetry for its own sake often has to take place on trips. There's a sort of liberation, a sort of freedom. You know, we've been up to Keats' house with students, and they absolutely loved it … They loved being in the house, walking round it, reading Keats' poems that aren't on the syllabus, you know, there was almost something illicit about it.*

The use of the word 'illicit' here seems significant as it suggests pleasure is something 'forbidden' in everyday classroom learning but that there is liberation to be found outside this.

Will also described how some students resist attempts to engage outside of the classroom and see efferent exam success as the main goal of education: *there is a feeling that I thought a lot of students have – you know? What am I going to get from it? What's the grade – what's the point?* The extent to which students share this point of view is discussed later in this chapter under *Part 3: Findings from Student Focus Groups.*

Philip talked about the benefits of taking poetry out of a taught classroom session and into a lunchtime poetry club he runs. Here, the power relationship between teacher and students relaxes, and he and the students read and discuss new unseen poems together. In the following, Philip refers to an instance where he took a lunchtime poetry club experience into the classroom:

Weirdly enough, it's the benefit of underpreparing. Like the other day, I had a load of extracts of Keats because, in the exam, they're going to get an extract … and I didn't have time, no, probably didn't want to prepare the extract myself. Because then you arrive at a similar point as the student … you're going through things together, and you're kind of noticing things together, or what often happens is they'll notice things, and you're sort of, well, I didn't notice that or think that …

Philip's emphasis on the need to explore poems together also aligns with recent research, referred to in my literature review, which demonstrates how significant adolescent students feel it is to have spontaneous, authentic dialogue with their teachers to enjoy learning poetry (Intrator and Kunzmann, 2009; Enright, Torres-Torreti and Carreon, 2012). His words also echo Steele's (2005) observation that to experience poetry as art, teachers should orientate reading toward noticing poems rather than explaining them. If, as argued in my literature review, poetry is a versatile linguistic art form offering experiences with language, then actively experiencing poems, rather than knowing *about* poems, is crucial for promoting 'personal engagement'. The personalising approach Philip describes matches well with Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of 'situated learning', which focuses on the relationship between learning and the context within which it takes place. Although, as discussed in the literature review, it is questionable whether a college class can ever become genuinely a 'community of practice', there is perhaps a particular 'authenticity' to the lunchtime poetry reading club and the dialogue in some of Philip's classes. This is because he emphasises reading poetry as a process of participation and shared meaning making.

Perhaps more significantly, Philip, Mick and Will, in different ways, pointed to the importance of 'third spaces' (Pahl and Kelly, 2005) in teaching. The concept of 'third spaces' (introduced in my *literature review*) derives from debates about literacy practices to argue that literacies are not discretely situated at home, school, or, in this case, college. There are competing and different literacy practices, not all of which carry cultural capital, but in 'third spaces' there is the possibility of different discourses to emerge and merge (Moje *et al.* 2004)

In the example of Philip's lunchtime lesson, the 'normal' rules of behaviour and role expectations are loosened. He has made a pedagogical move to disrupt and explore ways of thinking. He divests himself of teacherly authority to read and make meaning alongside

students. Paris (2012) calls this 'culturally sustaining pedagogy'. According to Paris, this is third-space learning, which is characterised by honouring the knowledge, experiences, and expression students bring to the classroom. Whereas Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development relies on a 'more knowledgeable other', usually the teacher, to be an authoritative voice, 'third-space' learning opens up the possibility of authentically shared and democratically constructed knowledge. I would argue that in different ways, Philip, Mick and Will invoke 'third-space' learning as they describe some of their reading practices.

In common with all the teachers in my sample, the teachers in this group expressed dilemmas about what they do in the classroom and their general beliefs about teaching. Mick, for example, was conscious of tensions between some students' tendencies toward efferent reading and how he saw his role as a teacher: *students desperately, desperately want the puzzle to be solved, the puzzle, what the poem means… and you have to do quite a lot of work to allow students to be free to say what they think it means…* .

Collectively, the broad views of teachers in this group may be defined in the following way. The curriculum consists of both prescribed knowledge and a series of practices to negotiate. It may be difficult, but there is value and pleasure in negotiating spaces so that personal meaning and response have a place when reading poetry.

3. Poems as aesthetic expression – We must try to prioritise responsive reading in the classroom (Ayesha, Crossroads Tertiary College; Amelia, River Sixth Form College and Arthur, London Tertiary College; Tom – to some extent, Eastern Sixth Form College)

This group includes Ayesha, Amelia, and Arthur. These teachers are most allied in terms of literary theory to Rosenblatt's aesthetic pole of reading, and this was reflected in the language they used as well as the ideas they expressed. For example, Ayesha used the words 'feel' and 'feeling' a total of 33 times during her interview, which was far more than any other teacher. Ayesha explicitly hoped the students would have *feelings that connect* (with poems).

In common with other teachers, Ayesha also talked about tensions between experiencing poetry as art and learning it for exam purposes:

I can't imagine any poet ever writes a poem imagining it's going to be in front of a student to write an essay about …. yeah, there's a definite conflict. You want them to do well in the exam… but you have to keep reminding them. I try and remind them of their gut feeling, actually not to forget their gut feeling when they read a poem.

In contrast to Barry, Ayesha emphasised her understanding that there is space for personal meaning and response within the exam specifications:

We've been told… through moderator reports…there is a push for clarity and a personal response. They have to be analytical and logical, but they do get awarded for having several interesting interpretations.

Ayesha was the only teacher to reference personal meaning as an aspect of the curriculum at A level, although, as described in the literature review, it is part of the Assessment Objectives. I must note, however, that Ayesha's position was nuanced, and she shared, to some extent, Barry's 'efferent positivity' in relation to poems, stating that the length of poems made them accessible for personal response:

The fun thing about poetry because most poems are fairly short – they fit on a single page, they will understand the poem fairly soon as opposed to a long novel, and you can get a personal response from them. You can get quite an immediate response from them sometimes if they have a strong feeling towards a poem, so that's a positive.

Whilst not using the term 'personal response', Amelia talked about wanting students to have a *human response* to poems. She alluded to poems as offering experiences: *I want them to have a feeling, an interpretation – what do you get from this poem?* Amelia related this desire to her experience as a mature student:

… because I get something from it and maybe because I have this later university experience, desire to understand. I think, look if I LOVE this or I have a response to it it'll rub off on them. I'll have that moment, and they'll go OH Miss! I LOVE poetry.

In the following excerpt from her interview, Amelia defends poems against initial incomprehension:

> *I don't mean they have to have this huge emotional reaction, but the author is doing something to you, they're offering you something, and it's in the words. And it could be read this way, or it could be read that way. And if they're saying, 'what's this about?' I'm saying, well, it must be about something – it's not gobbledegook, it's not rubbish, it's about something.*

Here seems to be a teacher who clearly wants to direct student attention to poems and explore differing interpretations. In talking about her enjoyment *rubbing off* on students, she sees her role as broader than a teacher, training students to pass exams. Her approach can be described as coming from a liberal humanist tradition discussed in the literature review. Liberal humanism prioritises individual experiences and development of the whole person through engagement with art. Likewise, Amelia sees poems as offering important personal experiences, and she seeks to open students' eyes and hearts to experience poems.

Arthur also endorsed a liberal humanist approach when he talked about the importance of students:

> *... developing their voices* (so that by Year 2), *they should have developed, through their own reading programme, both a sense of what they write and what they read.*

Arthur talked about reading as an active choice, within which his role was to offer poems for students to read as 'bait'. The analogy of 'bait' implies the role of the teacher as an angler, and this perhaps also invokes ideas that successful teachers need to be patient and observant. The 'angler teacher' can only do so much – response on the part of the student is crucial. As Arthur put it: *They pick up the bait and that's the start of it – that's their aesthetic response.*

It is important to state here that Arthur is the only teacher in my sample who taught on the (now discontinued) A level Creative Writing course. In this qualification, reading is intrinsically linked to students producing their own writing, which may be poetry. Developing reader and personal response is, therefore, a prominent and explicit aim of teaching and learning. Here is a strong indication that, as with A level English Literature/Language and Literature, assessment may shape beliefs about learning in the classroom.

As described above, Tom's interview was interrupted, so I was obliged to make notes on what he had said and check some points with him later via email and a phone call. This disjointed and abbreviated his interview, and I am not confident that I can fully characterise his views in this respect.

However, to some extent, Tom's views aligned with the views of this group. He talked about the importance of 'negative capability' as a concept new to him, which he felt enabled him and the students to be open to interpretations of poems: *understanding it* [negative capability] *helps them to value ambiguity* in poems. This relates perhaps to Amelia's tolerance of ambiguity and Ayesha's discussion about personal response. Still, Tom did not fully discuss his thoughts on reading poems beyond *treating them as drama with a focus on action.*

Taken collectively, Arthur, Ayesha, and Anna's views can be described as taking a liberal humanist perspective on the curriculum and the role of poetry in this. They said they felt poems had their own integrity and that it is possible and desirable for students to personally respond in some way in the classroom. In this respect, they appear closest to Rosenblatt's aesthetic stance and are most concerned with the value of reader response to texts. However, this is not to say that there were not some inconsistencies and overlaps between these teachers' concerns and others. For example, when discussing how she wanted students to interpret poems for themselves, Amelia referred to the difficulty of her role as a bridge into meaning in the following terms:

> *I find it* [meaning making] *hard, really hard; I've got lots of ideas* [but, for example] *I found it hard to get under the skin of Duffy. So I find it hard to get that out of the students without giving too much away.*

I would argue that *get that out of the students without giving too much away* allies with the extractive language expressed by Bella and Barry in the efferent group. This suggests that even those teachers who focus on personal response struggle at times to negotiate reading experiences with reading for the purpose of passing exams.

4.1.3 Summary

In this section, I broadly characterised the ideological perspectives of teachers in my sample. I describe them as fitting into one of three groups. All teachers refer to the pressures of reading for the exam, but the first group see poems as essentially an efferent tool for passing exams and in this case, there is no room for personal response. The second are more equivocal. They see teaching poems for exams as problematic, but they also seek 'third spaces' where poems can be liberated from the shackles of assessment outcomes. Finally, there are some teachers who, in principle, claim it is possible and important to put personally responsive reading to the fore of their teaching.

Having defined these broad ideological camps, I must acknowledge that all the teachers in my sample expressed dilemmas and ambivalence in their views. Dilemmas about how poems can be in the classroom are perhaps best illustrated by Ayesha, who crystallised the pull and push of efferent and aesthetic readings in the classroom: *They're* [the poets] *writing it from a place of passion and feeling that you have with a lot of … I keep going back to feeling. It is, it isn't just about feelings. You have to analyse it in a logical way…*

Here, the pull of the felt response suggests Ayesha (from group 3) is drawn to the aesthetic experience of felt interpretation. However, at the same time, she is pushed – she has to work with the poems so that a logical analysis can be arrived at, and this implies efferent close reading. This reflects competing theoretical positions within literary criticism. As described in my literature review, reader response theories are predicated on the 'live circuit' of interaction between reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 44). From this perspective 'personal response' is a key part of reading poetry. Close or New Criticism however privileges the art of decoding poems as standalone artefacts and therefore sees 'personal response' as relatively unimportant or irrelevant (Richards, 1929). The latter approach is more favoured by the assessment objectives at A level. Both English Literature and English Language and Literature A levels have the key objective that students should 'analyse ways in which meanings are shaped within texts' (Ofqual, 2014). As acknowledged in my literature review, 'personal response' appears explicitly only as an aspect of an assessment objective for English Literature A level.

Having described broad and contrasting views teachers have about reading poems, I now turn to the barriers and bridges that they say they encounter when teaching poetry. Throughout this, I trace the different positions teachers in each broad camp take to arrive at a fuller picture of their stated views.

4.2 Barriers to Reading Poetry: Beliefs About Deficits

I have identified three recurring ideas in teacher interviews that intersect with the larger theme of cultural deficits. These are beliefs about reading as a skill deficit – cultural deficits students have which negatively affect their reading of poems and cultural barriers students experience as a consequence of the poems prescribed by the exam board.

4.2.1 Reading as a Skill Deficit

All but two of the teachers I have described told me that they believe students do not read very much and that students find reading a chore. This view was strongly held regardless of core beliefs about general approaches to reading in this classroom. This perceived deficiency teachers variously and vaguely related to 'the times we live in' and across ideological groups some related it to adolescent development. It will be seen that these views are not fully borne out by the students in my sample. *Adolescents – it's around willingness to read … Nah! Is it over two pages, Sir? I can't read it* (Mick, group 2). Adolescent reading stamina was also mentioned by Ayesha (group 3) and Anna (group 1). Both said that common objections to poetry were that the poems were *too long.* Bella (group 1) offered the view that *some of them are poor readers,* and Anna claimed that not reading is *THE barrier* to learning poetry, saying *students nowadays do not like reading books*. Mick described having to *drag students who don't read* through the work, with the caveat that this was less of an issue with the shorter form of poetry than the novel. Will (group 2) declared that, in general A level students are:

> *… lovely kids, but they're weak kids. They haven't read a book, and that's not unusual. We get kids who haven't read a novel – they haven't read a book except for their set text and so you're dealing with a kind of literacy issue there.*

Will seems to be saying that he does not think that, collectively, students read much, and this creates a skill deficit that causes problems for them when studying A level English.

Like Will, Barry (group 1) said *'there are lots of students who are still dealing with basic building blocks of literacy'.* It can be argued that implicit in Barry and Will's comments is a limited view of literacy as reading and writing. Their comments seem to be inferring an

autonomous view of literacy (Street, 1994). This sees literacy as a set of incremental and individually derived skills learnt in a socially context-free fashion. This position, and particularly the idea that students are *'weak kids … who haven't read a book',* potentially risks overlooking the actual skills and abilities students have and their 'funds of knowledge' referred to by Mick above.

It is a plausible assumption that the teachers in my study grew up in an environment that prioritised reading books. By contrast, the students they are teaching have grown up in a different time and social context, and they have a lot of experience with digital texts. Digital texts are essentially multimodal in nature, often supplying audio and visual links and, while digital reading does not confer all the same benefits as reading in print (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2020) it does offer the possibility of active engagement with diverse sources of knowledge. Turner, Hicks and Zucker's (2019) large-scale quantitative study of adolescent digital reading habits in the USA cites skills of skimming, scanning and management of attention distraction as strengths rather than weaknesses. They further recommend that teachers try to make active connections between their student reading practices in and out of school. From this perspective, teachers of poetry at A level may find it helpful to discuss and build on the skills that adolescent digital readers have acquired rather than seeing their students as lacking reading experience.

Mick explored the value of reading at A level and said that reading is not necessary to pass an exam:

> *one of my students who actually got, I think a 'C' um, I know, hadn't read the novels. I know she hadn't… she's a very, very bright young woman but absolutely not a reader and didn't want to be... If you're very bright you can get away with an awful lot because – because of the way in which the syllabus is designed, there's a huge amount of content, and the questions are thematic.*

From this perspective, when an exam pass leads the purpose of learning, ANY engagement with reading is dispensable. Reading is unnecessary if the rules of the exam game are understood well enough. Mick provides a clear example of a student independently gaming the exam system. The student teaches themselves to pass the test whilst only engaging in efferent reading derived from lessons. Here is a powerful illustration of the ability of the assessment regime to occlude any and all other approaches to reading poetry.

Contrasting voices in relation to student reading came from Amelia and Ayesha (group 3). Ayesha suggested that students, *might read novels, possibly short stories, and drama probably even less*. Amelia stated,

> *reading is my absolute bug bear… I bang on about it from day one,* she also said *a lot of them do read. Sometimes they come in and put their books on the desk, you know, to show lovely extracts in there.*

Amelia's more nuanced comment on reading suggests that in her view, students do read, but they may be resistant to reading the set texts. Amelia's views are consistent with research from Moje *et al* (2008) and Park (2012) which found that unless teachers validate student reading practices in the classroom students may well conceal their private reading habits, which in turn, perpetuates the idea that they cannot and do not read. It is important to explore where and how teacher's beliefs that students are poor and unwilling readers impacts on teaching strategies in the classroom, and this is discussed later in part 2 of this chapter.

4.2.2 Students Have Cultural Deficits in Relation to Poetry

Mick, Amelia, Tom, and Zara expressed the idea that students have deficits specifically in relation to reading poems. Perceived cultural barriers include students' dislike and fear of poetry, a lack of student experience with poetry, and difficulties students have with the language and form of poetry.

That students dislike or fear poetry was a broadly shared view: *you hear them say two things … I hate Shakespeare, and I hate poetry* (Will, group 2). *What do they hate more? Well, they don't like drama, but they really hate poetry* (Tom, loosely allied with group 3). Mick described frequent *prejudice* from students against poems. Here, teachers are affirming some long-held reservations found in the literature about the accessibility and appeal of poems taught in the formal education system to students (Bullock, 1975; Benton, 1999/2000; Snapper, 2013).

Some teachers attributed the dislike of poetry to difficulties with the language and form of poetry. Amelia (group 3) said that poetry is harder for students than a novel because *words are not necessarily in the right order, and it's playful or ambiguous*. She also suggested that lack

of experience with poems was at the root of this problem: *they haven't been exposed to this, so they don't know what to do.* Amelia said that students had naïve expectations of poetry, losing focus when the poems did not have obvious rhymes or rhythms: *but it doesn't rhyme, Miss!* This perceived lack of experience with poems leads, in many of the teachers' views, to resistance to working with poems in the classroom.

Amelia's comment alludes to a key feature of many poems identified by Formalists (Eagleton, 2007), which is that they deliberately subvert daily usage of language and make the unfamiliar strange. Mick (group 2) also referred to this feature, saying that students sometimes *have a prejudice against poems* because, unlike plays, there is rarely dialogue, and this leads students to think poems are *unnatural.* Tom and Zara (also group 2) said that a lack of temporal order in poems can lead to *immediate fear … a fear you aren't told the instant story – you have to work at it* (Zara). *A lot of students find it more impenetrable than a play* (Tom).

Bruner's (1985) theory concerning thought in narrative mode is pertinent here. When working in narrative, rather than scientific mode of thought, we are concerned with constructing meanings based on factors such as our motivations, desires, and intent. This involves personal and cultural constructions of meaning embedded in abstract thought. Generic theory and research tells us adolescents are developing new capacities to think abstractly (Vygotsky, 1978; Kegan, 1994; Phelan, 2018; Cuthbert, 2019). It is possible that what teachers might be defining as deficits may, in fact, be emergent adolescent abilities. However, working in a positivistic and utilitarian educational culture creates tensions for students and teachers. They are judged on the basis that students 'reproduce required ideas' for an exam, and this may not fit easily with the ability to 'question realities', which Kegan (1994) argues is a key developmental feature of the adolescent mind.

4.2.3 The Curriculum as a Cultural Barrier

The teachers in this study are drawn from colleges situated in North and East inner London. The students they teach are from a wide variety of cultural and ethnic minority backgrounds, and, as evidenced by Government Indices of Deprivation (see methodology chapter, *Research Sites*), many come from socio-economically deprived backgrounds. Across the three groups of teachers I have identified, there was a shared view that in addition to the barriers I have just described, the kinds of poems that the exam boards proscribe present a barrier for their students.

The curriculum is designed so that an essential aspect of A level English includes poetry from pre-1914. Ayesha and Arthur (group 3), Will (group 2), and Barry (group 1) all expressed concern about the possible inaccessibility of archaic language for their students: *…the initial glance at the text is bewildering, overwhelming* (Barry on Chaucer).

> *I remember when we first did Sir Thomas Wyatt's 'Whoso List to Hunt', and it's full of several archaic words and phrases that they just didn't understand, I had to sort of give them almost a modern translation alongside it… archaic language – that would be a barrier for them.* (Ayesha)

Ayesha seems to be saying that the students she teaches lack the right kind of high-status 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1984) needed to pass exams. Whilst for Ayesha, this concept is implicit, Will addressed it overtly:

> *Part of what I'm interested in is enculturation, you know, Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital … I went to this WJEC exam board and … you go to the meetings and look at their unseen papers. To me, they seem very biased towards people who are socio-economically better off.*

Tom described student knowledge of historical and political contexts of poems as *piecemeal,* and Mick cautioned *it's very easy to take things for granted that we know, but actually, a 16/17-year-old from a Bangladeshi background living in London doesn't – just doesn't know.*

The firm implication from all these comments is that teachers see a strong discrepancy between the cultural experiences and knowledge of the students and the cultural references and knowledge that the examiners expect students to show. In Bourdieu's terms, the curriculum is narrowed to privilege certain kinds of texts which constitute 'objectified capital'. At the same time, 'the acquisition of cultural capital in the schools of dominant cultures depends upon the prior acquisition of particular forms of the habitus' (Carrington and Luke 1997, p. 110). Inner-city, working-class college students, often from migrant backgrounds, may well lack the kind of embodied social capital that gives them access to the poetic texts offered at A level. The *huge disadvantage* which Will describes (p. 160) impacts on their ability to acquire institutional

capital, that is, an exam pass. Arthur perhaps nailed the point when he described the 19th-century canon as *pale, male and dead.*

The challenge of privileging certain types of knowledge about the world above others has been previously explored (e.g., Yandell, 2014), but it is clear that the teachers in my sample have, in principle, reservations about the ability of their students to understand and reproduce the kinds of knowledge about the world demanded by the exam. Later, I explore whether and how this belief plays out in the classroom.

4.2.4 Summary

Teacher beliefs that students are unskilled readers who lack experience of poetry at home and school and that the choice of poems read at A level are difficult for their students to understand were powerful themes throughout the interviews. At least in part, teachers from the inner-city colleges I researched see their students as deficient and disadvantaged in relation to poetry reading at A level. Bella captured this idea from her efferent perspective when she discussed her own experience of reading at university:

> *When I started university…the professor in the department said, 'Welcome to the University. I hope after leaving us after four years, you'll be able to read a book.' And I looked at him and thought, 'You silly sod, I've just got A levels … what are you talking about, be able to read a book?' What I learnt in four years was how to read a book. I learnt how to withdraw information. That's what I learnt.*

Views about students as deficient readers exist, expressed in a variety of ways across all three identified groups. Later, I explore through data from focus groups and lesson observations where and how these beliefs may have consequences for teaching and learning in the classroom.

Synthesising international research, McInerney (2009) and Berliner (2011) have explored how the narrowing of the curriculum can lead to a stifling of creativity in the classroom and alienation of young people from learning. I have argued in the literature chapter that the description of a prescriptively narrow curriculum strongly applies at both A level English Literature and A level English Language and Literature. Young's (2016) qualitative research

in high schools argues that effective teachers of 'arts' subjects see students as capable and strive to relate learning to students' own aesthetic preferences. In this respect, the teachers in my research expressed deeply ambivalent views. Alongside some beliefs about students' disadvantages and deficiencies, they also expressed positive views about their own teaching strategies and the abilities and potential of their students. It is to these positive beliefs that I turn next.

4.3 Bridges: Positive Ways into Reading Poetry

Teachers expressed many positive views about bridges into reading poetry. I have identified four main themes in the interviews. These are students bring rich cultural capital to their reading, creation of a reading culture to support reading and learning, multimodal teaching strategies, and finally, a broader theme about the value of shared dialogue and discussion. I will now discuss each theme.

4.3.1 Students Bring Rich Cultural Capital to Reading

In the previous section, I discussed the ways in which teachers perceive cultural barriers and deficits in relation to students learning poetry. However, there are deep ambivalences around this belief. For example, whilst Mick (group 2) identified students' lack of willingness to read as a barrier to learning, he also broadly asserted that in relation to students, *I don't buy the deficit thing.* He explained that when teaching English Literature, historical anachronisms are unavoidable but that his job is to bridge gaps in knowledge concerning cultural artefacts:

> *I suppose you have to have an open classroom where people can say what's that? … I don't think it's a deficit not to know about CB radios or radiograms but it is something that you can't take for granted. And actually, that's quite a good thing in teaching because that's – you don't want to be taking knowledge for granted … CB radio was just 'well we don't understand' and the lock on the telephone – they were like 'well how do you lock a telephone, how do you lock a phone?' And I'm saying, 'well, you know where the dial'… 'Well, what dial? No, we don't know!'*

Mick also said that as a white teacher teaching exclusively ethnic minority students, he would

> *hand it* [reading of poems by ethnic minority poets] *over to them really and it happened in different year groups – absolutely definitely. I think it's – it's about asking the student to read, and there was a student, it was a him I'm sure, and this was his possibility to shine and he just kicked it, you know? And he just went for it and the rest of the class almost – I think almost applauded at the end.*

Mick is talking here about drawing on cultural strengths in the classroom: those of himself as a teacher and those of his students. This is an example of a teacher, as described in Young's (2016) research, who encourages active and enthusiastic voluntary reading. This, in turn, has been shown to support adolescent motivation for reading in general (Goldman, Snow and Vaughn, 2016). At the end of the interview with Mick, I asked if he wanted to add anything to how he taught poetry, and he responded by describing his role as a cultural bridge: [I try] *to get information from students about their own lives and drawing parallels so … they can jump from that to what the poem is trying to say or the references in the poem.* Mick then talked about drawing similarities between the concept of courtly love and student experiences of arranged marriage, cautioning that students *have to be able to understand where a particular label ceases to work even if they can see it on a historical continuum and that is the bit which I think is quite hard.*

Teaching through students' cultural strengths has been described as when the teacher 'filters curriculum content through (student) frames of reference to make the content more personally meaningful and easier to master' (Gay, 2018, p. 32). Making content 'personally meaningful' is key to my research, and Mick illustrates an important principle of drawing on what students can and do know, as well as recognising what they do not know without judgement of a deficit.

Will and Zara (group 2) and also Bella (group 1) explicitly discussed how they would draw on their students' experiences, often as migrants or people of faith, to encourage interpretative reading of poems.

> *A lot of our students come from a Christian or Muslim tradition … look at the rhythm of the King James Bible or the book of psalms or whatever. And if you get a student – particularly those who are part of a Christian church – to speak in the style of their preacher, well, you will get a fantastic poem coming out of them. So it's building a bit on their reservoirs of knowledge but quite quickly getting it to link in with what we're doing here.* (Will)

What I found with Keats was – my fear was they were going to come in 'We All Don't Like This.' Actually, what happened is some have come in going: 'I really like this story element – I really like the fact it's based on a myth that I have studied before in my childhood' or 'this reminds me of this…' (Zara)

I think cultural understanding they would bring. It really helps particularly with Dickinson if you've got Christians…particularly the kind of big African Christians …. If they've got biblical knowledge that's really useful [for reading poems]. (Bella)

My literature review introduced the Vygotskyan concepts of 'scaffolding' and the role of 'the more knowledgeable other'. In essence, the latter breaks down and models learning for students so that they exceed what they can achieve alone. I would argue that in the quotations above, further education teachers explicitly invite the students to be the 'more knowledgeable others' while also mediating and scaffolding learning. This matches teaching strategies discussed in my literature review and explored in research (e.g., Pike, 2000; Peskin Wells and Jopling, 2012) of teachers collaborating with students and enabling the co-creation of knowledge.

Philip talked about drawing on student life experiences in the following terms:

I suppose the nice thing about literature is it's about life so although they might not have read Pride and Prejudice, they might have, they have an understanding about romance or something, and you can tap into that.

The language Philip uses may be seen as efferent; *the nice thing about literature* perhaps suggests that it's incidentally useful that the content of literature is about life. However, he also points to the need to draw on student experiences of romance, just as Bella or Will are drawing on student experiences of religion or migration.

The rich cultural capital students bring to their reading was most obviously celebrated by Arthur (group 3). This can be connected directly with the demands of the Creative Writing A level, where students draw on both reading and their life experiences to produce new writing:

I think they're a unique bunch from London ... I mean, we have such a mix… The mix we get here – the experience is wonderful. I mean, a good example is one student for her coursework is writing about her Lithuanian grandmother's experience of being transported to Siberia by Stalin. Another student is writing about her experience of going back to Kenya on the Duke of Edinburgh award and finding out about that side of her cultural heritage. And then, of course, you get the sort of London working-class kids who write about going down to the canal and smoking dope.

The Creative Writing A level is exceptional in its focus on both reception and production of writing. Still, there is evidence that across all three ideological groups and across different syllabuses, teachers draw on students' own cultural capital to help them read texts. There is tension here because, as discussed in the literature review, for Bourdieu, 'culture' refers to both specific ways of life created by groups of people and to the works and practices of dominant groups in society (Beadle, 2020). Teachers in my study are trying to navigate both kinds of cultural capital, and how they position the students to invite or not invite them to make cultural connections is further explored through lesson observations and focus groups. It can be argued that even as teachers try to make links between different kinds of cultural capital, they are aware that to pass the exam, students have to reproduce particular cultural responses to the poems that they are studying. In short, teachers are aware that not all cultural capital is regarded as equally valid, and this, perhaps, explains their inconsistent views about students' relative strengths and 'deficits' in this regard.

After collecting data from interviews on this topic, I reflected on how often teachers from different colleges mentioned the religious beliefs of their students. In their lived experience, religion offers a significant way to help students read and interpret. Schieble (2010) has researched from a reader response perspective how teachers locate readers' subjectivities in the classroom, finding that teachers can make bold and untested assumptions about student relationships to the experiences being discussed in the text. It is possible that teacher familiarity with certain kinds of cultural connections students make could lead to inadvertent stereotyping and exclusion of less obvious but equally rich cultural connections to texts. Consideration of this might be a fruitful topic for teachers to discuss.

4.3.2 Creation of a Reading Culture

Reading as a habit is a 'distinctive and dynamic form of cultural capital' (Ee Loh and Sun 2020, p. 234) and the concept of a 'reading culture' has been variously defined but includes notions of independent, self-motivated reading within a broader participative and communicative culture (Kachak, Budnyk and Blyznyuk, 2020). Research from the USA drawing on large-scale, semi-structured interviews with adolescents found that the kinds of activities teachers model around reading 'can have a tremendous impact on students' reading habits and attitudes' (Pitcher *et al.*, 2007, p. 393).

Teachers from all three groups I have identified spoke enthusiastically about ways that they hoped to encourage a reading culture within their classrooms. Amelia (group 3) told me that one of the first activities she does with A level students is to ask them to draw a clock face with hourly segments. Students write in the segments anything they have read over 24 hours. Amelia makes no judgement of what students have read. Rather, she points to the variety and types of reading students do, hoping to persuade students that they are already skilled readers. In doing so, she draws on their reading of things as diverse as bus timetables, tweets and advertisements.

Amelia also said she habitually puts the title of what she is reading on the board each week and, in this way, hopes to be a reading role model:

> *Dana, she came up last week and rubbed stuff off the board and said right, I'm going to put up what I'm reading. I said, please do! It's not just about me I'm not showing off it just shows – you know, I tell them I read at home it's just natural. A lot of them do read, and they come in and put their books on the desk you know, to show…*

Similarly, Anna (group 1) talked about offering extracts of novels and bringing novels into a classroom for students to choose from: *years ago, Brick Lane – a whole class borrowed that book. I never got it back, but I didn't mind that at all.*

Zara (group 2) described an induction exercise she uses called 'Reading Memories' in which students are asked to recall something they recall reading as a child and discuss

> *where did they get them from and, how they feel about them, how would they describe them to someone now … I think that opens up the idea that everything we read does form your view and your enjoyment of something, and that's how you work out likes and dislikes.*

Will and Philip (group 2), both at Eastern Sixth Form, talked about how they encourage student reading by making their own anthologies of different poems by authors on the syllabus. If a student expresses their enjoyment of a poem by, for example, Duffy, they will then offer them other poems to read for pleasure by Duffy.

All of these tactics are ways of engaging students with poems at a level of personal response. Teachers are encouraging students to draw on what Bourdieu calls 'embodied cultural capital' and to value their own knowledge and experiences as they prepare to read poems.

4.3.3 Multimodal Teaching Strategies

As far back as the Newbolt Report, poetry has been discussed in terms of 'the sounds and colours conveyed by it' (1921, p. 11). Multimodal learning can be defined as students actively learning through verbal, non-verbal and sensory experiences (Massaro, 2012). Research on the benefits of multimodal approaches to learning poetry has been discussed previously in the literature review and includes increased affective and cognitive engagement (e.g., Unratz and Stats, 2011; Massaro, 2012).

There were considerable divergences of opinions about the merits of visual and aural multimodal approaches to teaching poems. Teachers from all three groups valued and reported using visual imagery to engage students. This included use of photos, blocks of colour to evince emotion, projection of art, and, in Anna's case, getting the students to draw their own images of poems. Interestingly, Anna devalued this exploration of the secondary world of the poem, saying that to *draw what they think ... it's very, very basic stuff,* suggesting drawing is an inferior way into understanding poems compared to the individual annotation of poems – which she previously discussed at some length. This seems cognisant with Anna's efferent approach to poems.

From her more aesthetic stance, Ayesha (group 3) positively prioritised the use of imagery, seeing it as key to meaning making. Ayesha also speculated about the 'secondary worlds' (Benton, 1985) students create when they read:

personal response, they're quite imaginative with things like words or phrases, what imagery comes into their heads…I guess they like to create a story in their own head, some kind of narrative that helps them understand what's going on in the poem... they might imagine what it's like to be one of the speakers in the poem.

Ayesha described the different ways she uses open questions and visual stimuli to help students respond to poems:

I might not present the poem straightaway. I might have images, [and] *brainstorm these images* [asking] *what comes into your head when you see these images? What else do you think it could mean? So, for a poem like Winter Swans, which is in the collection, I might just show them a picture of an icy landscape, swans, or people holding hands, or a heart shape, like with your hands or with the swans' necks, because that's an image in the poem, and then I might show them the poem. Or if I'm not doing image work, I might pick words that are in the poem and then put those on a page and, say, brainstorm these words. What comes into your head?*

Philip (group 2) described similar tactics:

We put a lot of pictures on the board and say to them what's interesting about that image. Say just ten words … um, and they always really like that because it's sort of their opinion and their interpretation and they sort of enjoy that element of it.

Barry (group 1) described the use of imagery, particularly when teaching Chaucer, because Middle English is *bewildering and overwhelming*

… when I was creating the Chaucer scheme of work… I must have had too much time on my hands because there's so many images but, yeah, making it very visual…It doesn't matter who you are or what level you are in that class, everyone can see an image of Damien as a snake or an image of a bed half nails and half roses, and they can process that and do something with that and feel that they've got a starting point.

Do something with that is language that I would argue has an efferent flavour. It is perhaps indicative of Barry's broader views, which place him in group 1 of my general approaches to

reading in the classroom. The central point here, though, is that for many teachers in my sample, imagery is seen as an inclusive way into reading poems, which invites students of many abilities to engage in the class.

Whilst there was consensus about the value of imagery, there were very different opinions amongst teachers in my sample about the value and role of sound to support meaning making. This is significant because the importance of sound in poetry has been explored in literature from a variety of perspectives (e.g., Dimock, 1997; Padel, 2004; Ribeiro, 2009). More specifically, the relationship between music and adolescence has been referred to. It is perhaps noteworthy that a connection between these was made by Hall (1904), who, it will be remembered, conceptualised the term 'adolescence'. In my research, differences of opinion between teachers about the value of sound cannot be mapped neatly to any of the three identified groups.

Two teachers (Philip and Zara, both from group 2) did not discuss the sound of poems at all in their interviews; they simply made no reference to rhyme, rhythm, or musicality of poems. Ayesha (group 3), who said that feelings about poems matter and who was insistent about the value of imagery, did not think sound very important. She discussed it in efferent terms as '*the mechanics'* and talked about sound only in terms of its difficult role as a feature of poems to be memorised rather than having any experiential value in the classroom.

> *A negative might be if they need to know a lot of, sort of more like the mechanics of the poetry, if they need to know things like meter, and rhyme schemes, and form … I would need to teach them that and some of those things, names, and meter and stuff, they'd need to memorise that and be more familiar with that side of things. So that's the challenge, sort of teaching them about meter without making it boring and mechanical and counting stressors and syllables.*

In making these comments, Ayesha was close to the position of Barry and Anna (group 1), both of whom were dismissive about the value of sound. Anna said *I dislike* teaching anything to do with rhyme and rhythm because *it's fiddly, and I'm not sure what it illuminates beyond a few points.* There is no sense here of sound as having intrinsic value; it is there as an extrinsic factor to *illuminate … a few points.*

Barry explicitly demoted the role of sound to last place in his teaching of poems. *Usually, the last thing we did with Dickinson was look at rhythm and rhyme… when they've kind of mapped out all that information, I'd go, Right, ok, so how might the rhythm or rhyme support the meaning that you've come up with?*

Mapping out all that information is efferent and graphic language, suggesting that facts have to be martialled and managed to make 'the meaning' of the poem which the class have arrived at. Sound is an auxiliary support to a mapped out meaning: *some kind of message you can link it to*. It is not seen as an intrinsically important feature of poems.

Ayesha, Anna, and Barry expressed no sense of the importance of what Dimock (1997) described as the 'bodily resonance' of poetry: the idea that poems can convey affective and cognitive meanings through the physical experience of sound.

Bella, who, like Barry, is in group 1, expressed a more nuanced approach to sound. She said *I try to remember to tell them that when they're reading, they need to hear it because poetry is meant to be heard, and that sound is a really important part of poetry.*

Unlike the three teachers above, Bella believes in principle in the intrinsic value of sound as an essential aspect of poetry. However, saying *I try to remember* is an uncommitted position to take. Bella may tell students to hear poems, but there is no certainty that she does, nor does she say anything about how she might help them to appreciate this *really important part of poetry.* It is possible to infer that Bella doesn't act on this belief because she also does not believe poems can exist in the classroom in the first place.

Tom (allied with group 2) referred to the sound of poems tangentially in relation to his own classroom performances. Saying that, *on reflection, my approach is to teach poetry like drama*. Tom talked about his enjoyment of dramatic readings of poems where he adopts different voices and accents to convey meaning. Tom said students value *a focus on the action.*

The strongest advocates of the potential of sound as a strategy for reading poems were Mick group 2) and Amelia and Arthur (group 3). Mick and Amelia said that sound is more than important in their teaching; it is an essential aspect of poems. Mick offered a definition of poetry as a unity of experience: *form, meaning, rhyme all go together to make a poem, and*

that's what, well, without wishing to sound too pretentious… [makes]… *a work of art rather than a … a story.* In relation to student experiences, Ameila said the following,

> *that whole idea that it's around you all the time, maybe…* [makes it] … *a bit more easy for them to understand… I do try and contextualise it you know, rhythm and sound and music and rhyme is around you all the time, and that is what poetry is. I mean rap is poetry.*

Here, Amelia goes beyond Bella's assertion that sound is *a really important part* of poetry to claim that sound *is* poetry, and moreover, it can be found everywhere, including the kinds of music her students might listen to. She says she tells students that sound is the essence of poetry and also hopes to persuade them that this art form can be culturally accessible and meaningful to them.

To support this, Amelia argued that students should be encouraged to read aloud. Whilst in practice, every one of the teachers I observed got students to read aloud, she was the only one to directly refer to this as a valuable way into making sense of poems: *Reading out loud …* [I] *… think is really important in terms of teaching poetry because quite often students don't necessarily hear the rhythm or the rhyme unless they're reading it out loud.* (Amelia)

Whilst the concept of multimodal learning covers more than imagery or sound, it is notable that in my sample, the only teacher who went beyond these categories in their description of how they stimulate reading was Arthur (group 3), the teacher of Creative Writing A level. He discussed getting students to write and respond to blogs and contribute to discussion threads of their reading. Shared personal response begins with students coming in with an extract from their favourite summer reading: *They'll read it to the class and share it. And quite often, that will trigger other students too, so they… they have a task in which they all produce a creative response to that reading.*

Arthur described getting students to take photos on their phones to illustrate readings and also the use of artefacts to stimulate ideas and writing. Declaring *we raided the Art Department for all these …* Arthur showed me a box of various objects, for example, leaves, a doll's foot, a night light, some coral and an ultrasound scan of a foetus.

I'll scatter them around the tables at first, and I'll ask them to describe it in the plainest possible terms – just describe it and a quality that it has. Then … um …we collect the descriptive stuff. And then I'll ask them perhaps – where did it come from? You know create a location, think about where the object has been – then think about how it came to be in this location and then that leads them into story telling. Sometimes – I've got some images too [reaches to shelf] *and we use that. Oh, this is one of the fun ones …* [shows photograph of Kenwood House]

At the end of this process, students can choose to write a poem, a short piece of dialogue, or a story about the objects they have discussed. Here, meaning making and response are built on the use of objects. The students begin by reading into the objects *we collect the descriptive stuff* before creating written responses. Arthur talked about the importance of music and sound:

… culturally – some of them will draw from music. I've had students who write about or borrow ideas from music, and again it's the ideas thing really, so the tone of a Coldplay song inspired someone to write about being homeless in London. I used to get a lot of performance poets – there was a little rash of them after some good school visits and the Barbican Young Poets. We used, um, The Song that Saved My Life? You know the article used to be in The Guardian sometimes? So, they pick a song that means something to them. They write a description of why that means something to them – and then they post a video on YouTube along with their description.

To summarise, I found a broad consensus between teachers in my sample about the role and value of visual patterns within poems. There is less consensus about the role and value of sound patterns. Whilst it is the case that those most open to the value of sound to support reading poems are from groups 2 and 3 there are individual differences between people which make it impossible to trace declared practices from core beliefs.

4.3.4. Dialogue and Discussion

As discussed in my literature review, language is a shared tool which mutually links and shapes our inner world of 'personal meaning' with outer cultural influences (Vygotsky, 1978). Making meaning in what Bruner (1990) called a 'narrative' or storytelling mode involves social and subjective claims, and these, in turn, draw on both personally idiosyncratic and broadly shared

cultural experiences. From a reader response perspective, which my research rests on, dialogue in the classroom is an essential aspect of learning. Dialogue and discussion played a significant role in all the lessons I observed, and I would argue that lesson observations and focus groups are a stronger lens than teacher interviews through which to see the impact of discussion on adolescents responding and making 'personal meaning' with poetry.

Having said this, all the teachers I interviewed talked about the role of dialogue and discussion as a teaching strategy, irrespective of their general approaches to teaching poetry. This is not surprising. Training, development, and professional standards for Further Education and Training in England have been managed since 2013 by the Education and Training Foundation. The foundation emphasises that teachers should develop confident learners by drawing on what learners already know and do, and this clearly aligns with the need for discussion and dialogue in the classroom (Education and Training Foundation, 2022). However, the reasons, types of discussion and extent, to which teachers said they use dialogue and discussion widely diverged. Teachers also talked about conflicting feelings and dilemmas around their management of classroom discussions. I now turn to these two sub-themes.

4.3.5 Reasons, Types, and Extent to Which Teachers Promote Dialogue and Discussion

Will talked about the use of informal conversations (dialogue) with students as a way of building relationships in third spaces, stating that these, in turn, support relationships in the classroom. He did not refer to whole or small group discussion as a teaching strategy; he positioned it as a social bridging tool:

> *Talking to students on the trip, which is actually one of the great things about trips, and … if you have a useful relationship – well, speaking cynically, if you have a good relationship with them, they work really well for you usually.* (Will, group 2)

Everyone else, apart from Tom, mused about the role of both whole and small group discussions in their teaching. Tom said that it is *my preference* to teach using whole class discussion and targeted questions. For reasons already stated, it was unfortunately not possible to explore this in the interview although I did observe Tom and Will using discussion in different ways in lessons.

Teachers who talked about dialogue and discussion talked about it in three ways. Firstly, their use of open discussion at the start of lessons, and secondly about different types of discussion at the start of teaching a poem. Finally, teachers talked about small group discussions that are strategically embedded throughout lessons.

Discussing poems as a whole class or in groups at the start of a lesson as a kind of short primer for the class was reported across the spectrum of teachers interviewed (i.e., Barry and Anna group 1; Philip and Zara group 2; and Amelia group 3). All talked about using visual cues (photos, colours, works of art) and use of open questions at the start of classes.

Picture starters (discussed above under multimodal strategies) were seen as especially useful for enabling open whole class discussion; students give *their opinion and their interpretation, and they sort of enjoy that element* (Philip). Amelia said that at the start of a lesson, she likes to *take out single words* [from poems they're studying] *and put them on the board and ask what do these mean to you?* Talking about whole class discussion at the start of the lesson, Zara asserted *visual imagery and discussion. I think that feeds it all.*

Zara and Philip's comments reinforce the general point made earlier, namely that teachers in my sample are keen to use visual imagery in terms of meaning making. Taken with Amelia's comment about the exploration of single words, these supported discussions at the start of classes seem to invite personal responses. However, from interview alone, I could not tell whether these 'personal meaning making' activities are seen as a 'warmup act' to 'real teaching' or are used throughout the lessons. This is explored further in *Part 2: Lesson Observations* and student perspectives are discussed in *Part 3: Findings From Focus Groups*

Teachers also talked about discussion at the start of teaching a new poem in quite different ways.

Mick (group 2) talked about open questioning in a whole group discussion when introducing a poem. He was explicit about what he called *the way to hell* in this context:

> *I'd usually ask pretty open questions – what do you think about this? What did you get from it? Ideas about the language, does it rhyme, is there a rhythm? And get them to talk about those sorts of things and talk about it without labelling it, without saying, 'there's an adjective on line 5 that rhymes with that one' because that's the way to hell, really!*

Asked what he meant by *the way to hell,* he said,

> *well because it always detracts from the poem, and also for the exam, whilst they need to mention metaphor and key terms, they need to explain why and how. And that's – well- students, especially weaker students, cling on to the mechanics rather than how it relates to the meaning.*

I have previously highlighted Mick's positivity toward students making 'personal meaning' through their own cultural understandings. In the above extract his use of open questions: *what do you think… what did you get …?* invites multiple viewpoints, and he appears to be offering a strong element of experiential reading. He also refers here to the perils of efferent reading, that is, that reading for mechanical features of poems alone detracts from the poem and the exam. In his view, reading for meanings and exam skills need not be in conflict. What matters is that understanding and wider meaning are foregrounded in teaching.

In contrast to whole class discussion, Bella (group 1) talked about using paired discussion as a kind of primer for reading a new poem. She said she would:

> *put up the first sentence and give them ten minutes, five on their own, five in pairs. 'What do you think it's about?' 'Where do you think this is going to go?' 'Why?' 'What kind of tone...?' 'What's happening?'*

Bella's use of the word 'sentence' rather than 'line' in relation to poems is interesting. It suggests she treats a line of poetry as a grammatical construction rather than a unit of thought, and, if so, this seems consistent with her generally efferent approach to reading poems in the classroom. Nonetheless, some of the predictive questions she is asking such as *what do you think this is about ... where do you think this is going to go?* invites personal engagement and speculative anticipatory meaning, making it grounded in the secondary world of the poem.

Anna (also group 1) said that when introducing poems, she asks students to read and annotate poems alone and then compare and discuss individual answers in small groups.

> *[I] give them a few questions to go with it, you know: what do you think this is about? What's the relationship between this person and that person if it's not clear – um, you know, er,*

how does the – ah, if it's a sonnet, how does the argument change at this point, the volta in the poem.

Anna, like Bella, appears to be prompting some measure of personal response, especially in terms of the narrative *what do you think?* However, subsequent examples of questions she asks are directed toward answering specific questions and to this extent, reading is encouraged to be purposely efferent rather than experiential. I would argue that in different ways, Anna, Bella and Mick are trying to resolve a central dilemma teachers experience around teaching poems. The dilemma is, how far can poems in the classroom be experienced as pieces of whole art read aesthetically, and how far must they be experienced as *clever little machines* (Barry group 1) to be taken apart and read efferently? Mick's stance is to attempt aesthetic reading consciously when introducing poems. Bella and Anna seem to swing between both of Rosenblatt's aesthetic and efferent poles. Later, I explore through lesson observations and focus groups how readings play out in the experience of the students.

Finally, teachers reported on the role of small group discussions embedded in lessons. Ayesha (group 3) and Anna (group 1) described how small group work is often used between whole class teaching and individual reading. *They work in small groups for about five, ten minutes, and then we'll give feedback to each other* (Anna). Sandwiching group work between whole class teaching is a familiar teaching strategy which, as a teacher educator, I have witnessed being used in many subjects. Teachers talked about the value of small groups for generating ideas:

because there are four of them or five, often ideas, which mean they have to share and talk through those ideas, and they have to decide which ones they're going to report back on. And that is sometimes around the hierarchy of the students in the group, but sometimes it's about someone has had an idea, and everyone else thinks, 'ooooo, that's interesting' (Mick)

In the above quotation Mick is describing elements of co-created learning. He refers to challenging elements of dialogue, shared meaning making, group dynamics and dominance. By contrast Barry (group 1) described small group discussions as *like they're little islands talking to each other,* as if students are isolated individuals exchanging ideas rather than building them together. He also had specific ideas about the number of students who should ideally work in groups to produce conflicting ideas:

> *Six is an absolute minimum of the number that you should have in a group. If you have a group of three then if one person thinks something different, then if they're a powerful enough personality they'll then persuade, you'll end up with agreement. But what you really want is a big enough group for there to be someone, somewhere, who's ... You're bound to get one or two people who don't necessarily agree with the consensus.* (Barry)

Teachers described a number of typical activities undertaken with students in small groups, which were variously structured. At one end of the spectrum were very structured activities, Barry described *a thing, actually, I did have to develop a formula when I was doing Dickinson. And one of the things was, I called it a sort of Poetry Toolkit.* The toolkit, accompanied by slides, makes students discuss poems through a predictable narrative framework, which Barry trained them to use: *They'd be like, oh right, I've got to do this ... I kind of really posed it as the 'W' questions. W-ho? W-hat? W-here? You know, all of those kinds of things. Let's establish the basics of what's going on in the poem.*

This narrative approach to poems, Barry explained, helps the students make comparisons with novels, which is a key aspect of assessment. Here, the exam can be seen to explicitly lead an analytical and efferent approach to reading.

Likewise, Philip (group 2) described and showed me a comparative grid for understanding poems (see Appendix K). Students are allocated to groups to explore particular features of poems, such as overview of theme, phonology, and use of metaphor. As with Barry's 'toolkit', the purpose is to focus on efferent reading as students collaborate to spot particular features for the exam. In both these examples of highly structured small group discussions, it might be supposed that this constrains personal meaning making and free discussion of poems, but to what extent this was the case in practice needed further exploration through recorded lesson observations.

Zara (group 2) described a contrasting approach to small group discussion. Taking the example of a Keats poem, she said that during poetry lessons, she pauses to ask: *Do you feel sympathy towards, for example, Lamia? First, you write down your own response; students write their response, then they can discuss that with someone next to them so then they can feedback as a class.*

This is a semi-structured dialogic approach to meaning making. It relies initially on a modelled teacher response, which students can then dispute in their individual responses. Following this, students share ideas in pairs and then feedback to the class. Notably, the activity is about an affective personal response to a character and, therefore, tends toward a more aesthetic reading stance.

4.3.6 Dilemmas About the Role of Discussion and Discursive Interpretation of Poems in Relation to the Exam

An additional theme that can be seen in the data concerns teacher dilemmas about how to manage discursive interpretations of poems. In common with others in the UK education system, teachers of A level English have a role to manage the production of meaning making so that students can pass standardised exams (Xerri, 2013). This effectively makes teachers 'gatekeepers of meaning' in the classroom.

As has been discussed, teachers from all three groups expressed concerns about reconciling the experience of reading poems with passing exams. It is clear from my interviews that discussion in the classroom is specifically shaped by the exam. In this section, I will discuss what teachers told me about the role of classroom discussions and the limits of personal response and interpretation in these discussions.

For Arthur, teaching the now discontinued Creative Writing A level, reading and personal response to that reading align because students are reading in order to respond to that in their own writing. He said that at the outset of the A level:

> *there's a discussion around where they read poetry and what poetry they've read, and that'll lead me to a discussion about what might inform them and broaden their reading a bit… And that's their aesthetic choice, I suppose that's their sort of feel from the texts.*

For those teaching A level English Literature/A level English Language and Literature, the relationship between personally interpretative reading and the exam is more problematic. The purpose of reading is geared towards producing certain kinds of limited and comparative

responses between texts for the exam, and this, in turn, raises dilemmas about the role of discussion:

Zara (group 2) expressed it this way:

> *I think there's room for… discussion in each lesson…This idea that students should be welcome to discuss in groups and share their viewpoints but also ask questions of you before* [pause] *you tell them what the answer is – almost*.

Zara seems torn here; she wants to encourage personal response, but in the end, she has to prepare them for the exam so there are 'correct answers' that she will provide. This is somewhat like Bella (group 1), who, it will be remembered, said: *if something really, really baffles them, I tell them what it means ... and tell them they have to take that one* [interpretation] *on.*

Philip described a teaching strategy designed to encourage discussion and personal response in the following way:

> *You could just – take a like – or you could write like a complicated statement on the board, and the focus of the lesson is trying to figure out the answer. Like David* (Head of Department) *is really good at this, and he presents it not like he knows the answer and he's just withholding it.*

In this discursive strategy, the teacher impersonates incomprehension, *presents it not like he knows the answer* when, in fact, the teacher 'knows' exactly the answer they want to reach/why the problem is posed. The teacher pretends not to know so that the students will engage. In authentic dialogic relationships envisaged by, for example, Freire (1996), there are moments where no one is in charge, and mutual respect of views enlarges group understanding. However, this is not happening here. The teacher seems to be invested in a banking model of education, which is disguised behind a sort of 'theatre of equal exchange'.

All the teachers, except for Arthur and Tom, expressed concerns about the limits of personal interpretative reading.

Philip (group 2) put his view in stark terms: *I suppose the problem with poetry is the students* (who) *often lean to either over or under analysis* (of poems):

> *So say Ozymandias, you know, a student could say, well, that's all about cats. I think that would be a wrong reading of the poem. So somewhere on the spectrum of like you can say anything you want, and anything would go, and saying there's a correct reading – I think somewhere on that spectrum is what is defensible …*

Philip expressed a significant dilemma, which was shared across all three groups by Ayesha (group 3), Anna (group 1), and Mick (group 2). How do teachers gatekeep meaning making for the exam whilst exploring personal interpretations and responses to poems? Drawing on an example from a discussion about a novel, Mick described a student as *very loud and insistent* and who said:

> *'I'm entitled to my opinion, this is what my opinion is I think – I know I can do this' and (she) told me and the class that one of the characters in George Eliot's Scenes from a Clerical Life was definitely a prostitute because she was wearing black and she was dirty.*

Mick and Philip, it will be recalled, are loosely identified as being part of group 2, that is, those teachers who see poems as occupying a problematic place in the curriculum and who intentionally work to bridge meaning making in the classroom. In the example above, Mick took a clear gatekeeping role and told the student her interpretation was not valid: *at some point, you have to say, 'no, I'm sorry, that's wrong'.*

Philip stated that sometimes he would say to the class that he didn't think interpretations were a *true reading* but that also *you can have a vote in the class and say do you think that's over-reading or plausible justifiable reading?* This, I would suggest is an attempt at democratic gatekeep meaning. However, what might look like inclusive involvement of students in discussing the limits of interpretation can also be seen as an exclusionary tactic. A number of factors may sway voting, and the tactic of saying an interpretation is 'right' or 'wrong' may also silence the expression of personal responses to poems.

As indicated above with Mick and Philip, to some extent what teachers say about their dilemmas around managing interpretation of classroom discussion can be mapped to their core beliefs.

If teachers read poems as efferent objects to be learnt for the exam (group 1), there is some value in encouraging a personal response in discussion because it motivates students to 'learn the material'. However, this may be in the most limited way. As Barry (group 1) put it:

> *I might get into a position where I say, look, this is my reading of the poem. This is what I think. Do you buy it? You know. Do you agree? And, you know, or maybe I present my reading and say, 'Right, can you come with any evidence to back up that reading?' So, that's* [pause], *and I think that can sometimes be a really productive way of getting students to make* [pause] *like, at one level, I've told them what to think, but at another level, they have then made that interpretation their own …*

This might be understood in Vygotskian terms as Barry – the 'more knowledgeable other', inducting students into dominant cultural understandings of literature. However, I would argue that more significantly, as pedagogy, this is an example of teacher-led meaning making where interpretation is essentially the work of the teacher. Students are invited to introject Barry's interpretation using textual *evidence*. *At one level,* Barry tells people *what to think*, and then they recreate that by repeating it with their own justification, using perhaps the toolkit he has introduced. In Freire's terms, Barry is controlling the narrative of the lesson, and knowledge is 'the property of the teacher rather than a medium evoking the critical reflection of both teacher and students' (Freire, 1996, p. 61)

In Barry's judgement, some poems are more abstract and difficult than others. Personal interpretation of poems is reserved for these, which are left until late in the teaching year on the supposition that students will be able to respond to these with 'more experience':

> *Particularly with Dickinson, there's a lot of, sort of, personal preference in that. There's one poem called, 'What Mystery Pervades A Well' and I've had arguments with other – not arguments, creative discussions, with other teachers about how we interpret certain aspects of that … I'd probably save a poem like that towards the end of a scheme of work when they're a bit more experienced.*

There are a number of assumptions here, including the idea that poems and student abilities can be hierarchically ordered. In terms reminiscent of Bloom's educational learning taxonomy (1956), students are seen to be capable of working at the comprehension end of poems using evidence and analysis supported by a toolkit. However, personal interpretation based on preference (and perhaps feelings) is seen as a more complex and wayward activity. One that is best left to last, when Barry hopes that students' experience of reading poems in the classroom for the exam will equip them to engage with nuances of meaning. In relation to this, I would argue that poems, by definition, are open to nuance and interpretation, not just those deemed to be 'difficult'. From a reader response perspective (e.g., Rosenblatt, 1938; Iser, 1978; Fish, 1980), poems are not objects of more or less difficulty, they are there to be realised by readers engaging with texts in a variety of contexts.

Barry's more efferent reading and technical engagement with personal meaning contrasts strongly with Amelia's (group 3) approach to personal meaning making. Hers is, in essence, a reader response approach to poetry, concerned with the agency and creativity of the reader:

> *we were doing a Betrothal poem, and there's a line that says, 'I'll be ash in a jar, for you' So we were talking about being cremated, and this student said, 'no – it's not about that it's about being owned. It's about this person getting someone and putting them in a jar on their mantelpiece and owning them' and I thought oh isn't that lovely? They've really got a nice idea here.*

Amelia pursued this thought, returning to the centrality of what she called 'human response' and the contractual relationship she believes readers and authors have in the subject of English Literature.

> *I talk to other teachers about this all the time. There are other humanities subjects, and they're not asked to give that human response, you don't have to do this. History – you know, what are the facts? Sociology – research methods, Biology- what are the parts of the brain you know? But this is so much more. We're in a contract with this author – they've done it for us they've brought this out into the world, so we have some sort of relationship. And they just see it as another piece of work they've got to do but the answers aren't there. It's not like Sociology – you have to remember your theorists, you know?*

4.3.7 Summary

Teachers in my sample said they use discussion in a variety of ways throughout their teaching. These include to establish good relationships with students, as a starter activity, to prime students for learning at the outset of teaching a new poem and as an activity embedded within lessons. Teachers value the role of whole class and small group discussion because they recognise the importance of dialogic learning (Wenger, 1998) and interpersonal meaning making (discussed in my literature review).

Teachers are understandably extremely conscious of the necessity to prepare students to pass their exams. In terms of research question 4, *how is the process of constructing and articulating personal responses reconciled with pressures to pass exams?* I believe data from interviews show there is no final reconciliation between the exam and personal response; rather, it is a tension that needs to be managed within the classroom.

All teachers, regardless of their stated ideological position, experience the exam and assessment objectives as a magnet that draws attention and time. It shapes many activities, including discussion and interpretation. For Arthur, who teaches Creative Writing, there is little conflict between personal response, reading and interpretation because these activities constitute part of the exam assessment. Students are encouraged to explore their preferred poets as influence for their own writing.

However, those teaching A level English Literature or Language and Literature see significant conflicts around personal response and exam responses. Some teachers, such as Barry and Anna, say it is essential to focus on efferent reading for the exam and outwardly deny the relevance of personal response in the classroom. Other teachers try to accommodate or encourage personal responses, for example, Ayesha and Amelia, who said that they try to focus on the 'feelings' that poems can evoke. At a deeper level, it can be seen that unless teachers want to be a one directional 'transmitter of knowledge' in the 'mug and jug' tradition of teaching learning they must ask for personal response as a way into learning. For some, this will include aesthetic and felt engagement. Examples of this are Zara (group 2), who asks about the student's level of sympathy for a character in a poem, and Amelia (group 3), who described her delight at a student offering a fresh perspective on a poem.

For others, the personal responses that they ask for focus on extrapolation of information from the poems, such as *what kind of tone?* (is in this poem) or *how does the argument change at this point?* (Bella and Anna both group 1). In this respect, the responses they are evoking are largely efferent. This is not to invalidate such questions. It's perfectly possible, as Sipe (2008) points out, that efferent questions evoke wider understanding and enjoyment of poems. However, this approach tends toward, as Barry put it, treating poems as *clever little machines* rather than engaging with them as pieces of art to be fully experienced.

Whatever 'personal responses' teachers want to evoke one important aspect of their views on reading for personal meaning is their implicit ideas about teaching adolescents. Adolescence is an important concept for my research, and therefore, I conclude this section by exploring what teachers tell me about their practices, their views, and how they relate to the literature. Following this, I offer a general conclusion on what teachers say about teaching strategies related to reading poems.

4.4 Teachers' Views of Adolescence

Teachers in my research see adolescence as significant in terms of how they teach and relate to students. Their views draw on a variety of discourses about adolescence (e.g., developmental/psychological/socio-political). In different ways, teachers applaud the abilities of their students whilst also worrying about perceived deficiencies, and this, perhaps, reflects wider cultural ambivalence in our society about adolescents.

I did not use the term 'adolescence' in my question to teachers; instead, I asked about students and their experiences of teaching in further education (see Appendix E). However, all teachers spoke in some way about the age of their students; one used the word 'adolescence' directly and talked about it at some length (Will). Other teachers talked about 'teenagers' or 'students in relation to their age. Symonds and Hagell (2011) estimate that 21% of adolescent waking life is spent in formal education, making school or college a vital context for the experience of adolescence. I will, therefore, preface this section with what teachers say about teaching adolescents in colleges. After this, I discuss two widely shared views: that adolescents are poor readers and that adolescent minds are best taught through discussion of ideas. Following this, I categorise and explore a range of positions teachers take in relation to teaching adolescents.

4.4.1 Teaching Adolescents in the Context of Further Education

Teachers in my sample are conscious of the context of further education as distinct from other sectors. Many (Amelia, Anna, Arthur, Tom, Mick and Bella) trained to work exclusively within the further education sector. Others made a positive decision to move from other sectors into further education. Zara and Ayesha moved from school teaching to further education, both saying this was because they liked teaching 'teenagers' and enjoyed the challenging content of A level English. Will moved from teaching at university, and Philip from adult education, the former because he wanted to teach *'inner-city kids'* and the latter for job security outside the school system.

Many of the teachers expressed pride in their role in providing 'second chance' education: *I like the idea that we offer students who didn't enjoy school a fresh start in a different environment* (Tom). Two teachers in my sample (Mick and Amelia) decided to teach in the sector as a direct result of positive experiences of learning as adults in further education colleges. With the exception of Bella, who said avoidance of school teaching motivated her to work in colleges, it can be said that the teachers in my sample had made a positive choice to teach people aged 16-18.

Since the work of Hall (1904), adolescence has been positioned as a 'risky time' when adolescents are vulnerable to destructive behaviour. The cultural marginalisation of adolescents has led to them being characterised as 'moody, violent, untrustworthy: adolescents are often stereotyped and maligned in alarming ways' Blakemore (2018, p. 195). Whilst most of the teachers in my sample expressed positive views of the people they teach, Bella (group 1) touched on the idea of risk, saying that she had never wanted to teach in schools because she was *scared of 14-year-old boys … seen the violence – wasn't interested …* To what extent Bella saw this behaviour as innate and/or exacerbated by school as an institution, she did not say. What she did say was that teaching in further education gave her the opportunity *to teach, not control classes*. In this respect she was drawing a distinction between younger adolescent males as prone to violence in a school context and older adolescent males as more mature and responsible in a college context.

Mick and Will (both in group 2) focused on the importance of the social context of learning and contrasted further education positively with schools. Mick said *because they come with a*

legacy from school often students will tell you they're not good at X and actually they are. I understand Mick as saying that, having internalised 'failure' in the social institution of school, students may present as weak learners in some ways. However, in reality, they are not, and teachers should know this and act to boost student confidence. Likewise, Will speculated about the causes of underachievement in schools:

> *Perhaps they found it too difficult and didn't get the help in schools. There are a lot of absent teachers in schools, and you get children coming through and their teacher was only there for a short period of time.*

The implication here is that colleges might offer a more collegial and equitable environment for adolescents to learn in (Hang-Cheong Cheung *et al.*, 2020).

4.4.2 Adolescents as Poor Readers

At the start of this chapter, I discussed that many teachers in my sample characterise their students as poor or non-readers. This view is worth revisiting in the context of teacher discussions about adolescence. As Mick (group 2) put it: *students …* (have not) … *necessarily read deeply…adolescents – it's around willingness to read*. Research in relation to adolescent reading paints a complex picture. The UK National Literacy Trust (2019) reports a significant fall in reading for pleasure amongst adolescents from a variety of backgrounds. This takes place across both gender and class (as measured by free school meals). In small-scale research in the UK, Wilkinson *et al.* (2020) have explored reasons why adolescents aged 15-16 do or do not read for pleasure. Not reading for pleasure has been attributed to many factors, for example, lack of time and lack of encouragement to read for pleasure at home and in school.

However, Pitcher's (2007) large-scale qualitative research with adolescents from many ethnic and social backgrounds, found a huge discrepancy between what teachers think about reading and students' own reading habits and their ideas around themselves as readers.

According to Pitcher *et al.* (2007), the central problem is twofold. Educational institutions do not value non-print, visual and digital literacies at which adolescents can excel, nor do they recognise the meaning making that adolescents make in out of school contexts. Effectively, educational practices 'act as disincentives because they fail to take into account what motivates

adolescents to read' (Pitcher *et al.*, 2007, p. 379). Ironically, students in this research also do not see themselves as readers because they define reading in the same way as teachers: a school-based print activity. However, adolescents do read and respond to texts in creative ways, just not in a way that is immediately obvious to teachers.

Data from my sample suggests that those teachers who define adolescents as non-readers concur with the above findings that some students do not easily engage with the limited printed texts on offer at A level. However, it is possible that they are not seeing the reading that their students *are* doing, and this belief may be reinforced by broader cultural tropes of adolescents as somehow 'lacking in self-control'.

Later, I explore what students themselves say about their reading from the data in the focus groups. This is important as it relates to research question 3: What experiences and knowledge do students draw on in the construction and articulation of a personal response?

4.4.3 Working with the Adolescent Mind and Four Positions in Relation to Adolescence

In broad terms, I would argue that teachers in my sample like working with the adolescent mind. They are concerned with what they see as the increasing cognitive and emotional sophistication of their students, and they enjoy working with this group of people who have emerging powers of self-expression and identity. Zara used the word 'fun' to describe her feelings and approach to teaching 17 times in her interview. Mick said that *teenagers are very often open to finding meaning in poems. At times they can be inspiring with fresh and exciting new ideas.* Across all three ideological groupings, there was a view that discussing the content of ideas in poems would interest adolescents. It is believed that this discussion will also support learning poems with which students may not be familiar.

> *I think that what Dickinson writes about is so universal …that they can engage with the ideas really easily. So, if the ideas can be intriguing enough to them, that notion of … They all loved her 'Because I could not stop for Death', they were really fond of that idea of a gentleman, of a personification of the grim reaper …* Bella (group 1)

themes are often a nice way into an experience of poetry which students might not instantly relate to… we're looking at – 'Disaster'. Just getting a sense of what that means as an idea – something that's relatable. Zara (group 2)

Arthur (group 3), discussing Creative Writing A level, said:

Because there's so much emphasis on ***ideas*** (his emphasis) *I started to use that as an approach to texts. Not entirely differently from how the Lang Lit spec might use attitudes and values so asking them to read and ask: 'What is this writer asking or thinking about this topic?'*

To some extent, as Arthur implies, these views reflect the curriculum because the exam boards at both GCSE and A level emphasise comparative thematic exploration. Data from my sample suggest that the teachers also share an underlying assumption that students at this age, can relate to abstract ideas such as disaster, death, or love. Their views ally with much of the literature I have previously reviewed (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Vygotsky, 1978/1986; Kegan, 1994) which confirms the depth and width of changes in cognition that develop in adolescence when 'thought takes flight' (Dacey; 2005, 105). As will be seen in discussion of focus group data, students have independent ideas and do not always share this perspective on thematic exploration of poems.

Beyond the teacher's shared view that topics are important for teaching adolescents, those in my sample took a variety of positions in relation to their role with adolescents. These loosely shared positions can be grouped in the following ways, which I now discuss further:

1. *Adolescence is not relevant to my teaching* (Barry, group 1)
2. *Adolescents must have agency in the classroom, and teachers must step back to make space* (Bella and Anna, group 1; Philip and Zara, group 2; and Tom, allied to group 3)
3. *Adolescents need protection, and we are parental role models* Will (group 2), Ayesha (group 3), Mick (group 2), Anna (group1)
4. *Adolescents are inspirational, and teachers should celebrate this* (Arthur and Amelia, group 3)

Please note that Anna fits into two groups.

1. Adolescence is not relevant to my teaching (Barry, group 1)

As previously discussed, Barry was resolute in his interview that his concern is with teaching texts for the exam and that he is not interested in discussing personal responses to texts. However, as seen later in this chapter (in discussion of lesson observations), there are contradictions between Barry's stated views and his practice because he teaches in ways that potentially invite personal and engaged responses from adolescent students.

Unlike other interviewees, he stepped back from the context of his work to insist on the importance of the text and the curriculum and did not refer to adolescence directly. His only reference to student age was when he talked about his dislike of teaching the genre of 'teenage fiction', contrasting this with the more serious work of 'adult' fiction.

> *I just found it more difficult to, sort of, look at a teenage novel and say, this is brilliant; let's get on board with this. When actually, really, I wanted to be doing that with, with a Shakespeare text or with a serious adult novel… of the kind we can do at A level, so yeah, that really was my enthusiasm for the level of text and the level of teaching… for me, it was just always about, Key Stage 3* [UK curriculum for children aged 11–14] *in particular, I just never got as far as I wanted to go.*

Barry is comparing the seriousness of 'adult' fiction with what he sees as trivial 'teenage fiction'. Whether there really is a clear demarcation between these genres is debatable, but a key characteristic of 'teen fiction' is that it appeals to what teenagers might enjoy whilst protecting them from possible corruption by the adult world (Eccleshare, 2004).

Later, in interview, Barry said that *one of the best kinds of texts to teach in literature are the texts that aren't completely inaccessible to the students on their own. That they can read it and go, 'oh right, I see what's going on there'*. This suggests that he believes students at A level do have the capacity to grapple with at least some adult texts. Barry is also pointing towards the importance of student agency, which may be defined as comprising 'self-reflection and intentional action' (Klemencic, 2015, p. 11). This was an important idea explored in more depth by a number of teachers.

2. Adolescents must have agency in the classroom, and teachers must step back to make space (Bella and Anna, group 1, Philip and Zara (group 2) Tom (allied to group 3))

This view was shared across ideological groups. Tom expressed the view that in adolescence, sophisticated interpretations of poetry can be made. To foster this, teachers need to give students time and space to think for themselves: *I need to make space for students to develop their trust in their interpretations, they can tolerate ambiguity at this age.*

Bella and Anna, two of the teachers who I have previously categorised as group 1 (we must teach for the exam), held strong opinions about student agency in the classroom. Bella told me that she adjusted her teaching after the students asked to revisit poems learnt in year 1, in year 2 of their A level:

> *So, that actually, they're coming back, and they've had that year effectively to allow these ideas...You're asking them to think about things like whether there's an afterlife or something and big ideas like that with, sometimes, quite obscure images, and they come back to it with far more vigour than they necessarily take it the first time… Because, otherwise, I don't own them at all. They don't remember it. They don't own it*.

Bella is clearly saying that students' opinions about their own learning need to be listened and responded to. Students have the introspective ability to know they will understand more when they have the opportunity to re-read and discuss poems over a period of time. Bella also seems to share this view that time and pace matter when making interpretations of poems, although this view is in tension with her other comments, which emphasise the need to tell students what to reproduce for the exam.

The importance of peer relationships has been discussed in the literature as neurologically significant (Sebastien, Burnett and Blakemore, 2008), developmentally important (Kegan 1994) and as a pedagogical tool (Lockney and Proudfoot, 2013). Anna, Ayesha, and Zara all referred to peer discussion in their interviews, emphasising the importance of students as active learners: *in my experience, they do better if the engagement comes from them. That they engage with the poetry that THEY actually explore the poetry – share ideas between them* (Anna).

Philip contrasted his previous experiences of teaching adults with that of teaching adolescents in college. He said that *with students here, you have to find ways in … Talk about their experiences and their concerns … they're a lot more engaged when they're talking about themselves.* Here, Philip seems to recognise the egocentric aspects of adolescence, which I explore in the literature review. For example, Erikson (1967) defined the chief and complex task of adolescence as the achievement of a coherent self-identity and resilient ego. Elkind (1968) discussed the importance of the imaginary audience in this regard as a 'testing ground' for the ideas and limits of the self. Research has shown this exists in late adolescence and sometimes beyond (Schwartz, Maynard and Uzelac, 2008).

Philip also expressed reservations in relation to student agency, saying that *the reality is that lots of them are here, and they don't know why. You know they may be toeing the line of what their parents want them to do*. Here, he seems to echo a socio-cultural approach to adolescence, which emphasises alienation (McInerney, 2009). From this perspective, adolescents are positioned in our society in dependent state without full agency over their lives, and this can have consequences for learning.

Zara emphasised the importance of students taking the initiative to read poems in advance of class and ask questions, although in line with previous comments, she was not entirely confident of their doing the reading:

> *We're not reading the texts in class and saying, 'this is this – this is this' all the time. Students should've read the text beforehand. In an ideal situation – it doesn't always happen, but ideal situation that they have an initial viewpoint. 'Ok, I'm finding this challenging and this…'*

3. Adolescents need protection, and we are parental role models Anna (group 1); Will, Mick and Zara (group 2); Ayesha (group 3)

Many teachers expressed the idea that adolescence is a period of transition between childhood and adulthood and talked positively about their role as a supporter and facilitator of learning. Ayesha (group 3) talked about the benefits of teaching adolescents and her responsibilities to assist them:

They're ready to go to university or not, something equivalent and [I'm] *just helping them on their way …. I liked the conversations I was having with the older children and young adults and the banter …*

Mick and Will also talked about the importance of the role of the teacher to *negotiate with* adolescents around their learning and engagement: *You can model it you know? 'I really didn't like that when I was 17, but now I love it. So, trust me,' and most people will come onside with you. A lot of it is about engagement and modelling.* (Will)

One important theme in the literature is the idea that adolescence is conceived of as a kind of limbo between the social construction of childhood as dependency and adulthood as a relatively individual, independent, autonomous stage of life (Lesko, 2012; Gabriel, 2013). Gabriel argues that this results in ambivalent discourses about the perceived 'condition' of adolescence. Adolescents are seen as being in a transitory state, and attributes of both child and adulthood can be ascribed to them. That is, adolescents can be seen as simultaneously irresponsible and responsible, innocent and knowledgeable, able to reason but also unreasonable in their behaviour (Gabriel 2013).

These ambivalences about adolescence were clearly expressed in some of the interviews. Will (group 2) described students in his sixth form in the following terms, positioning himself as a kind of cultural anthropologist:

It's fascinating to watch them cos, at the beginning, they're keen, and then that slightly adolescent mindset crops up, and it's 'we're going to get those teachers', and it happens across all courses, and then towards the end, some of them realise or halfway through. They think, 'oh my god, it's coming – I've got make that change…' and you can then negotiate with them. And that I think goes across the whole college, I really do …

In Will's narrative, there is an identifiable and negative 'adolescent mindset' associated with immaturity and disruptive behaviour. However, there is a developmental resolution to the behavioural problems of adolescents as they become aware of their own needs because *the more mature student has a meta-understanding of where they are going. And even if they don't know it they know that they need to and will learn.*

The idea that adolescents, *even if they don't know it, they know they need to and will learn* is reminiscent of Kegan's (1994) claim, discussed in the literature review, that adolescents are learning to think beyond themselves to think in 'cross-categorical ways'. Will's comments also illustrate Kegan's point that adults make claims about not only the behaviour of adolescents but also how we want them to know and make sense of their experiences.

Will argued that a consistently present teacher was needed to support adolescent interest in subjects. In describing this, he applied ideas about parental attachment to the role of the teacher: *the fact that they are always there is really crucial because when that transference takes place, the teacher is in loco parentis for that student, and they actually really bond really effectively.*

Here, Will is using a psychological paradigm as a way of understanding adolescent learning. This approach is steeped in the idea that the 'fully formed' adult has to consistently be there for the 'insufficient' adolescent who is not able to reason independently for themselves. *I think you* (the teacher) *structure their independence a bit.* This, I believe, resonates with Will's views on teaching. As has already been discussed, Will was vocal in discussing the role of teachers as 'bridges' into meaning while also being deeply preoccupied with the needs of the exam. Other teachers shared a psychological lens. Zara, for example, pointed to the cognitive sophistication of adolescents, arguing that they could develop *a train of thought* more effectively than younger people.

1. Adolescents are inspirational, and teachers should celebrate this (Arthur and Amelia group 3)

In my literature review, I claim that developing adolescents have new capacities to experience, think about and respond to poems. I have related this to neurological research, as well as cultural and developmental factors. It has been claimed that adolescent brains are liable to be more reactive and sensitive to new experiences than child or adult brains (e.g., Berk, 2014; Dumontheil, 2016; Blakemore, 2018). Perhaps the most significant comment in this regard, identifying adolescence as a time of new and expanded thinking, was expressed by Arthur, the Creative Writing teacher (group 3). It will be remembered from the literature review that (the now discontinued) Creative Writing A level offered students the opportunity to creatively respond to non-fiction, fiction, poetry and script on the basis of their interests.

Arthur referred to adolescents as teenagers and explored in interview what he saw as the special relationship of the Creative Writing syllabus with teenagers. He claimed that the Creative Writing A level offered *freedom, excitement and scholarship* and contrasted the freedom of teaching individuals with their emergent identities with an increase in college managerialism.

The college has been, *becoming much more regimented much more controlled, there are interventions in my lesson planning, in my year planning all the time*. The interventions he refers to would include managerial observations and requirements for certain kinds of activities to be included in lesson plans, particularly during Ofsted inspections, which are a core aspect of teaching in the UK. Arthur further said, I think somewhat romantically, that he liked to *wrangle them* [the students] *as a bunch of rowdy individuals rather than as a group*. He claimed that education for personal and individual development is supported by teaching Creative Writing. His thoughts about students' individual voices have already been quoted above (see p. 165). He added to this: *you know they've all got these personal experiences and it's exciting for them to find out that that's valued and that's something they can write about and that's interested in. There's a reward for that.*

Arthur is describing adolescence as an exciting and emergent stage of life. He is recognising adolescence as a time of identity formation (Erikson, 1967) and situating this within the wide cultural influences of life in the multi-cultural city of London. His tone is celebratory as he contrasts the breadth of topics and writing opportunities. Arthur implies that adolescents are open to new experiences (McMahan, 2009) and, as Kegan, (1994) theorised, students are extending their thinking about themselves in relation to the world and other people. Within this (now discontinued) A level there is an explicit place for personal reading and personally responsive writing and, as Arthur says *There's a reward for that.*

Amelia (group 3) had a similar perspective on adolescent learners. As a mature student, Amelia returned to university and was impressed by the abilities of students who had completed A levels at college. Adolescents effectively became role models for her as a learner and an inspiration for her own teaching:

> *My colleagues were 18/19. They'd come straight from sixth form and from doing this type of course. And they knew their Shakespeare; they knew their Hamlet. They knew how to write notes and all of that. And I remember sitting in my first lecture and going – why aren't*

I learning anything? How do they know this? ... So I thought that's the sort of age group I want cos they're obviously really engaged in their A level. I mean, some of them weren't – they were of different abilities, and I thought that age would be brilliant to teach.

4.4.4 Summary

From Amelia's celebratory perspective on adolescence to Mick's concern that adolescents are unwilling to read, it is clear that the teachers in my sample hold a range of views about the abilities and motivations of adolescent students. I have argued that in this respect, their views mirror a wider cultural ambivalence in our society about this time of life (Gabriel, 2013). One significant finding is that across the three identified ideological groups, there is a shared belief that adolescent students need time and space to develop their ideas and that peer discussion is important to facilitate this. In the following section, I discuss observed lessons to explore how peer discussion, as well as other pedagogical techniques, play out in lessons.

I now offer a conclusion to this section on teachers' views about teaching poetry to adolescents, specifically focusing on the stated strategies they adopt and reasons for these.

4.5 Conclusion

This section has reviewed the views of teachers in relation to research question 2: *What teaching strategies do teachers use to prepare students to read for personal meaning?* and research question 4: *How is the process of constructing and articulating personal responses to poems reconciled with pressures to pass exams?* I began by teasing out the broad ideological perspectives teachers have on reading poems in the classroom. These were classified loosely as:

1. Poems as efferent objects – we read for the exam (Anna, Crossroads Tertiary College; Barry and Bella, London Tertiary College)

2. Poems are problematic in the curriculum – we are bridges into meaning and also have to prepare students for the exam (Will, Philip and Zara, Eastern Sixth Form College and Mick, Crossroads Tertiary College)

3. Poems as aesthetic expression – we must try to prioritise responsive reading in the classroom (Ayesha, Crossroads Tertiary College; Amelia, River Sixth Form College and Arthur, London Tertiary College; Tom – to some extent, Eastern Sixth Form College)

I followed this with a discussion of teacher beliefs about student deficits and abilities and the strategies they deploy to assist in the reading of poems. Finally, I concluded by reviewing teachers' views on the concept of adolescence.

At one level, regardless of their broader views, all teachers want students to personally respond to poems because this gets students to engage with material for the exam. Discussion and opinion exchange is also in keeping with teaching practices common to the UK. However, the ways and extent to which teachers want to evoke personal response diverge.

For some, a student's 'personal response' is, in essence, a technical prelude to working efferently with poems, and the kinds of discussion they encourage are based on finding information from the poem. This can be mapped largely but not exclusively to teachers described as being in group 1. Teachers from groups 2 and 3 are pulled to explore more 'felt' responses to poems in the classroom and try to encourage pleasure in reading poems. They do this in various ways, for example, by asking open questions or asking how students respond to dilemmas expressed in poems.

One way of engaging with personal response is to draw on the cultural capital that students bring to the classroom. In this respect, teachers expressed inconsistent views. Teachers from all three groups said they valued certain kinds of cultural capital they perceive the students as bringing to poems. On this point, it is my observation that teachers' ideas about the *kinds* of cultural capital they believe students have seem to be limited, and this may, in turn, limit student expression. This is because, at the same time, as teachers say they value students' cultural capital, they also see them as deficient because they lack the high-status cultural capital that gives others a head start in studying these poems.

In addition, drawing on narrow autonomous definitions of 'literacy and reading', most of the teachers describe the students as 'poor readers'. Whilst this view, derived from those teachers' lived experiences, is contested by research, it remains a powerful shared belief that is likely to have consequences for reading in the classroom. Ambivalent notions of sufficiency and

deficiency are echoed in views about adolescence. Teachers in my sample draw on a variety of discourses about students to variously describe them as newly capable or vulnerable and in need of role models. However, it must be said that in general terms, teachers are positive about the concept of adolescence and see their own professional practice as defined in some ways by this term.

Teachers from all three groups expressed anxiety about the kinds of meanings they want students to make. They are concerned to ensure that personal responses do not lead to meaning making that is 'wayward' or unjustified. Here is 'the long arm' of the exam in which teachers must act as gatekeepers of meaning and ensure that certain kinds of responses are made for the purpose of assessment.

Teachers in my sample are ambivalent about reading for personal meaning, and I have characterised this as a 'push and pull' effect. All teachers are pushed to efferent readings of poems by the need to get students to pass exams within a time frame. Some teachers, however, from groups 2 and 3, are also 'pulled' toward wanting to evoke more felt and aesthetic responses to poems. These teachers seek out 'third spaces' away from the classroom where more free responses to poems may be shared.

In terms of classroom strategies, all the teachers, whether tending to efferent or aesthetic readings, describe discussion as an important way to read poems. They also all talked about the relevance of multimodal approaches to reading. There was a marked difference between groups in terms of the *sound* of poems, and I believe it is significant that teachers from group 1 described sound as an unimportant feature of poems. Teachers from groups 2 and 3, however, talked about poems as sonic experiences capable of evoking felt connections. Their views echo findings discussed in my literature review, which suggest the particular value of music for adolescents (e.g., North, 2000; Miranda, 2013). It may be that these teachers have an 'instinctive' grasp of this. Certainly, Will did, as the extract from his interview below shows:

> *If you look at the poems we teach, they're largely dead white men, you know, 1900 and before. But you know, of course, music, song ballad pop song, there's a lot of room … to use them – and sometimes it sounds a bit patronising, and Keith (college Principal) says – why are you playing them that? Well, because they understand, they really understand the*

verse form of popular music. So that's a good way in and starting point – er – and getting students to write their own rap or whatever … you can get some fantastic stuff with rhythm.

Key points from this section are discussed in *Part 3: Findings from Student Focus Groups*. In particular, I look at how students express their personal responses to poems and the cultural capital they bring to their reading. I also explore how teacher containment of meaning making with poems is experienced by students and whether and how students connect with the sound of poems.

The ambivalence expressed by many teachers in my sample about discussions and interpretations of poems must be understood in a wider social context than the classroom. Their inconsistent views can be interpreted as a consequence of their trying to manage differing social pressures.

All teachers currently work in a positivistic culture (Giroux, 1997) where they are obliged to be compliant with meeting targets. In the case of further education colleges, this means getting students to pass exams with 'added value', which essentially means grades in excess of those forecasted on the basis of GCSE grades. Teachers in this particular study work in inner London further education colleges with a variety of largely ethnic minority and working-class students who are likely to be from materially disadvantaged backgrounds. Teachers understand this, and they also understand that the curriculum (Creative Writing A level excepted) is narrow and content heavy. It is based on the so-called 'best' poems from largely restrictive traditional canon, and assessment is predominantly, if not exclusively, through timed exams. Teachers are, therefore, well aware that they start their job from a difficult position.

Teachers are, in essence, caught between different kinds of knowledge that are not of equal value in the high-stakes game of education. On the one hand poems are a linguistic art form to be enjoyed (Lennard, 2005) and some teachers positively want to share this experience with their students. They want to explore poetry, and these teachers recognise the value of reader response. On the other hand, all teachers know that they have to privilege certain kinds of meanings and skills for the exam. To do this, they have to connect somehow with what the students know and think, even as they impose different types of culturally approved knowledge for the exam. Personal meanings and responses in this respect are prompted more by teachers' pragmatic aims than ideological perspectives. Teachers can be seen to be caught in the process

of ‘cruel optimism’ discussed in my literature review (Berlant, 2009; Moore and Clarke, 2016). Their professional experience is compromised between what they might want students to experience and express and what they have to do to develop their careers and reward students with institutionalised capital: a good exam pass. Those who want to promote aesthetic ‘personal responses’ to poems taught at A level are conflicted about what they are doing, others are more reconciled to simply ‘getting students through the exam’. For these teachers, personal response is merely a device for securing interest or promoting relationships. The former position obliges teachers to manage difficult tensions. The latter may relieve some of these tensions, but it is also a position that devalues the purposes of poetry and limits the potential for students to engage with the art form.

Part 2: Lesson Observations

4.6 Scope and Purpose of Part 2

I will now develop my findings from teacher interviews to explore the experience of personal and aesthetic response in the classroom. Here, I draw on data from lesson observations to both ‘flesh out’ the stated practices of teachers and begin to look at where and how students respond to poetry. As described in my methodology chapter, and including pilot observations, I undertook 19 lesson observations of a variety of A level poetry classes at four inner London further education colleges. The majority of my observations took place between January 2017 and April 2018.

This section provides further answers to research question 2: *What teaching strategies do teachers use to prepare students to read for personal meaning?* It also introduces answers to research question 3: *What experiences and knowledge do students draw on in the construction and articulation of a personal response?*

It will be remembered that when beginning to answer the question, *what strategies do teachers use to read for personal meaning?* I loosely categorised teachers according to their ideological positions in relation to reading poetry.

The lessons I discuss are drawn from each of the three categories referred to above, as this enables me to interrogate practices with some constancy and depth. Barry is from group 1,

poems as efferent objects – we read for the exam; Philip from group 2, *poems as problematic in the curriculum – we are bridges into meaning;* and Ameila from group 3, *we must try to prioritise responsive reading.* To ensure a strong range of cases, I have chosen teachers who work at different colleges and teach different syllabuses and a variety of poems. In this way I hope to maintain consistency of thematic exploration whilst maximising the potential of richly contrasting data. Other lessons from different ideological positions are explored later in this chapter in the section *Teaching Strategies for Personal Meaning.*

Below is a table summarising key features of the lessons I discuss. Copies of poems are provided in Appendix J.

Date and duration of lesson	**Syllabus/year of study/ poem being read**	**College**	**Teacher**	**Previously assigned ideological position**
28/03/2017 1hr 30mins	English Literature (OCR) Yr1 Chaucer: *The Merchant's Tale* prologue and wedding night	London Tertiary	Barry	1: Poems as efferent objects, we read for the exam
23/01/2017 1hr 10mins	English Language and Literature (WJEC) Yr2 Three love poems by Herrick, Rossetti and Yeats	Eastern Sixth Form	Philip	2: Poems as problematic in the curriculum – we are bridges into meaning
07/02/2018 1hr	English Language and	River Sixth Form	Amelia	3: Poems as aesthetic

	Literature (OCR) Yr1 Two poems from *Rapture* by Duffy			expression – we must try to prioritise responsive reading

In what follows, I firstly offer an overview of the context of the lessons discussed. I then narrate three lessons in detail using an adaptation of Sipe's (2000) framework for exploring literary impulses. The framework I use has been introduced and described in my methodology chapter, and a copy of it is available in Appendix A.

4.7 Exploration of Three Lessons: Initial Similarities and Differences

In order to set the context for detailed narrative descriptions and analysis, I first summarise and compare some of the key features of the three lessons that I identified at the time of observation. In this analysis, I draw on the spirit of the interpretative tradition by trying to offer a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of the research settings.

All lessons took place in dedicated English/humanities teaching classrooms with which the students were familiar. There were approximately 20 students in each lesson; the majority in each class were female, and students were predominantly ethnic minorities from many cultural backgrounds (predominantly Turkish, Polish, Pakistani, Bengali, and Afro-Caribbean).

4.7.1 Lesson Aims

The teachers declared their teaching aims to the class and to me. Barry intended to *analyse the way the writer shapes meanings in the text* using a text with which they had previous familiarity. In terms of literary response, his teaching aim can be characterised broadly as authorial and close reading. This would seem to match efferent and hermeneutic readings in terms of my adapted Sipe framework. By contrast, Philip aimed to *explore poems in relation to the theme of love,* and Amelia's was to *explore poems the students were unfamiliar with from a collection of poems by one author.* Both were looking at poems with which the students were unfamiliar. Philip and Amelia's 'exploratory' aims might suggest a more interpretative

'reader response' approach to poems, which may include space for personal and aesthetic student responses.

4.7.2 Classroom Layout

Students in Barry's lesson were directed to sit in a horseshoe seating plan, which he regularly used. He said the layout was devised to *minimise friendship groups and enable 'more able' students to support 'less able' students*. Amelia allocated students to groups around tables, saying this would (enable) *groups of similar size to work together*. She did not say whether there were other pedagogical reasons for allocated seating in this lesson. Philip allowed students to sit wherever they chose around clustered tables.

4.7.3 Introductory Activities

Barry and Philip both began lessons with use of imagery which matched the preference both said they had for this in interviews. Philip asked the students to look at a projection of the colour red and think about the possible connotations of the colour. Barry showed an image of an artwork called *The Marriage Bed,* which showed a diagonally bisected bed, half of which was covered in roses and the other half in nails. Students were asked what the image suggested to them about marriage.

Amelia did not include an introductory activity. Students began with a main activity, which consisted of 28 lines of poetry taken from two poems. These were cut up, and students were asked to recreate two poems using just titles as guidance.

4.7.4 Kinds of Reading Undertaken in Each Lesson

Barry read Chaucer to the students, pausing to discuss, question and explicate to the whole class at regular intervals. He read in both middle and modern English and provided an interlinear translation to support understanding. He occasionally used a recording in addition to his reading. By contrast Philip and Amelia nominated students to read stanzas of poems aloud. Philip did this throughout the lesson, and Amelia did it at the end.

Additionally, Philip asked one person to read the Yeats poem in its entirety. In both classes, students also re-read poems in small group discussions. The bulk of reading in Amelia's class involved group-led, reconstructive readings of poems.

4.7.5 Loose Characterisation of Each Lesson

Whilst all three teachers engaged in mediating learning their lessons followed different patterns of pedagogical engagement. Therefore, I characterise the shape of each lesson differently. Below, the term 'deductive learning' refers to the teacher practice of giving general rules and examples in relation to the material being learnt. After this, the student applies specific information. 'Inductive learning' refers to the teacher giving specific examples or experiences to the student from which they might infer generalities or rules. In terms of cognition, deductive learning is often characterised as 'top-down' learning and inductive as 'bottom up' (Mallia, 2014). The term 'spiral curriculum' is derived from Bruner (1915–2016) and refers to the 'iterative revisiting of topics' throughout a course of study, which has the aim of increasing the depth and breadth of knowledge (Harden, 1999, p. 141). I see this term to refer to repeated activities to which teachers return in order to build on connected knowledge within a lesson.

Lesson 1: Barry, Spiral-Shaped Lesson, Teacher-Led Deductive Learning

Barry led each part of the lesson by reading a section of the poem. This was followed by explication with whole class question and answer. Explication included Barry working to bridge cultural knowledge, and he supplied historical context to the poem. He also defined unfamiliar words and allusions. Barry then asked students to answer specific questions about the text in pairs and small groups with the people they were placed next to. Following whole class feedback and teacher clarification of learning points the lesson returned to teacher reading and explication.

Lesson 2: Philip, Spiral-Shaped Lesson, Student-Led Deductive Learning

Philip nominated students to read poems, after which they were asked to comment on the poems, discussing any broad features or themes that stood out. This was followed by whole class open feedback of ideas with little teacher intervention or clarification at this stage. Students were then asked to give second impressions, honing in on language features, historical

context, and themes. Following a second round of whole class feedback, Philip highlighted learning points for assessment purposes and culturally bridged knowledge. Students were told to take notes. Students were then nominated to read another poem.

Lesson 3: Amelia, Inductive Student-Led Learning

Amelia asked students to make poems using lines from two Duffy poems which had been cut up. The task was ambivalent in nature from the start as she variously encouraged them *this is not a test…it's your poem* (and) *I'll give you a clue – one poem is 14 lines.* The lesson was essentially inductive and student led. They worked in groups to assemble poems and read them back to the class. Amelia's role was to support with suggestions (e.g., to consider the semantic field of the poem). Only after student poems were completed, read, and commented on were Duffy's poems read in their entirety as they were originally written.

Having outlined some key features of each lesson, I now offer a close narrative of key aspects of each lesson. This maps characteristics to Sipe's framework (Appendix A) as well as attending to other aspects of learning such as paralinguistic/behavioural features and other pedagogical moves. I make the following annotations:

- Comments are in **bold.**
- Square brackets [] indicate comments in the lesson which match Sipe's framework.
- Rounded brackets () indicate other information useful for making sense of the lesson.
- In all transcripts, T indicates 'teacher'; FS female student; MS male student and where more than one speaks, the voices are labelled 1, 2, 3, etc.
- / indicates overlapping voices (Where students are named, this is because they were used in the class, and names are anonymised in this script).

4.7.6 Narrative Extracts From Each Lesson Explored

Lesson 1: Barry, spiral-shaped lesson, teacher-led deductive learning

The following are extracts from Barry's lesson where students are reading *The Merchant's Tale*. The tale concerns the cuckolding of an old knight, Januarie, by his young bride, May and her suitor, Damien. Extracts have been chosen because they illustrate a range of responses

within this teacher-led lesson. The main extract starts 21 minutes into the lesson, following Barry's reading of a section of the poem.

T: We're going to introduce a new character, and I'll say a bit more about him when we've read this bit

(He reads the poem with pauses to explain the narrative e.g., *the party is still going on*; *that means Damien carves the meat for the dinner***)**

T: Venus? Who is Venus? **[Teacher checking cultural knowledge, analytical reading]**

Goddess of Love **(chorus of student voices)**

T: Yes, Goddess of Love, ok. Ancient Roman Goddess of Love **[Teacher clarifies knowledge, cultural bridging, analytic reading]**

(Teacher continues to read)

T: So why is Damien not enjoying the celebrations? **[Inviting speculation about the narrative, analytical reading]**

FS1: He likes her

T: He likes her- he would much rather have May for himself. And um – a very interesting image which I think is worth noting: the 'Venus hurt him with her brand' – ok? Venus hurt him with her torch. The torch is like burning – it's almost a physical pain – yes, Harriet? **[focus on a single image to inform broader meaning making. Multimodal, analytic reading]**

Harriet: also, like the saying of carrying a torch for someone **[Draws on proverb, intertextual reading]**

*T: Oh, brilliant yeah, I like that, yes, so carrying a torch for someone - the idea of the torch as somehow representing love. Good. So love is something that's bright, warm, but also it <u>burns</u> [***Teacher extends possible connotations of meaning]**

Harriet: Also, there was like – when they, you were talking about erm …' harder than ever Paris did of Helen of Troy' I felt like that was kind of foreshadowing what's going to happen – where he's trying to suck up to - Januarie to get to May **[using the text to predict events, analytical reading]**

(Long pause)

T: Right. Are you thinking kind of Trojan horsey kind of way? **(Referring back to an earlier part of the lesson where this metaphor was discussed) [cultural reminder and shared exploration of Harriet's point]**

Harriet: Yeah

T: Right ok. I see. Yeah that might – work actually, yeah. So there could be some interesting parallels between that and we didn't actually comment on that we were talking about sexual desire but that seems like Januarie's being compared to Paris -um and – (pause) Have you all seen the film Troy? **[Draws on film. Intertextual reading followed by a short discussion. Phrase 'that might work' suggests an efferent approach and possible foreshadowing of alternative interpretations]**

S's: Yes **(general assent)**

T: What do all the men look like?

S's: Laughter… **(mention of Brad Pitt? Unclear, voices overlap) [possibly intertextual]**

FS: So they all look prepared to fight, and they've all got armour on

T: Yes, and they're all quite- erm- masculine men, would you say? Warriors? And I think that they're meant to be heroic and, and I suppose, attractive. Um, so it's interesting that Januarie obviously hasn't necessarily been made to come across as attractive so far – he is comparing himself to this kind of – heroic character. But anyway – we were talking – oh ok – yes? **(Responds to hand waving from student)**

FS: I was going to say he has this kind of body dysmorphia **[personal reading]**

T: Oh ok, we're getting diagnostic now – go on …

FS: He seems like he really thinks he's great (…. Mumble laughter…), but he's really bad **[moves from labelling the character's imagined internal world to make a moral judgement outside of this, a personal reading]**

T: Yes – erm he's talked about his white hair as a positive, hasn't he? As a sign of fertility. Now I don't – well, narration is kind of getting us to laugh at him isn't it? **[What the narrative does, analytic reading]** *Are we supposed to take him seriously?* **[the reader as positioned by the text, analytic reading]**. PAUSE. **(no response from class)** *Perhaps not, perhaps not. Anyway – back to Damien, back to Damien*

(Teacher reads from poem introducing Damien as a 'false/untrue domestic servant' who intends harm to Januarie)

T: Ok – bit of vocabulary? What's a foe? **[clarifying vocabulary and meaning, analytic reading]**

FS: Enemy

T: What's pestilence?

FS: Disease?

This extract illustrates Barry's careful management of a cycle of deductive-led teaching, which I previously referred to. He begins with teacher-led reading followed by whole class questioning, which leans into and supplements students' cultural knowledge. Barry actively works with what students know whilst bridging understanding and reinforcing the kinds of cultural meanings needed to pass the exam. Teacher-led 'cultural meaning work' begins and ends the extract: Venus as a goddess of love, the meaning of pestilence. The emphasis is on whole class dialogue, with Barry skilfully directing the discussion.

Readings are largely analytical and intertextual, with an emphasis on making meaning of themes and language. There is a broad range of analytic reading, from comprehension of vocabulary and concepts to predictive and inferential work. This efferent approach to 'cracking the code of meaning' has been found in the research (Xerri, 2013/2017) as a dominant way of reading in college classrooms heavily reinforced by the need to read for examination. The emphasis on efferent reading in Barry's classroom might also be informed by his personal pedagogical preference and/or the archaic text he is teaching. The latter, which includes unfamiliar language and cultural references, may push him to break up the reading experience to fill perceived knowledge deficits. However, Barry's teaching is 'multi-tooled', and he also prompts intertextual reading focusing on an image (of a torch). This multimodal (visual reference) prompts a student to respond with her own intertextual reference to a proverb. Later, Barry switches to a popular film as a way of encouraging students to imagine characters and actions in the poem. In this sense, Barry goes beyond the strict confines of literary 'close reading' or didactic exam preparation into more exploratory and culturally responsive reading.

I would argue that the above extract also illustrates some of the difficulties of applying the labels of the framework in the classroom. For example, I labelled the speculative comment *I think he has this kind of body dysmorphia* as a personal response, but it might be better described as 'idiosyncratic' as I have no way of knowing how or where this link is made between the student and the text. Similarly, when Harriet says *I felt like that was kind of foreshadowing* she is using the language of emotion, which may be associated with a personal response. However, her observation is analytic and inferential – about a possible intention of a character, so I have not assigned it as a 'personal response.' I noted during observations that students often said *I feel like…* when they might more accurately be described as saying, *I think*. Perhaps this is because 'feel like' is more tentative and hedging language, and 'feeling'

does not make a claim to 'truth'? Using this language means students are less likely to feel judged in the public space of a classroom.

Other parts of the lesson show the ambiguity as well as the richness of some student responses. For example, toward the end of the lesson, there is a long discussion about the status of marriage and the relative merits of Damien and Januarie.

> *T: Colin, and then we'll move on*
> *Colin: Do we know how long Damien's known May?*
> *T: No, I only know what you know- we've only got the text* **[close reading is needed]**
> *Colin: Cos I don't think he's done anything really to go after her. He's kind of just seen her, and he's been overwhelmed by her beauty, and it seems like* **(changes his voice)** *'Oh yeah, she's really cute, and I love this woman.'*

Do we know how long Damien's known May? This might suggest that in this moment, the student has fused with the text as if the characters exist independently of the text. Barry reminds the student that the text is complete in itself, and because this is not a 'wow' moment of transparent aesthetic response, I labelled the beginning of Colin's response as a comprehending and analytic response. Colin goes on to infer how the character might feel by voicing what Damien might say in a dramatic, vernacular style: It seems like, '*Oh yeah, she's really cute, and I love this woman'*. I think this shows how student interpretations can be both analytic and personalised.

Similar dramatic vernacular re-voicing of formal language characters took place in several other lessons that I observed (including Philip's, which I discuss below). This seems to be a significant way in which adolescents personalise texts to make meaning, and it is one that Barry was aware of and drew on in the classroom. He asked students to write and send imaginary phone text messages from characters at the wedding: examples are *dress is the best, wish you were here!* and *maybe Damien was staring at me? I can't help thinking he freaked me out.* Bowmer and Kirkwood (2006), cited in my literature review, use the term 'remixing' to describe this use of digital and popular culture to enhance understanding. Their research showed that this is a powerful and popular way of enabling adolescents to make personal connections with texts.

Writing phone texts and dramatic re-voicing are examples of multimodal meaning making. This, it will be remembered, is reminiscent of Tom's expressed preference in interview for reading with an emphasis on dramatic action. As will be seen later in this chapter, drawing on data from student focus groups, dramatic expression when reading texts is valued by the students in my sample.

Barry's lesson contained mostly analytic and intertextual reading with some elements of personalisation. There were no moments of aesthetic response that were visible to me as transparent or performative responses. This is perhaps unsurprising as teaching and learning was tightly controlled by Barry and focused on decoding the language of the poem. His tone throughout was instructional and directive, and he used imperative language, for example, *I want you to think about ...* and *Pick three quotations ...* He maintained warm engagement and pace throughout the lesson and, in keeping with his broadly declared ideological position, did not invite personal response to the text. He did not ask about the connections students might make or think about in relation to the text, and questions such as: *How do you feel ... what images come to mind ... does this remind you of anything?* were notable by their absence. Barry chose not to share any of his personal responses, although this does not mean that he or the students did not experience them. Notwithstanding this, at times, there were some appearances of personal response from the students, for example, when re-voicing the text in vernacular or speculating about moral choices.

Where Barry did refer to feelings about poems, he used distancing language which framed the poetic experience in efferent terms, for example, *How are we* ***supposed to feel*** (my emphasis) *about Damien at this point?* This led to the following exchange:

T: How are we supposed to feel about Damien at this point?
FS: We're supposed to like him
(Some laughter)
T: We're supposed to like him? **(Disbelieving emphasis on like)**
FS: I like him. He's quite courageous. I mean, he loves her evidently ...

Here, I think the female student is offering a personal response and a resistant reading. The student wanted to state her opinion and her feelings about the character of Damien despite the

unpopularity of her view. This view is not validated or discussed further, perhaps because Barry is focused on analytic reading.

Toward the end of the lesson, Barry announced:

> *This is gonna be a text that constantly plays with where our sympathies lie, and I think it's a question to keep asking yourself: how do I feel about Januarie or May?*

This is a very particular approach to personal response and feelings experienced when reading poems. I would argue this approach derives from Barry's efferent reading stance. In terms of Sipe's (2008) framework, when people are observing their feelings, by definition, they stand outside of the text itself. They cannot be experiencing, in Sipe's terms, 'transparent fusion' with the text which is an essential part of an aesthetic response. Feelings about texts matter to Barry because they are early warning signs that can serve to expand the technical understanding of the text. Barry, it will be remembered, referred to poems as *clever little machine(s)* in interview, and it would seem, in this lesson observation, his approach to teaching is consistent with his wider views.

Lesson 2: Philip, Spiral-shaped Lesson, Student-led Deductive Learning

The following extracts are from Philip's lesson, in which he asked students to explore and compare three poems that were new to the class. He chose poems from three different eras to enable historical comparison of the theme of love. The poems are Herrick's *To Virgins to Make Much of Time;* Rossetti's *A Birthday*; and Yeats's *He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven*.

Philip introduced the lesson as exam preparation and a planning grid (copy in Appendix K) was given to the students to help them make sense of the poems in ways to meet assessment outcomes. This was a year 2 class taking place in February so it's safe to assume that exam preparation was uppermost in both teacher and student minds. Much of the lesson was dominated by efferent reading, although this changed toward the end of the lesson. The first extract is approximately five minutes into the lesson, and the second is from the last ten minutes.

In contrast to Barry's lesson, students here are working in groups. Therefore, I recorded small group discussions. This enabled me to capture more dialogue between students than I did in Barry's class, but it also means that the sample of discussion is necessarily partial.

T: – Let's have a read and go in chronological order so we can see how love has changed…. **(they turn to read Herrick first)** *Let's have a stanza each, and then we'll do the overview and do a bit more detail.*

Teacher nominates three students to read a stanza in turn **(contemporary note- 'read in dreary tones')**

T: Go on then on your tables. Initial first impressions, just on the first reading. What do you think this poem is about? What does it seem to be saying? **(An open question followed by a more attenuated question about a possible 'message')**

I record a table:

FS1: Time for love is going to fly away, and he's got to jump at the chance because he can/ **[analytic reading for primary meaning]**

FS2: You shouldn't wait because … / mmmm **(mumbled agreement from several voices)**

FS1: You should marry as soon as possible/

FS3: Yeah, so you don't lose your prime, prime! **(laughter)** *Humming and coughing …*

FS2: What that you're gonna lose your …. Charms? **(Charms? overlapping voices)**

*FS1: Yeah - you know how people would say like… whatcha call it? Like 'life goes on and all of a sudden'…***[reaching for a proverb – intertextual meaning]**

FS4: Maybe he's talking about your sexuality like your appeal, but once you get older, you're – **(vague 'ugh' sound)**

FS1: Yeah

[above dialogue is both analytic and personalising; they are working out a primary meaning and having an emotional response as they think about ageing and sex appeal]

FS4: Cos it says that age is best when youth and blood **(overlapping voices 'yeah'/ 'easier maybe?')**

FS1: Like don't wait around

FS3: Maybe it's saying when you're younger, it's easier to find love **(voices ummm 'spontaneous')**

FS2: Yeah and in the first stanza it says, 'same flower that smiles today tomorrow will be dying.'

FS2: So that says he thinks everyone wants to have sex at a young age **[analytic, drawing on primary meaning]**

FS1: Yeah, cos of the rosebuds, innit? **[symbolic, analytic interpretation?]**

FS4: Exactly! and the title as well… **(cross talk agreement) [Analytic interpretation drawing on the cultural meaning of rosebuds]**

Noted at the time: Teacher, who has been circulating, interrupts at this point to nominate tables

T: I heard some great ideas and that's just on the first reading – what did you think?

FS (table one): We thought he's basically saying to lose your virginity at a young age – how it's good to lose it young when you're like full of energy and of life, you could say – and that's what we got from it **[summative interpretation]**

*FS (table two): We said, like most of the time, you should make the most of now because you don't know…***[partial inferential interpretation]**

MS (table three): We said like, 'the same flower smiles today' shows the purity throughout changes… **[analytic interpretation- based on ignoring enjambment of the line?]**

T: I think you're right, can you write it down, and does it remind you of any other poems in the anthology? **(invites comparison)**

(Students begin to offer analytic summaries, and the teacher controls and approves interpretations. Linking to other poems is to help them make comparisons, which they will do in the exam)

FS: Passionate shepherd

T: Exactly why? **(Student speaks, inaudible)** *Yeah – it's persuasive and full of what you call rhetoric, persuasive language, and it's a courting wooing poem like most of love poetry is. Trying to persuade a young woman to get into bed with a man. So let's have another read. Now you've got that sense you'll probably see more on the second reading. Like the layers on an onion… peeling away.* **(Poems have layers: signals that they are special kinds of texts which need re-reading)**

The teacher nominates students to read the poem, in turn, each taking a stanza. Read again, and then they are asked to talk about the poem again on their tables and see what 'jumps out' what they notice now **(nominated and segmented reading followed by an open question, which potentially invites many kinds of responses)**

I record a different table from above:

FS1: Isn't he saying you should marry? **[Analytic interpretations follow working out a primary reading]**

FS2: If you get past a certain age, you have no hope basically, just saying you're in your youth, and these are your glory years and stuff **[vernacular summative interpretation]**
FS3: Hmmm, there's no point in waiting; you might as well just do it
FS1: Maybe you don't have to wait for marriage to /
FS3: And you could still get married after that (low 'dum de dum' voices and FS3 whispering 'tarry tarry tarry') **[paying attention to the sound of the poem, exploring it as sound- moving toward performative manipulation of the text]**

Philip asks the students to read the poem twice, saying that 'like an onion' poems are layered in meaning. However, both readings are the same: nominated students read individual stanzas aloud. This may be problematic; research from Cupchik and Hilscher (2005), referred to in my literature review, found that students engage more with poems when they read them for themselves. To what extent the reading affected discussion, I cannot know, but subsequent dialogue, in common with Barry's lesson, is dominated by analytic interpretation as students try to work out 'the meaning' of the poem. The one exception to this is at the end of the extract, where several students start to experience the sound of the poem emphasising rhythms and whispering *tarry* repeatedly. This, I would argue, is a 'very slight moment', meaning it is transient and difficult to interpret. However, it might plausibly suggest the importance of orality for responding to texts as previously researched (Dyson, 2005; Ladson-Billings 1995; Lapp and Fisher, 2009). I think it is helpful to contrast this with another conversation about the rhythm of this poem. I recorded this in Will's class earlier on the same day, discussing the same poem:

FS1: I know – it's iambic pentameter
MS1: What's the effect of the rhyme scheme? Is it consistent all the way through?
FS1: Maybe it's a consistent idea? Let's look at each paragraph
FS2: There's a paragraph analysis that goes with this/
MS1: It's a bit of an odd poem; it's basically telling them to get married and have a child

I would argue that the above exchange about the same poem draws entirely on efferent reading. The students analyse the poem, refer to stanzas as paragraphs, and describe the possible sound pattern using technical terms such as 'iambic pentameter'. By contrast, the students in Philip's class are experiencing the poem as sound and beginning, perhaps to appreciate it aesthetically as they recreate the sound. It's hard to know because, as Benton and Fox put it, 'the substance

of the secondary world is … elusive, constantly changing and highly individualised' (1985, p. 7).

I now move to the second extract from Philip's lesson, where he introduces Yeats and the poem *He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven.*

T: This is the poem that got me into poetry **[personal announcement, Philip declares the aesthetic value of the poem for himself]**
(He asks one student to read the poem slowly and she does)
My note at the time: ***when she gets to the last line 'tread softly because you tread on my dreams, ' the quality of her reading changes, and she sounds slightly in wonder – it seems she may be affected by the line*** **[possibly a transparent/ performative moment]**
(My contemporaneous note says: ***sigh of oooo around some of the class at the end)**
T: It's lovely if that's your first response to that poem… yeah **['ooo' indicates some student aesthetic appreciation, teacher shares personal response]**
Students discuss at tables for first impression – I go to another group
FS1: I think it's quite – the dynamic word 'tread' shows how disheartened he is… **[analytic interpretation]**
FS2: I was thinking, you know how she puts the cloth at the other person's feet, or he or whatever, isn't it kind of like saying, 'I'm putting all that I have before you, like under you so you're comfortable' **[analytic understanding of metaphor]**
(Cross talk, 'yeah yeah' */'be wary'***)**
MS: yeah, that's like in the olden days, like what a gentleman would do, you would take off your coat and put on like a puddle / *'yeah yeah'* **[sharing cultural historical knowledge to make meaning]**
FS3: So basically, in other words he's given her his all, and she's just/
FS1: Well he's just saying be careful I'm giving you everything, she hasn't done anything yet
MS: I think it's a bit like in his bare hands thinking about/
FS1: Yeah he's saying I have nothing/
FS2: He's warning her don't tread on my dreams, yeah and he's/ **[dialogic meaning making]**

T: **(announces to class)** *I think on the second reading the slightly tricksy image is the first four lines, which I think become clearer on the second reading so try and get a handle of what he's describing or doing*

(Same student reads the poem aloud; Philip asks, *so what's happening?* **tables discuss again)**

MS: I think he's describing like this really fancy cloth. It's given to him from heaven, this amazing thing **[tentative analytic meaning making]**

FS1: It's like 'had', 'if I had', it's conditional **[analytic, understanding through grammar]**

MS: Is he saying like if I had it, I would give this to you? **(seeking clarification)**

FS1: But what are all these colours, do they mean something?

MS: I think it's to show how divine it is/

FS2: How he would treat her/ **(dialogic meaning making)**

MS: Yes, like he would give her all of this **(murmurs and a general pause)**

MS: I think it's more like a- you know like a fancy red carpet; you know, like walk down the red carpet when you're like famous or have a celebrity persona? I think that's what he's trying to say… I would give these fancy garments for you to like walk under…. **[intertextual meaning making, use of celebrity to make sense of the poem]**

FS1: Isn't like tread softly an oxymoron? **[analytic, discussing subtlety of language]**

(My note at the time: the group continue to discuss this quietly as the whole class begins to feedback)

T: **(to whole class)** *What do you make of the first four lines?*

FS: When he says embroidered cloths and then he describes the colours, and I think in those days they have such colours as well and dark colours and gold as well/ **[in those days? Some attempt at historical understanding and analysis?]**

T: What other ideas are there about these first four lines? I agree with you there's images of wealth contrasted with but 'I am poor' it's very strong- erm Ibrahim? **(open question followed by some direction -** *I am poor***)**

Ibrahim: I think the whole thing is about like him not having the wealth of the man she married but he has given everything he has, even though he doesn't have much he, again, laid it at her feet in essence but she still goes over him to go to this other gentlemen **[analytic narrative]**

T: Mmmm yeah and you know be careful I've given you everything. Those first four lines – Sylvia?

Sylvia: I'm not sure

T: Anisa? Jane what do you make of those first four lines?

Me: **(there is no response from Anisa so I speak)** *Those first four lines, erm, I would say if you think of him looking up at the sky you might get an idea of where that imagery might come from*

FS: Space

T: What does embroidered mean? **(Closed question to aid clarification)**

FS: Stitched on?

T: It's like decorated, I think the key to it is that the opening image is an image of the sky and he's saying the night sky is like an embroidered cloth

(Laughter and murmured discussion, and he shows them a picture of the night sky) [intertextual use of imagery]

T: So: Shantavia read the four lines again they might make a bit more sense (She reads). Do you see what he's saying? Had I a cloth as beautiful as the heavens, had I that cloth I would lay that at your feet

FS1: Wow! **(murmured) [transparent aesthetic experience?]**

FS2: That's so nice

FS1: Wow, that's so nice **(laughter across the class)**

From the start of this extract, the lesson takes an entirely different turn in relation to poetry. When Philip says that this is the poem that got him *into poetry,* he is prioritising the value of personal response. He asks one person to read the poem in its entirety, and this is unlike earlier in the lesson, where reading is done by nominating one person to read one stanza of a poem each. The student read the poem clearly and fluently; Philip deliberately chose someone who is good at it and enjoys reading to the class. This, I would argue, makes the reading experience seamless for both reader and listeners and honours the poem as a work of art.

I cannot be certain because I did not talk to the student about her reading, but she seemed to be moved by the last line – I noted at the time that her tone changed as she read: *tread softly because you tread on my dreams.* The effect of the introduction and the reading can be seen to invite a range of responses from the students that have not previously been expressed in the classroom. The spontaneous low-toned 'ooo' sounds that come from various parts of the classroom can be interpreted as awe. This could be, in Sipe's terms, a transparent moment of aesthetic response where students might be intensely experiencing the internal world of the

poem. This is noticed and shared in turn by Philip, who says it's *lovely* if that's their first response to the poem. The lesson might be said at this point to have moved from efferent to aesthetic appreciation of poetry. Following this reading, students turn to a discussion of the poem in their small groups, offering a variety of analytic and intertextual responses. These responses can also be labelled as 'personal', because, like students in Barry's lesson, they draw on dramatic voicing of characters as they make sense of the poem: *in other words, he's given her his all/ he's saying be careful, I'm giving you everything/ he's warning her 'don't tread on my dreams yeah'.*

There is some rich dialogic meaning making as students puzzle over the what the 'cloths of heaven' might be. The students questioned each other: What are all these colours? D*o they mean something?* and the group moves from literal to implied meanings to explore whether the cloth represents *how he would treat her.* This free-flowing talk seems to support previous findings from research by Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith (1995) that adolescents make more connections and discuss poetry more freely in small groups than in large. A clear pedagogical implication here is that teachers can actively adopt different kinds of small group work to support student responses to poems.

As with Barry's lesson, students mostly make analytic meaning in terms of Sipe's framework, but I also noted at the time that the group were talking in *hushed and attentive terms,* and their level of engagement with the poem seemed to be qualitatively different from earlier in the lesson. Such moments of interior experience are difficult to precisely evidence; however, when the groups were called back to whole class discussion, this group were reluctant to stop talking. In fact, they continued to talk quietly about their interpretations as Philip began to take whole class feedback. I would characterise the students in the group I recorded at this point as being intensely involved in the experience of the poem, their reading is active and receptive.

At this stage the whole class were still unsure what the cloths of heaven could be, but they appeared to be curious rather than frustrated by their uncertainty and this perhaps is a mark of their attention and aesthetic absorption in the poem. Discussion sustained until Philip explained the imagery with the help of a picture, which prompted laughter and murmured discussion. There follows, I would argue, a transparent moment of awe as one student murmured *wow!*, another said *that's so nice*, which again was echoed by the first speaker *wow, that's so nice.*

The laughter that followed around the class, I reflected afterwards in my notes, was 'like the breaking of a spell,' perhaps recognising and marking an unusual collective experience.

The total amount of time spent exploring the poem was approximately ten minutes, but immediately, the tone of the lesson changed as, perhaps, Philip became conscious of time. He abruptly switched focus and began writing on the board information useful for passing the exam. He summarised some key points about the use of context and comparison, telling students to make notes of the following things:

> *You could say that Herrick is influenced by Ben Jonson. Ben Jonson, that's all you need to know…Take a couple of ideas from the book, not all of it just use a couple, like Royalists are aware of trying to make the most of time… Victorians – with the rise of atheism, you also get a defence of religion – can you see how this relates to Rossetti?*

This was hastily delivered as if Philip suddenly began to worry about the exam. The above excerpt is clearly an example of efferent cramming: *that's all you need to know/ take a couple of ideas from the book*. I think Philip's actions can be understood as derived from the deep professional dilemma teachers of A level English find themselves in, which has previously been explored as a theme in interviews. On the one hand teachers have personal and academic knowledge about the value of experiential reading – they may well enjoy poems and want to pass on that enjoyment. On the other they have a duty and responsibility to get students to pass exams and this need to prepare and train students to write down key points for marks drives practices in the classroom. This leads to deep ambivalence about their practice. Possibly for Philip, in the moment described above, the aesthetic experience of Yeats' poem felt like a 'guilty pleasure' from which he had to redeem himself quickly.

Philip's lesson illustrates strongly contrasting approaches to reading poems in the A level classroom. The first part of the lesson focuses strongly on efferent reading, and even though (during discussion of the Rosetti poem) he tells students reading, *don't rush it – it's poetry,* the practice of nominating students to read poems in stanzas tended to encourage hurried and anxious readings. Only when Philip turned to reading Yeats, signalling an aesthetic stance: *this is the poem that got me into poetry* and asked a single confident reader to read the poem was the experience of poetry unrushed. I would argue that in this lesson, Philip effectively opened

the class to deeper engagement and for a short space of time, some students experienced aesthetic appreciation of a poem.

I now turn to explore the third lesson, taught by Amelia.

Lesson 3: Amelia, Inductive Student-led Learning

This was the second lesson I saw Amelia teach. I had interviewed her the previous week and so had some idea of her approach to teaching and that she valued trying to encourage students to have what she called '*a human response'* to poems. This, she explained, involved an emotionally felt response to the work.

At the start of the lesson, the titles of the two poems were written on a whiteboard. Thirty-eight lines of poetry, previously cut into strips, were distributed to each table. The poem was, therefore, deconstructed as a work of art. For a teacher invested in the idea that poems offer aesthetic experiences to which teachers should encourage students' personal response, this was an unexpected teaching strategy. Amelia seemed to be teaching in Sipe's terms from a hermeneutic rather than aesthetic impulse because students were being asked to analyse lines to master a text.

Amelia told the students that the task of their group was to recreate two poems using 28 lines from two Duffy poems:

> *T: You have 38 lines, sort them into two poems, and when you're happy with the choice, tell me, and you can stick the lines down… think about why you are making choices* **(about where to place lines)** *…. the choice is yours, ok? On the board, there are things you might consider – use of punctuation, theme, choice of words, tone – anything you think might connect under the headings.*

Amelia stressed at the start *this is not a test.* However, from the outset, this was an ambivalent task. The students were working to rearrange published lines of poetry, and they were not clear whether they were expected to recreate the poems as Duffy intended them or whether they were invited to create their own poem using her lines. This created confusion, which persisted throughout the lesson and perhaps added to an atmosphere of anxiety, which I noted at the time.

I made a note that *there's a lot of off-task chatter as this begins … students seem worried about this.*

The heart of the ambivalence in the lesson is that the two tasks call for different reading stances. Recreating Duffy's poems as she wrote them calls for efferent reading in which students might be expected to analyse and match lines based on previous experiences with poems or the poet. In doing this, they may draw on analytic, intertextual and personalised responses to the text. However, making new poems with lines from published poems has some aesthetic potential and invites more intense participation with the poem. Students creating new poems might make artistic choices and even become performative in Sipe's terms as they manipulate existing texts to express themselves.

I observed, digitally recorded and took notes of two groups, chosen at random, who were working on the task at different times in the lesson. Much of the talk at the start of the task was focused on efferent reading, as this excerpt from the first group I recorded illustrates:

GROUP 1
FS1: 2,4,6,8 – so maybe 14 this side **(she is calculating the possible length of two poems and dividing the lines exactly)** *I'm looking at it, yeah – I see a lot of hyphens so they're the ones from the same poem, if that makes sense?* **[analytic]**
FS2: Are there any capitals? **[analytic]**
*FS3: That's true…***(confirmatory)**
FS2: If there's a capital, maybe this one starts the poem, and this is another? **[analytic]**
MS1: yeah
(Discussion about the capitals and the title of the poem 'Love' cross talk)
FS2: *Maybe there's enjambment? So the hyphens could be that too* **[analytic]**
FS1: So how does that work? **[efferent checking]**
MS1: For the next line, so if you run out of space you put a hyphen, and you come to a realisation, so falling in love she left a gap/
(inaudible interruption, someone says 'oh yeah' **then crosstalk)**
FS2: So let's just pick out all the capitals so that's a capital er… that's one ..um **[efferent shortcut]**
FS1: 'Love's lips pursed to quotations'? **(moves to narrative sense of poem)**

FS2: er – that's in the love poem cos there's love in it, so that's them, so guys let's contribute/

(there is a lot of cross talk as some of the group are trying to work out what belongs in the poem Epiphany at the same time)

MS: Epiphany- is it like deja vous? **[analytic enquiry]**

F2S: No, it's like come to a realisation but I'm just not sure **(reaches for the dictionary as the teacher comes round and asks what word she is looking up. Short discussion with the teacher, which clarifies that epiphany means a sudden and inspiring revelation)**

As can be seen, the exchanges are short and overlapping, and the conversation covers a range of efferent reading responses. At different points in their discussion, students highlight different analytic features, thinking about the role of capital letters in poems, enjambment, and narrative sense. Having explained the meaning of 'epiphany' to the students, Amelia tried to clarify the task:

T: So, you're using capital letters, but you're not trying to second guess the poet **(in this exercise)** *you're trying to think about choices poets make.*

The suggestion to *think about choices poets make* may have altered the course of the group discussion. At this point the conversation between students turned to reading lines from the poems using dramatic expression:

MS: Come live with me

FS: To lie on white sheets

FS: (sings)– *come live with me* **[intertextual link to music and slightly performative]** (**the tune she is singing is unclear**)

I noted at the time: *a discussion starts about whether 'live' rhymes with 'give'. There is disagreement. They continue to talk about whether there is a rhyme scheme, whether this is a sonnet, they rhyme red and dead in a couplet to see how that sounds* **[slightly performative and use of sound, multimodal]**

MS: You know Talia said this one? **(indicates a line)** *because it's got love in it – it could be the love poem? The burning gold – could be a theme here* **[narrative and thematic sense making, analytic reading]**

*Yeah/ yeah:***(group agreement overlapping voices)**

FS3: I don't feel like 'Not close my eyes to the light' I don't feel like that's a style of a poem I don't know why/ **[personalised response – 'feel' may be a substitution for 'think' here?]**

FS2: So, do you think that style of a poem begins with like a lower case? **[back to the role of capital letters, analytic]**

FS3: No, no, not lowercase, that phrase I wouldn't start with that **(this is the first line of the poem** *Epiphany***)**

FS4: But you know when we were reading **(inaudible – another Duffy poem?)** *– and there was a capital and then lower case line, and then it had a line starting with a capital – it could be like that* **[analytic guessing from what they know of the poet]**

MS: 'Dear heart' that's like a love poem

FS3: I feel like this is the beginning of a stanza **(think or feel? How far is this intuitive? I can't know)**

FS2: It's indented **[analytic, feature spotting]**

MS: Dear heart – yeah, that's a love poem

FS2: It's indented, though – like falling in love **[more sophisticated analysis – the indentation functions as a metaphor for the meaning of the poem, perhaps?]**

(cross talk, and they start to glue words down, getting the task finished)

MS2: I think what's the answer is really good **(unclear what this means)** *let's find two themes- what you said, the definition of epiphany, and then love.*

FS2 'Light' and 'in your head' probably go with a love poem.' Talk Sense' maybe? cos you're understanding? goes with epiphany that's the understanding/ **[working together to complete the task using some personal and analytical understanding]**

I would argue that in the above excerpt, there is a shift in the tone of the discussion from the start of the lesson. There is a wider variety of meaning being made as students draw on their knowledge of poems and make some personal links and intertextual references. The conversation ebbs and flows, recapping some of the earlier discussion, and there is a lot of movement between the kinds of responses students offer. Toward the end of this discussion, student talk receded into what I would characterise as 'efferent play'. Amelia reminded the students that one poem is a sonnet containing 14 lines, and with this information and perhaps becoming aware that time to complete the task was running out, the group sought to glue lines as fast as possible.

From my notes at the time: *they pool lines and semantic fields, they return to where and how hyphens are used, discuss words and trade lines. It's a fairly random process but earnest – like playing cards. Someone says, 'has anyone got …?' People are working alone and across each other.*

In some respects, this can be seen as a creative process and the students are making poems. I would argue, however, that at root, this is an efferent reading experience. The students wanted to master the text in some way that met the parameters of the task on time, and my note about playing cards indicated that the students effectively traded lines to make poems. As one female student said, slightly despairingly,

FS3: I feel like let's just do the easiest thing first… **[efferent]**
FS2: 'So that's the love poem – that's the sonnet, so we need 14 lines for the other poem' **[efferent]**
FS1: I feel like light and dark they match the idea of an epiphany **(questioning voice)** *Like a revelation. This is really hard, isn't it?*

I think this illustrates some of the complexity of group work. People, apparently working on the same thing, take very different positions in relation to the work. Here, the group seem to be pulling in different individual directions. FS3 is emotionally exhorting the group to get the task done by doing whatever is easiest (although what this is, she doesn't say and perhaps doesn't know). FS2 is efferently focused on allocating lines according to the rule that a sonnet is 14 lines. Meanwhile FS1 is thinking through the meaning of words and their relationship to the title. In this sense, she is working at a more analytic level, although this is immediately followed by a personal and emotional appeal to the group– *this is really hard, isn't it?*

Shortly after this exchange, the sole male student in group 1 began to line up phrases and words:

MS: Ok, anything to do with light and darkness on this side – here, here, **(indicates another part of the table)** *body parts go here*
Amelia came to the table at this point to look at the lines they were allocating to each poem and had the following exchange:
T: You have some really nice ideas about communication and lips here **(encouragement and validation of their work)**

FS3 **(replying)** *What?* **(incredulous tone, not convinced by teacher)**
FS2: Right – anything light or sexual over there and anything body over here/ **(working alongside the MS) [efferent]**
MS: And anything to do with love, anything to do with words/ **[managing semantics, efferent analytical]**
FS3: Oh, miss! It's not like a poem – it's just a messed up order **[negative personal response to task]**
FS2: But it's OUR order! **(protesting - we have done something)**
T: Right. Have you looked at Duffy's poems? Have you looked at them? They're all over the place, aren't they? **(supportive)**
FS2: It's our poem **(repeats assertion of ownership)**
T: It's your poem, your poem, you're not second-guessing **(what the poet did)** – *get sticking!* **(confirming ownership and telling students to get back to the task)**

At the start of this exchange, Amelia seems to be working to support students and, in line with what she told me in interview offers her own 'human response' to poems. She does not comment on analytic features, for example, to query line order, just appreciates what the students have done – their *nice ideas*. This does not impress FS3, who resists valuing their work throughout this exchange. FS2, who at this point is more involved in the process of making the poem, pushes back, asserting that *it's our poem*. The implication is that ownership has value.

Leaving this group after approximately 15 minutes, I approached a second table of four who seemed to have stopped working. I spoke to them directly about the task, and this was the exchange:

GROUP 2
Me: How are you finding it?
FS1: We're doing it
Me: But how is it?
FS2: **(shrugs)** – *Ok*
Me: How are you deciding where to put the lines?
FS1: Just guessing
FS2: Using rhymes

Me: So that makes you feel that the words go together? Do you feel that they do?
FS3: They're all the same; they're just sloppy.
(They have what looks like a complete poem in front of them)
Me: How did you do that?
FS1: We just put the words together – made grammatical sense where we could

As can be seen, these students gave me very short answers. Their first response to my question *how are you finding it?* being the brief *we're doing it* is suggestive of drudge. Other answers they gave included *just guessing*, *using rhymes* and making *grammatical sense where we could* seem barely analytic in terms of Sipe's framework. This group might be characterised as compliant but minimally engaged in the task. It is also possible that they resented my questioning and were 'shrugging' me off.

I returned to group 1, where, in my absence, it seemed the male student had taken an executive decision to move some of the lines around that they were sticking down. This is what followed:

MS: Guys do you like this? **(I noted murmurs of** *oooo/look at him* **from members of the group as they see the finished poem. MS begins to read quite slowly with feeling and emphasis)**
Now close my eyes to the light
When the light
Is in my head
Is my bed
Love's light fading, darkening
Is a light gone out yet burning, gold red
FS2: I like the-**(pause)** *thing* **[personal appreciation possible aesthetic response]**
FS3: Yeeeeeaaaahh **[very keen and low voice – transparent aesthetic response?]**
MS: Or should I swap it like/ **(anxious concern, perhaps meaning can this be improved?)**
FS2: No no, no, go back go back it's nice **[personal response] (confirmatory, supportive of original arrangement which is kept)**
FS3: It sounds really nice **[appreciative personal response]**
MS: Maybe we need a new caps letter, or maybe it doesn't need a new caps letter? **[analytic query]**
FS2: It doesn't **(refutes suggestion)**

FS3: Yeah, because these two capitals go with the… **(? indistinct)**
FS1 How many lines have we got there? **[analytic check of task]**
MS: 1 2 3 4 5 – it's only six lines, but everyone agrees/
FS1: Oooooo/ ***[appreciation, enjoyment, aesthetic response?]***
FS2: Everyone agrees that we like this one **(expressing group consensus and finalising the choice)**

The above exchange, I would argue, includes elements of performance, aesthetic reading and personal response. The male student has been the chief organiser of lines and, perhaps, bolstered by the previous conversation about the value of this work *(it's our order… it's our poem*) seems to take pride in the poem. He reads the poem slowly and with feeling. This suggests aesthetic appreciation as he seems fully engaged with and impressed by the poem. The other students also seem to value the work, and their spontaneous and slightly incoherent comments *(I like the – thing/yeeeaaaah/ooooo)* might be evidence that they are, in Sipe's terms, reading transparently, engaged in the world of the short poem they have made.

The students are also aware that the task called for one poem to be 14 lines long and, in allocating six lines, they have 'failed' to recreate the poems as Duffy wrote them. The ambiguity of the tasks crystallises in a brief moment of tension between their aesthetic pleasure and the need to complete the task efferently. Realising the poem 'should' be 14 or 24 lines long, the male student says:

MS: *I'll fix this up* **[efferent – will increase the lines]**
FS3: *No it was nice how it was is in my head, my bed, love's light burning …. ok It sounds* – **[personal response and appeal to leave the poem on aesthetic grounds]**
MS: *Ok so do we agree with this, ok?* **(agreement seeking, concedes to FS3 reads their original six-line constructed poem above again as they all listen)**
FS1: *I like that* **[appreciative personal response]**
FS2: *I like that*. **(I noted lots of murmured agreement and then laughter, and voices overlap.)** *Stick! Stick! Stick it down! do it do!* **(glues the lines to the page)**
MS: *Let's put this over here* **(indicates all the other lines should be made to fit in the second poem)**
FS3*: I wish you could write how she writes though* **(wistfully said and followed by several people laughing)**

FS2: *You know it's in your head you can't get the order in*/ **(? Incomplete thought)**
FS3: *Yeah, right and I'll get so gassed if I find the first three lines of the love poem start off like this* **(happiness with their work, also identification, hoping that they have made some choices the same as Duffy)**
(my note at the time: they play with the lines for the second poem now with renewed enthusiasm and lots of overlapping: *Guys!/wow/ that sounds so good.* **FS reads the second poem, which is unfinished, Amelia comes over)**

It seems that the students are so pleased with their work that they don't want to change what they have created. For this group, in this moment, aesthetic and creative pleasure has trumped the efferent task of trying to recreate Duffy's poem – six lines of their own arrangement are more valuable than completing the task to order. Fittingly, perhaps, they allocate the poem the title 'Epiphany'. The overlapping voices are energetic and self-congratulatory *(that sounds so good),* and this seems to be evidence of strong personal engagement and response. I noted at the time *they now continue to try to construct the second poem out of the 'left over'! Bell rings to stop the lesson, but they continue to work.*

At this point Amelia, the teacher, joined the group.

FS1: Why are you smiling? **(to Amelia)**
T: I love it I love it. **[personal appreciative response]**
FS1: Miss is like ra ra and he's like/ **(gestures to male student) [celebratory vernacular appreciation of 'I love it'?]**
T: I like the idea the light is in your head as if you're crazy **[personal response and analytic interpretation]**
MS: That was me/ **(pride in his work)**
T: *or lightheaded* **[alternative analytic interpretation]**
MS: She is a bit nuts though she's always **(Cross talk indistinct,** *she is a bit nuts* **refers presumably to Duffy**, **also building on Amelia's response of lightheaded?)**
T: Right. I like that a lot **[affirming and appreciative personal response]**
FS2: A remake of art of her own poem – can we send it to her? **(laughter)** *can we email it to her*? **(so pleased and proud of their work they want to share it with Duffy)**
T: Yes, we should do **(overlapping excited voices)**

In this interaction, teachers and students temporarily stretch their roles and experiences to enjoy the pleasures of reading and writing poetry mutually. Amelia, like the students, leans into the task as one in which they are creating work rather than trying to recreate the work of the poet. As the teacher leading this interaction, she might have taken another approach, e.g., appreciated their work and then pointed out that they had not succeeded in allocating 14 lines to a sonnet. Instead, she offers a personal and unqualified appreciation of their work: *I love it.* She continues with two possible interpretations of what a line might mean *as if you're crazy or lightheaded.* The students' pride in their work and their excited response to her pleasure and appreciation is palpable: *Miss is like ra ra/ that was me* and, in this small section of dialogue, there's evidence of potential further meaning making, which builds on Amelia's comments – *she's a bit nuts though she's always …* Frustratingly I was unable to catch the full thought from the male student because people were talking over each other in their excitement. At the end of this exchange, the students want to send their work to Duffy. Whether this was ever done, I cannot say, but the shared desire of the teacher and students to do so at that moment illustrates the extent of their pride and pleasure. I would argue that this is, in Sipe's terms, an instance of performative and aesthetic creativity. The students manipulated the original text for their own purposes and, in doing so, expressed their pride and pleasure. Furthermore, Ameila, as the teacher, actively enabled this through her unqualified receptive aesthetic appreciation.

Both Harris (2018) and Sigvardsson (2020), in their studies of young people reading poetry, have argued that *how the teacher is* within the classroom is the most important factor relating to student experience. I would argue Amelia's attuned connection and appreciation of students' work supports this claim. It is not the adaptation of a particular teaching strategy which led to this aesthetically pleasing outcome. It might be argued the aesthetic experience happens *despite* the cut-up poem strategy. Amelia potentially increased students' confidence in their own capacity to respond to and enjoy poems because she draws on and rewards their creativity.

Finally, it is notable that at the end of this exchange the students returned to trying to work out what the second poem might look like using the 14-line rule. Effectively, therefore, they moved quickly back to a more efferent approach to reading and writing poems. However, as they did this, one of the female students began to sing lines from a contemporary pop song, which she said was related to the lines in the original Duffy poem, *Epiphany*.

This seems to me to be a brief moment of intertextual meaning, which, in my revised version of Sipe's framework, may indicate an aesthetic response. The student actively related one cultural product (poem) to another (song) and was using this to make meaning. The song seemed to be explicitly concerned with female sexual desire, and the male student declared it *disgusting,* which led to a short (inaudible to me) dispute about the song and how people get record deals. After this, the students returned to discussing the formal elements of a sonnet.

4.7.7 Summary

Above, I have described and discussed three contrasting poetry lessons taking place at different further education colleges with different poems. Collectively, they illustrate the slipperiness and sometimes the slightness of responses to poetry in the classroom as reading focus can change rapidly from efferent to aesthetic responses and back again. Drawing on both previous research in my literature review and interview data, I believe that all the teachers in my sample face similar dilemmas about teaching poetry. These include, but are not restricted to, pedagogical strategies, how to read poems in the classroom and the extent to which teachers want to and can engage with poems at a personal and aesthetic level.

In the next section, I explore further how teacher practices relate to their broad ideological positions. This section begins with the three lessons I have discussed above and broadens to include data from other lessons in all three groups. My aim is to discuss similarities, differences and discrepancies between teacher practices, bearing in mind teachers' broad ideological positions.

In relation to research question 2: *What teaching strategies do teachers use to prepare students to read for personal meaning?* I am interested to know the extent to which teachers have agency to engage with personal meaning and response when teaching poems at A level. This will illuminate a broader picture of the experiences and knowledge that adolescents draw on when constructing and articulating personal responses.

4.8 Teaching Strategies for Personal Meaning

Barry expressed in interview a clearly efferent approach to poetry, and it will be remembered I labelled his position as *poems as efferent objects – we read for the exam*. His lesson, based

on *analysing the way that writers shape meanings,* tightly matched the assessment outcomes of the exam. The horseshoe organisation of the classroom with nominated seating places gave him a high level of control in the classroom. His lesson was teacher led, and group pair work was tightly timed and predicated on questions which he clarified and ultimately sanctioned the answers to.

His teacher-centred approach put him in control of the lesson content and the pace all the time. Reading was undertaken either by Barry reading aloud or occasionally listening to a recording of *The Merchant's Tale*. Dialogue in the class was directed by explicit questions. Exploration of the meaning of a line or phrase was undertaken in relation to the position that the text places the reader in. This is derived from a Practical or Close Criticism approach to reading (Richards, 1929), which positions the reader as a subject detective of the text. Barry said in interview that he was not interested in student likes or dislikes and, in this lesson, much of his practice was consistent with this. He did not directly ask what students felt, thought, or the connections they made with the poem. He used distancing language when considering the emotional experiences poems can offer. Research from Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith (1995) referred to in the literature review found that teachers profoundly shape classroom talk to limit or permit discussion. In many ways, it might be argued that Barry limited opportunities for personal response in a way that was consistent with his own ideological position.

However, some of Barry's teaching techniques do potentially enable personal connection. An example from the transcript above is asking students to revoice characters using phone texts. Another technique he used in the lesson, not in the transcript, was to cast the students as medieval characters. In this instance, Barry told one student she was a lady in a castle and asked what she might wear/eat and how she might live. Another he cast as a peasant and asked similar questions of them. Techniques such as these, noted earlier, have been described as 'remixing' (Curwood, 2013). 'Remixing' invites students to take contemporary artefacts or experiences and combine them with older, original texts. Crucially, students use their imaginations; in Sipe's terms, they are 'personalising' and making links between the texts and themselves. In these moments students are engaged in creative acts in which secondary worlds are being explored. Therefore, contrary to Barry's stated philosophy, I would claim that, at times, his teaching offers the basis for personal and aesthetic responses to poems. Because of the nature of my research, I can only see some parts of this expression, but in this class, students can be

seen to make personal connections and hold opinions, which are occasionally expressed even if they do not match those of the teacher.

It is also the case that there is considerable overlap, particularly between Barry (group 1) and Philip (group 2), in terms of intertextual responses. Both used imagery (in Barry's case extensively in support of a PowerPoint presentation, and a wide variety of contemporary references, for example, film, proverbs, and a painting, to support student understanding. In my revision of Sipe's framework, I suggest that, for adolescents in particular, intertextual references can support aesthetic and personal responses to poems. This further supports my observation that there are interesting and valuable differences to be found between teacher's declared positions and their practices in the classroom. I can only speculate about the reasons for the differences, but it might be fair to assume that Barry, as an experienced teacher, understands that learning is about more than knowledge transference and that students need to be active in order to understand. This is the case even when the content of that learning is attenuated consistently toward preparation for an exam.

There are further overlaps and discrepancies between ideological groups in terms of teaching style. Barry's managerial style of teaching was not dissimilar in some ways to Will's, who I categorised ideologically as being group 2. Like Barry, Will has a strong grip on the pacing of the lesson and targeted closed questions. Toward the end of Will's lesson, I noted:

> *As the lesson ends, students suggest phrases to use in answering exam questions, and he translates ideas into appropriate terms: 'iambic octaves' and 'syntactic parallelism'.*
> *FS1: Can we say it's old fashioned?*
> *Will: Do we use the term 'old fashioned'?*
> *FS1: Archaic*
> *Will: Yes, archaic*

Like Barry, Will prioritised close and technical reading of poems and seemed very task centred. Where he differs is in the extent to which he draws on student knowledge as a preparation for reading poems. For example, Will asked specifically about students' religious views and experiences in relation to death. He was also keen to share some personal information and preferences of his own. Will, it may be remembered from interview, felt the weight of the exam

negatively, describing it as *a kind of horror*, but his teaching, like Barry's, was strongly anchored to learning outcomes and signposted to the exam.

In general terms, there are overlapping practices between all three groups of teachers in relation to understanding the historical and authorial context of poems. Across all ideological groups, teachers used strategies to explore students' understandings and supplement cultural knowledge. This practice matches widely held views identified in interview data about cultural deficiency and cultural strengths of students. Some teachers, such as Will, gave supplementary information to students with the expectation of student cultural deficit, *there's no moral failing in not knowing, but the exam board is expecting you to know the key features of the English Civil War …* Others were more discursive, seeking to build on students' own knowledge whilst reading poems. In the excerpt below, Zara, who, like Will, is broadly from group 2: *poems as problematic in the curriculum – we are bridges into meaning,* offers a strong example of exploratory discussion.

In the lesson students are beginning, for the first time, to read the poem *George Square* by Kay. Zara writes the line *to march against the war in Iraq* on the board and asks them to think what the poem might be about and if they have any initial 'personal response' to the line. **[predictive and personalising]** The students talk in groups of three or four. They are sitting in a horseshoe shape but cluster into small groups to discuss this.

> **Contemporaneous note:** The room is very quiet for a couple of minutes (are people thinking about their personal responses?) I then record a group of three people, chosen at random,
>
> FS1: *When I think of Iraq, I always think of war and conflict. It's always in the headlines, and loads of people did not like the war in Iraq. Mmm, there's always a negative*/ **[making political and contextual links with her experience – beginning a felt response when she says there's always a negative? Nb; She is interrupted]**
>
> FS2: *Yeah* **(confirmation)**
>
> FS1: *I'm trying to think what the poem could be about… it could be … (indistinct) demonstration because there's war going on and highlighting, I can't think of the word – what's wrong with the war* **[analytic interpretation]**
>
> FS2: *Yeah/* **(confirmation)**

FS1: *Social protest and it could be a political protest as well and to march against the war in Iraq, to march against gunfire, civilians, people* **[analytic, trying to locate the poem – is it in Iraq?]**

Zara stops and asks for 'absolute first impressions' from the lines, and she begins to write on the board as someone says protest **(uncritical initial acceptance of student ideas)**

Zara: *What kind of protest? Remember that huge mind map we did about protest and different forms of protest? We said things like sit-ins- what kind is this?* **(relates to previous work and theme of protest)**

FS1: *Marching*

Zara: *Yes, a marching one, so we're talking about physical protest, and let's go to Ana what kinds of things were you discussing?* **(clarifies and broadens discussion)**

Ana: *It's about the war and what's going on in it* **[summative analytic]**

Zara: *Ah, so we think it's in some sense about a wider context of the war itself. What kind of emotions would you expect from this poem – let's have this group over here* **[predict and theorise about feelings in the poem, analytic]**

FS: *Anger*

Zara: *Good – anything else?* **(open question, broadens view?)**

FS: *pain*

Zara: *I'm going to ask you a slightly trickier question here – anyone have any idea about what kind of perspective this poem might be from?* **(signals development – this is tricky) [perspective taking implies sophisticated efferent reading]**

FS: *I think it's detached, people are marching against the war rather than I am marching against the* war **[uses syntax to make meaning]**

Zara: *Ah ok -good.* (she then reiterates the points made). *Anyone want to take a guess where the poem might be set*? **('take a guess' – implies you can be wrong as well as right?)**

FS: *England*

Zara: *You think England- why?* **(follow-up exploratory question)**

FS: *(indistinct) – um they are trying to show they don't support what Tony Blair did*

Zara: *Okay, interesting. So you're tapping into that wider context, that lack of support for Tony Blair's vision to go to war. Very good, so bringing in your own ideas, so maybe it's set in England. I'm going to tell you the title now and see if you can build on that. The poem itself is called George Square ok, think about that as a way into that poem. Does it link into any of those ideas here and does anything change now you know the poem is called George Square?*

I think what's striking about this excerpt is the skill with which Zara allows students to express their ideas and build up their shared knowledge without imposing an answer or her own ideas. Despite the fact that, in Zara's own words, *the exam is always bubbling in your head,* she makes time for shared discussion in a way that seems to approach Wenger's (1998) concept of 'communities of practice' – that is, it involves mutual engagement, shared repertoire and joint enterprise. Zara shapes discussion through open questions and tentative language, for example, what kinds of things/what kinds of emotions/does anyone have any ideas? There is a liberal and democratic spirit in the exchange, and in Vygotskian terms, dialogue is key to the social construction of knowledge. Zara's strategy is consistent with her declared ideological position *as a bridge into knowledge.* Furthermore, the contrast between her and Will in this respect illustrates how different teaching strategies may be adopted by teachers who share the same broad views.

Amongst teachers, there were divergent opinions about the value of sound when engaging with poetry. It will be recalled that these views did not map neatly to ideological beliefs. Both Anna (group 1) and Ayesha (group 3) were dismissive of the importance of sound, whilst Bella (group 1) said she thought it significant in making meaning. I think practices around this are important in terms of my research. Music as an art form is important to adolescents and a key component of youth culture in the UK. It is also a means through which adolescents explore their feelings and identities (McFerran, 2011). Poems often have musical features, so exploration of sound may complement this interest and provide a way into personal meaning making and response. It is, therefore, worth reviewing teacher observations to further explore these three teacher positions.

Ayesha's lesson, which I observed, consisted of a series of student presentations about poems. Sound was only briefly referenced by one student, referring to an alliteration *it trips off your tongue so elegantly,* so I think there is insufficient data to further explore her practice in this respect. However, I am able to explore sound as it played out in two lesson observations, that of Anna and Bella.

Firstly, in Anna's lesson toward the end of her revision class discussing *Goblin Market* by Christina Rosetti:

Anna: (referring to discussion of sound and poems) *I'm scared of this, but we want to give you the same as you would get if you went to Eton College, but you know it's not essential, but you might get Brownie points if you do mention you know iambic pentameter. God. I hate doing this* **(From** *God.* **is said as an aside to herself) [analytic and efferent]**

(Contemporaneous note: She tells them to count syllables in a section of some of the lines, and they do this with some dispute reading aloud asynchronously. She writes the lines on the board and annotates syllables**)**

Anna: *Ok, so we've got six, six, five; ok if we divide it by two, we've got three pairs- we can see the stress is on the second syllable – I hate teaching this – 'to be or not to be' so we've got paired sounds* **[analytic efferent and strong personal response again from her – hates this!]**

FS2: *Oh* **(unsure?)**

Anna turns to face the board, looks confused and scratches her head: *I'm trying to decide the rhythm. Ok, so except when the goblins speak, it's iambic, but when the goblins speak, it's the opposite (thinking aloud)*

FS2: *Miss! Sing it – we'll understand it more* **[intertextual and personal appeal]**

Anna: *I'm not singing it!!* (she reads the lines with emphasised rhythm) *Well, when the goblins speak it's stress from the front, so that's called dactylic – terrible word. And the rest is iambic*. **[slightly dismissive, analytic, her personal feelings intrude again]**

Anna goes back to counting pairs of syllables to teach the terms iambic tetrameter/ dactylic/ anapest, which they write down.

Anna: *Now you can see why I don't like doing this, what sense does it make?* **(frustration? What we are doing has no meaning?)**

FS2: *Oh it does- like the women have a heartbeat because it's iambic, and like the men, the goblins don't speak like that, and it shows they're not the norm!* **(said enthusiastically) [makes meaning and interpretation with sound patterns]**

Anna: *Ooooo. I like that. Where did you get it?* **(appreciation – where is this from? Could refer to a student's idea or use of an outside source)**

FS2: *we learnt iambic is like a heartbeat, so I'm just saying … it's like the men are different, not normal* **(student has applied previous learning to the task to extend meaning. I'm just saying… slightly disowning of her own insight?)**

Anna: *that's good Rupa, but I think if you just say in the exam iambic and dactylic…* **[efferent, exam-focused answer is what you need to do, the interpretation is not useful]**

Consistent with her views in interview, Anna is reluctant to discuss sound with the class, saying several times she hates to refer to it. She couches her comments in efferent terms, talking about cultural capital and exam marks her students will gain, *the same as Eton College.* I would argue that in the above excerpt, Anna treats the experience of sound as an efferent exercise, a mathematical task in terms of feature spotting and labelling patterns of stress and metre. This is perhaps, a source of her frustration as she asks *what sense does it make?* It may be indicative of mutual trust and respect between teacher and students that Anna feels able to voice her frustration and thoughts aloud as she works, *I'm trying to decide the rhythm*. In any case, her frustration is countered by the female student who takes the rhythm Anna has suggested and applies it interpretatively in relation to the poem. The student spoke keenly, and whilst it is hard to judge whether she was experiencing aesthetic pleasure alongside her interpretation, she seems deeply invested in a possible meaning of the poem at this point. Anna is impressed, saying *oooo, I like that …* but, ultimately, she closes down further discussion, telling Rupa that *if you just say in the exam iambic and dactylic,* that (presumably) will be sufficient for marks to be gained.

In this instance, it appears that an opportunity to validate and explore a personal response and interpretation of a poem in relation to sound is missed. As a teacher, Anna could have opened a discussion on this point. She chose not to, perhaps because of a lack of personal confidence in this area but with the justification that it was not necessary to because the exam demands less.

In Bella's lesson, the issue of sound was discussed as an aspect of how to answer an exam question.

> Bella: *What could be something you could say?* **(in an exam)** *The effect of it? What does a rhyme scheme do?* **[analytic purpose of this feature]**
>
> MS: **(from the group I previously recorded)** *Um, it changes the way something is said, so if she* (Dickinson) *wants a particular effect it kind of forces it to be said how she wants it to be said* **[analytic purpose]**
>
> Bella: *Right ok, so it's about emphasis… anything else?* **(clarification, follow-up open question)**
>
> FS: *So obviously, it slows down the pace* **[analytic effect]**
>
> Bella: *Brilliant, pace, again though, pace in itself, ok that's not a seven-year-old comment that's maybe mid-teens but let's bring it to the high teens, does it speed you up? Does it*

make you rush? Does it slow you down? Does it, think of a poem where the rhyme scheme leads to that magic thing – meaning? **[efferent recognition of meaning and relationship to rhyme]**

MS2: *Well, this one* '*I like to see it lap the miles'* so/

FS: *Definitely – can you hear that? The least depressing – 'I like to see it lap the miles' and what does that rhyme scheme do?* **[analytic effect - the purpose of sound]**

MS2: *It speeds it up – and it references a train- it sounds like a train/* **(summarises effect)**

Bella: *Absolutely!*

I would categorise this exchange as largely efferent recognition of the effect of rhyme. Poems are not in this lesson, read for their sound, so they are not given the kind of cognitive and emotional attention which is necessary to aesthetically connect with the text. The exchange here is framed from the start as being about *something you could say* rather than *how you experience it?* This framing clearly matches Bella's belief in the interview that poems cannot be experienced as art in the classroom. As a caveat to this point, I should acknowledge that, as this is a revision lesson, it is possible the poem has previously been experienced aesthetically.

Bella's obscure reference to peoples' ages when the female student cites *pace,* I think, may be a reference to the exam and the need to use particular kinds of language to support ideas, but this is also unclear. What I think is of interest here is that toward the end of the exchange, the students talk to each other rather than the teacher. The male student is interrupted as he starts to read the poem: *I like to see it lap the miles* by the female student who enthusiastically cuts in with *definitely – can you hear that?* They seem, in this moment, to be experiencing the sound of the poem, which the female student immediately calls *the least depressing.* I take this to be a reference to the collection they are studying, and again, she repeats the line presumably to enjoy exploiting the effect. I would argue this is a tentative moment leaning toward aesthetic enjoyment of the poem. It is noteworthy also that later in the lesson, when the students are asked in 'quick-fire' quiz style to name poems that exploit sound, the same male student as above enacts the sound in his response, suggesting pleasure in the experience of the poem:

MS: *what about the train one? Even if it's not the way it's said, it forces the sound, like Bang bang bang!* **(fist on desk with each 'bang')**

Whilst the above illustrates a match between ideological position and practice, some observations threw up striking apparent discrepancies. For example, Bella began her lesson with a strategy that one might have expected from a teacher in group 3, *we must try to prioritise responsive reading.* Pike (2000) coined the term 'responsive teaching' to describe a teaching strategy which begins with student experiences of poems and genuinely values their felt responses.

Bella's second year A level class was reviewing Dickinson poems they had learnt the previous year. Bella's starting point was to ask them to consider the following open question in groups which they had chosen to sit at: *On your own first … ok? Just you – just you – what do you like, and what's challenging?* I left the recorder on one table who offered this in response:

MS: *I enjoy* (pause) *nothing* **(sounds tired)**
FS: *I don't know if I enjoy it – I dunno*
(Contemporary note: Sighing and pauses and mumbled indistinct comments)
FS: *I like* **(indistinct)** *cos she's being rebellious -er she challenges like, - I don't even know if heaven is real* **[tentative personalising]**
As this was being recorded, I listened to another group - see below.
FS: *I like 'The Soul Selects Its Own Society' because it's sort of inspiring* **[personal connection]**
MS: *It's about a woman and her power and not doing what men expect* **[interpretation]**
FS: *It's not majorly inspiring, but I like it* **(qualifies her position)**
MS: *the one I like is about a train… Miss said it's not about a train* **[disputed interpretation]**
This opening activity appears to suggest that, although in an interview, Bella said she thought that poems were destroyed by teaching them in the classroom, she is, in the classroom, invested in students' personal responses and interpretations. Several minutes later, having discussed the relevance of rhyme schemes and how they can cite them in the exam, Bella returned to the issue of pleasure and response to poems:
Bella: *Ok, I'll come back to rhyme scheme, I'll come back to it. What else? What else came out around your tables? Do you want more time – what did you enjoy about them? Did you enjoy them? Table at the back?* **(Open question, What did you enjoy? gives way to a closed and more limited question: Did you enjoy them?)**
FS1: *Some poems – about two* **(answers the first question)**

Bella: *hmmm. I hated it initially, I thought they were absolutely tortuous* **[strong personal response]**

FS2: *Erm I don't like the poems* **(agreement with the teacher)**

Bella: *you don't? You've just got to learn it and produce it. Anybody here enjoy them?* **[An efferent approach is needed – learn and produce. Are there any exceptions to this view?]**

MS: *No*

FS3: *Not really*

FS4: *No* **(all three confirm Bella's opinion and personal response)**

Bella: *Ok what are you confident on? Anyone feel confident on context – I've got a sheet on that for you, it isn't in your lesson, but I might bring it in. Um interpretation, have you drawn up interpretations? Rhythm, verse form, there are other things. Take a moment and talk in your groups…* **[discuss analytic possibilities]**

Having opened the lesson with open small group discussions about what people like or don't like about the poems they are reading, Bella, in the extract above, has brought the class together to review what they do or don't enjoy. When the first female student says she does enjoy two poems, she is not asked anything more about these, such as which poems she likes or what she enjoys about them. Instead, Bella takes the opportunity to express her own strongly negative initial feelings about the poems which the students who speak, agree with. Their confirmation is perhaps unsurprising, given power relations in the classroom. This exchange further illustrates the ability of a teacher to dominate and shape discourse in the classroom, as referred to above in Marshall Smagorinsky and Smith's (1995) research.

I believe that in this exchange, Bella has effectively enacted the view she expressed in interview to me that poems are at least very difficult and probably impossible to enjoy in a classroom. An exchange that starts with the enjoyment of poems becomes shaped into a publicly efferent stance: poems should be broken into analytic parts (e.g., context, rhythm) to *learn and produce* ideas for the exam. It is essential to Pike's definition of responsive teaching that student experiences are heard and appreciated. However, in this excerpt, Bella may be engaged in her own confirmation bias because she ignores the student who says she has enjoyed two poems. It is also clear from my previous recording she is not alone. There are at least two other students in the room who have enjoyed the poems at some level. However, in this exchange, their

opinion is not heard, and it is possible the students feel silenced by Bella's strongly expressed belief that poems cannot be enjoyed in the classroom.

Having said this, I must be cautious about interpretation because in any complicated group situation, there is always the possibility of contrary undercurrents. An illustration of the complexity of tracking responses is that the male student above, who emphatically said *I enjoy… nothing* in front of the whole of the class. Later in the lesson, he offered the following view in a small group:

> *I wouldn't use the term riddle* (in relation to poetry) *it's too simplistic, poetry can mean lots of things it's not like a novel that takes you on a journey it's pure feeling and you can see different things at different times.*
>
> (He goes on to talk about how this relates to the exam) *it would be better if it was one meaning- that would be easier, but it's richer too…*

This seems to me to be subtle and insightful and suggests that whilst this student recognises the gaming aspect of exams, he does have a strong capacity and interest in engaging personally with poems. It has been noted in research (Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith, 1995; Mironova, 2019) that adolescent students may express themselves differently with peers in a small group than they might in a larger one. The example above would seem to support that view.

4.9 Students Constructing and Articulating Personal Responses in Small Group Discussions

In this section I look at small group discussions between students and consider where and how small group work enables personal responses. Working in peer groups has been seen to be important for developing adolescent minds (Kegan, 1994), and teachers who were interviewed for my research often expressed the pedagogical value of this strategy. However, the experience of forging 'personal responses' to poems in groups is not always positive for students and teachers. I have, therefore, categorised my findings accordingly. 'Positive' personal responses are those in which group work facilitates enjoyment with poems, and where there are indications of aesthetic engagement with poems. 'Negative' personal responses are those in which group work resulted in personal responses that did not indicate pleasure and

where exchanges may have blocked further engagement and learning with the poem at the time of the lesson.

4.9.1 The Prevalence of Small Group Work in My Research

With the exception of Tom's lesson, all the lessons I observed incorporated some kind of small group work. Sometimes, the work of small groups was dominated by closed and directive questions, for example, in Barry's lesson, in others, such as Philip and Amelia's discussed above, space was made for more open-ended and exploratory discussion, asking questions such as *what are your first thoughts about this poem?*

Use of open questioning can be related to teacher interest in developing student's personal response and Arthur (group 3) began his lesson by reading a poem aloud, giving students copies of it and asking *What do you think?* Similarly, Ayesha, (group 3) gave her whole lesson over to small group presentations of poems in which students presented and discussed poems from an anthology. The main purpose was to discuss *key themes, key techniques and relate these to the novel we are studying,* and to this extent, the task for the small groups was anchored to the exam. However, Ayesha also said the students liked the poems they had chosen and that she encouraged them to express their feelings about the poems, and she *certainly encourages* personal response. *Personal response, they're quite imaginative with things like words and phrases, what imagery comes into their head.*

The classroom arrangement of small groups that I observed often gave students a measure of control in the class as individuals could choose who to work with. This was not always the case, for example, Amelia allocated seating in order to encourage mixing of abilities. Sitting at shared tables potentially enables more dialogue to take place between a range of students than when they sit in allocated seats in a horseshoe arrangement.

Small group discussions gave me the opportunity to record different responses at the same time. Sometimes, I would record one table of students while I observed and noted comments from another group. In general terms I would describe small group discussions as leaping between different kinds of responses, moving rapidly between Sipe's framework of literary impulses.

Therefore, in the following section I discuss the positive and negative experiences of personal response being constructed and articulated in groups. I draw on a variety of lessons.

4.9.2 Positive Personal Responses in Small Groups

I observed Tom and Zara at Eastern Sixth Form teach the same content (Lamia by Keats) to different groups of Year 1 English Literature students. The students had already worked with the poem and were returning to it following a break. Both classes were of similar size and ethnic/gender mix. The teachers were aiming to explore unfamiliar language and appreciate the ambiguity of characters in the poem.

Tom taught this lesson as a whole class activity, which he managed using targeted questioning. He punctuated this with individual annotations and writing tasks. Zara relied on small group exploration followed by a whole class discussion, during which she guided the discussion. I think it is valuable to compare the two classes. In both extracts the teachers are looking at the voice of Lamia speaking from her tomb (she is a serpent impersonating a woman) focusing on the same stanza.

T: *But …we've got a nice contrast now with what we've just discussed in terms of her being almost demonic and monster like if we go back to this one:*
All pain but pity thus the lone voice spoke
'When from this wreathed tomb shall I awake!
When move in body fit for life
And love, and pleasure and the ruddy strife
Of heart and lips! Ah miserable me'
(contemporaneous note: he is dramatically carrying this lesson forward with his voice – he has a deep 'actorly' voice – and he uses it to be persuasive and involving)
T: *Is there anything we can talk about how she's presented here?* **(Open question to the whole class)**
FS1: *Where it says all pain – it kind of shows her isolation, like how she's suffering, it's emphasising the pain that she has* **[tentative analytic interpretation, tempered with cautious language 'it kind of shows' and 'like how']**
T: *Absolutely, so, if I'd done these in the correct order, that would be an even nicer contrast wouldn't it?* **(Laughter from teacher and students. nb; Tom inadvertently looked at a**

later part of the poem earlier in the lesson) *we go from THAT to a frothing monster that makes the grass die- Amira?*

Amira: *I said that transition is like…. (inaudible) she dies and lives again?* **(Uncertain interpretation of simile, cautious language 'is like'… rising voice at end to query if she's right)**

T: *Yes, right it's almost like a death and rebirth in that respect isn't it? Now then, notice the speech marks – ok – whose voice is this?* **(Clarification of narrative voice, closed question)**

(Silence)

T: *It's not a trick question/*

Lamia! **(Several voices immediately say this)**

T: *Yes, Lamia* **(dramatises with hand to brow):** *'Ah miserable me – I'm suffering so much!' Hmmm. On the one hand, we've got the isolated suffering and the pain she wishes to be released from 'oh miserable me'*

Following this exchange, Tom summarises the ambiguity of the character and intended reader sympathies, he replays an audio recording and asks students to annotate their text, the focus is on the exam:

T: *always be thinking, if you were to do your half-term assessment again about the character of Lamia, what sort of elements would you bring into it? Transformation is key to that question … you may get a similar question in the exam.*

This part of the lesson is pacy and understanding is driven by Tom's reading, he provides the context for meaning making, asks questions to initiate responses, which he then evaluates. This is typical of whole class discussion, which is characterised by high levels of teacher-directed control (Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith, 1995). Student responses are short and informed by the questions. I think it's noteworthy that students are sometimes tentative in their responses and need reassurance, perhaps to express their ideas in a large group.

Zara reintroduced the same section of the poem, focusing at first only on the image of a wreathed tomb and the beginning line *When from the wreathed tomb shall I awake?* Students worked in groups to discuss the line and the image at the start of the lesson:

T: **(approaches a male student who looks puzzled)** *What are you looking at Jon?* **[open question]**

Jon: *What, what, what the word 'rithered'* **(his pronunciation)** *means* **[asks for clarification]**

T: *What the word wreathed means? Have a look at the image to help you, what's that thing on the left?* **(points to the image of a tomb)**

Jon: *Oh, is it a chest?* **(Someone murmurs 'treasure chest'?)**

T: *How might that link to the line? Treasure chest? Interesting – could be a metaphor for what we are looking at* **[values the interpretation while asking a question which indicates possible incongruity with the poem] (T moves away)**

Jon: *What is that?* **[comprehending/analytic question about word meaning to group on table]**

FS1: *What?* **(indicates the line)** *When from the wreathed tomb shall I awake?* **(clarification)**

Jon: *I see flowers like and they look like*/**[beginning to interpret]**

FS2: *Yeah, but is that a coffin?* **(questioning)**

Jon: *I don't think it's a coffin*/**[interpretation]**

FS2: *It's like a coffin but it's slightly taken*/ **[interpretation]**

FS1: *I think it's a coffin – yeah* **(agrees)**

Following short, whole class clarification that Lamia is in a tomb, Zara asks the groups to read the rest of the stanza and think about what it implies and how it builds sympathy for the serpent.

Jon: *So when can this wreath?* / **(question)**

FS1: *Yeah, but she's a nymph right? So maybe she feels like when from a snake body (inaudible) she wants to be human* **[clarification of the status of Lamia, beginning to identify feelings and motivation through personalising impulse – 'she feels']**

FS2: *Yeah, she probably feels like she wants to be*/**[personalising]**

FS1: *But I've not even seen that*/ **(? Unclear)**

Jon: *No, no, no because like, but she's not visible to him at this moment so like should we be saying she's trapped in death/* **[eager to offer interpretation based on further narrative knowledge – trapped in death? Dramatic tone suggests possible transparent aesthetic involvement in text]**

FS1: *Yeah, because she's dying in that form that she's in*/**[agreement and present tense involvement suggests possible aesthetic transparency]**

Jon and FS1 **(at the same time)** *SNAKE!* **[as above]**

FS1: *She needs to deal with someone to change her* **(wry comment on character's dilemma)**

FS2: *Oh yeah, yeah* **(agreement)**

Jon: *So she's trapped in death and also I really think there's some significance that, you know, it's the first thing she says*/**[tries to further interpretation but is interrupted]**
FS1: *Maybe she's like really, really depressed like, she's sad because she can't come out of it* **[interpretation from another point of view, shows involvement in text]**
Jon: *Yes so, she's weak* **[interpretation: sadness equals weakness]**
FS1: *Let's write 'symbolism of death'* **(reference to group writing task)**
Jon: *Yes, and I'm not saying hopeless*/ **[possible comment on his previous interpretation? weakness is not without hope]**
T: **(interrupts to ask the whole class)** *Who wants to share ideas in the whole group, any ideas so far?* **(open question)**

Compared to the whole group discussion undertaken by Tom, Zara's use of small groups slows down the process of reading and responding to the poem. However, I think in the exchanges above it can also be seen that through small group interaction active engagement and understanding of the poem is deepened and enriched. Interpretation in Tom's lesson is derived from his dramatic performance of the poem and whole group questions about the narrative. In Zara's lesson misunderstandings are exposed and clarified through questions and dialogue. Understanding, assisted initially through imagery, is supported by questioning which has been modelled by the teacher. Students help each other to comprehend themes, after which they move into personalising the poem, speculating about feelings, and making interpretations which build on each other. The language students adopt in the small group can also be contrasted with that in the whole class exchanges. There is more hedging and tentative language used when speaking in a whole class context and students seek confirmation from the teacher that they are 'correct'. By contrast, in small groups dialogue overlaps and there are more rapid and engaged personal responses. This can particularly be seen in the exchange the students have when they are asked to consider *how* (the text) *builds sympathy for the serpent* (Lamia) because they personalise the experience imagining how Lamia might feel.

My second example of personal response being positively cultivated by small group work is a short extract from Arthur's lesson in Creative Writing at London Tertiary College. A group of 18 students, mixed ethnicity and majority female, are discussing a contemporary poem concerning teacher/student relationships: *Decline and Fall* by Rae Desmond-Jones. Two students in a group of three speak:

FS1: *I like the last line* **[personal response to the line which is** *let there be war***]**

FS2: *Yeah* **(lengthens word, low tone)**

FS1: *War … like/* **(repeats the last word)**

FS2: *Yeah – it's very dramatic*

FS1: *It does sound like ego – like Russell Crow. That needles-in-the-arm thing – it's stereotyping, but at the same time it's true. That's the thing, it's the dangers of being out the door of education* **[intertextual reference, referring back to earlier parts of the poem and personally relating to a meaning to do with the danger of not being at college/school]**

FS2: *Mmmmm* **(emphatic, savouring?)**

This is a simple exchange but includes: direct appreciation of the poem; low tone of speech; repetition of the last word of the poem; an emphatic *Mmmmm* and use of the word *true* to describe one student's interpretation. Collectively these suggest that the students are experiencing a strong personal response to the poem. In terms of Sipe's framework they seem to be transparently engaged with the world of the text and having an aesthetic experience.

My final example in this section comes from Philip's lesson (previously discussed). In this section of the class the students are newly engaged with the poem *A Birthday* by Rossetti. I sit with a group of students who have been asked by Philip: *What do you get from it?* (the poem).

FS1: *It's kind of like- I don't know. She's definitely happy cos you can tell in the rhyme scheme I guess cos there's/* **[interpretation, sound as meaning]**

FS2: *I don't even know what kind of rhyme scheme* / **[analytic - wants to comprehend the rhyme scheme?]**

FS1: *it kind of – you can kind of sing it!/* **(enthusiastically said someone starts to sing 'Happy Birthday')[playful- aesthetic impulse?]**

MS: *It's in the line 'the Birthday of my life'. It's right there, like in the imagery cos the birthday is kind of symbolism of someone's greatest day* **[interpretation, birthdays are the greatest day?]**

FS2: *yeah* **(agreement)**

MS: *this person's saying it's the birthday of my life so like the person who she was in love with is the greatest thing /* **[extended interpretation]**

FS3: *Are you sure?* **(loudly and sceptically) [disputes interpretation?]**

MS: *Yeah* **(cross talk and dispute - inaudible)**

FS2: *'My love has come to me' I feel it's a …* **(indistinct)** *birth – a birth of new love* **[personalising impulse?]**

MS*: like she's tremendously in love it might be a kid then innit? - 'come to me'***[personalising, offering a different interpretation based on imagining dialogue and characters]**

FS4: *But also when she says 'all my heart is like a singing bird' is it the first line that tells you?* **[querying interpretation, refocus on text]**

FS1: *yeah like she's overjoyed – the kind of thing she compares her heart to, it's kind of symbolic of joy. When she says there's 'a singing bird, a rainbow, it's gladder than all these because my heart- and then there's repetition, she repeats my heart and it kind of gives it more like…* **(contemporaneous note:** she is reading this rhythmically**)**

MS: *look she repeats it four times* **[analytic importance of repetition in poems]**

FS1: *yes she repeats it four times, and that plus the rhyme scheme makes it seem happy, the sound/* **[further interpretation]**

FS2: *cos there are similes as well – it kind of makes it seem/* **[other features support this interpretation]**

The teacher, at this point, interjects to ask the groups to pause.

This is an example of a group making a variety of interpretations and having a mix of responses to the poem. There is confident enthusiasm in the way that students cut across each other's comments, questioning each other and offering ideas. FS1 plays an important interpretative role as she insists that sound is important. Her enthusiasm for reading the poem rhythmically and the comment, *you can kind of sing it!* indicates pleasure, which she wants to share with the group. The male student's speculation that the poem is about great love and possibly the love for a child is based on a personalising impulse, he imagines that the line *'come to me'* is spoken to a person. It cannot be seen, but it is reasonable to suppose an image of an adult and child is in his head at the point he says *it might be a kid then, innit?* The students here, I would argue, are dipping in and out of the secondary world of the poem making personalised and interpretative leaps.

4.9.3 Summary

The above are all examples of small groups supporting positive personal responses. The pace and confidence of exchanges possible in small groups can be contrasted with the more careful and curated responses to teacher questions in Tom's whole class lesson. There are moments in these exchanges where students become playful and challenging and where personalised and briefly aesthetic responses can be identified. Analytic and personal interpretations are made by the students but in the context of the way the teacher sets up the task. Open questioning from the teacher is significant because it makes space for adolescent students to transact with the text together. They are able, in Rosenblatt's words, to 'think rationally within an emotionally colored (sic) context' (1976, p. 228). I now turn to more problematic experiences of personal responses that groups can generate.

4.10 Negative Personal Responses in Small Groups

This section explores some of the more negative experiences of personal response in groups. In particular, sensitive topics can lead to the construction and articulation of problematic responses, which might be characterised as 'emotionally negative'. I argue that these personally felt responses can block dialogic meaning making with poems. This, in turn, raises questions for teachers as to how they prepare students to read for personal meaning.

When discussing *The Passionate Shepherd* in one of Philip's classes, a group of female students responded awkwardly to the theme of the older man wooing a younger woman. This can be seen in the way that these female students cut across each other's comments and, I believe, through other paralinguistic features that were recorded:

FS1: *Time for love is going to fly away, and he's got to jump at the chance because he can*/ **[interpretation]**
FS2: *You shouldn't wait because … / mmmm* **(mumbled agreement from several voices)**
FS1: *You should marry as soon as possible/* **[inferential, analytic meaning]**
FS3: *Yeah, so you don't lose your prime- PRIME!* **(laughter followed by humming and coughing indicating discomfort?)**
FS2: *What that you're gonna lose your …. Charms?* **(Charms? overlapping voices sound mocking/incredulous)**

FS1: *Yeah - you know how people would say like… whatcha call it? Like 'life goes on and all of a sudden'…* **[intertextual interpretation drawing on a proverb or saying?]**
FS4: *Maybe he's talking about your sexuality like your appeal but once you get older you're /* **(vague 'ugh' sounds)**

The above had echoes of the way that students in Barry's lesson responded to a similar theme of youthful women and sex with an ageing man (May and Januarie in *The Merchant's Tale*). Barry asked students to think about how sexual desire is represented in the poem. In the following pair exchange between female and male students, discomfort and embarrassment at discussing this are evident in their tentative language:

MS: *So um*
FS: *Um* **(contemporaneous note-** they both laugh awkwardly**)**
MS*: He does seem like he wants it to go fast, he also seems like he wants to cherish the moment* **[interpretation]**
FS: *Yeah*
MS: *Um – but*
FS**:** *He says that he 'offended'* **(she's looking at the original middle English version) –** *I can't read that - when he talks about offending her – that line there …*
MS: *Yeah, yeah, yeah*
FS: *The way he says the word 'offend' I think well, for that time, offend is something, well, at that time sex is something offensive they don't talk about it and him wanting her or desiring her is offensive – or ….*
MS: *yeah he says that and then two lines after he says 'my desire is sharp and keen', well sharp just goes with the idea of die and die goes with – ah*.
FS: *ha ha ha!* **(giggles/sniggers and can't stop)**

At this point, Barry, the teacher, intervened to address the pair, who were both unable to continue the discussion. He guides them back to the text, asking *what words?* (go with the idea of die). The female student I noted at the time continued 'giggling and sniggering' over the subsequent discussion, rendering it ineffective.

In the above two examples, I think it can be inferred that the female students identify with the female characters of the poem and have a personal response, which effectively blocks discussion of the poems. Adolescence is a time when sexuality is being negotiated in terms of personal identity and role (Schlegel and Barry, 1991) and, therefore, poems with this theme

might evoke sensitive responses from adolescents. I would suggest that before pairing students to talk about themes in this poem, the teacher should include preparatory discussion. For example, they might explore historical and contemporary representations of sexuality and invite students to consider their first responses to the poem. More specifically, I would argue that it is notable that the voices of the women in both poems discussed above are silent. If this lack of voice were problematised as an issue from the outset and those voices reimagined, I would speculate that this could enable greater engagement and less defensive personal response from students.

The issue of problematic identification with a poem also featured in one of Zara's classes where a group of students were discussing racism in relation to Soyinka's poem *Telephone*. In this poem, the speaker, who is black African, is negotiating room rental from a white landlady in 1950s Britain. This was the second lesson on this poem. I had previously seen Zara discuss with the class a lot about the author's background and the historical context of the poem.

In the following excerpt I recorded a small group of students, chosen randomly, whilst I listened to another group talk. The students' task was to explore themes around racism, power and protest. The groups also tried to share writing tasks based on their discussion. All the students I recorded were from ethnic minority backgrounds; one was male and had not, at this point, spoken in the group. A female student took what I would describe as a high-handed and aggressive approach to his silence:

FS1: *Are you going to contribute or not?* **(confrontational questioning)**
MS*: I am* **(short reply)**
FS1: *Okay, then you can have this question/* **(assumes authority)**
FS2: *Yeah. Which elements of protest do you feel it is pertinent to explore within the poem? Do you know what pertinent means?* **(two students ganging up – confrontational and rude)**
MS: *No* **(even shorter reply)**
FS2: *It means it's important to explore* **(superiority- I know what you do not)**
FS1: *Have anything you'd like to add?* **(ganging up?)**
MS : *No. Not really* **(minimal response)**
FS1: *Oh my God. Okay. I think, honestly, men are* (pause)*I think the /* **(exasperation and generalised insult)**

FS2: *Probably be power and powerlessness* **(? talking about the male student? Men in general?)**

The male student here is generalised to generate the start of a complaint about 'all men'; the tone is bullying. The conversation continued and after several further comments from the female students, the following was said:

FS1: *Does he have anything to add?*
MS: *What elements are a microcosm of the time period*? **(referring to a discussion topic suggested by the teacher)**
FS2: *What is that, what he said?*

Referring to the male student in the third person and not responding directly to clarify his question, I would characterise as disdainful and bullying behaviour as it isolates and insults the student in question. Following whole group feedback, the students return to their discussion and hone in on the racism of the landlady in the poem.

FS2: *Could I just say that the landlady appears dominant because of contributing factors. So, skin colour, the fact that she owns property, there's only two really. Skin colour and the fact that she owns something. But then, he (the African speaker of the poem) is also dominant in some areas. I don't think there's any way to split it up. I think all of us just write a total sentence, separately, but about the same thing. Because, at the end of the day, it gives us* **(indistinc**t) **[interpretative summary followed by suggested task allocation]**
FS1: *Do you have any contribution, Turkish Ahmed?* **(aggressive tone, racializes the male student)**
MS: *Half Turkish*
FS2: *About asking people how Turkish they are?*
MS: *Yeah. Half Turkish*
FS1: *What's the other half from?*
MS: *Don't worry*
FS1: *Is it Pakistani?*
MS: *No*
FS1: *Why did you say no? That's disgusting*
MS: *Sometimes I don't even know, maybe*

FS1: *How do you not know where you are from?*

MS: *I was in the war*

FS1: *In the war?*

MS: *Yeah. It was between the war*

FS1: *Your conception was between the war? How old are you?*

MS: *No, like my family* **(indistinct mumbling)** *and adoption and stuff like that*

FS1: *Oh sorry*

MS: *Alright*

FS1: *Anyway, I'm part Egyptian*

FS2: *That's nice* **(short silence)**

FS1: *So we're going to write paragraphs, all of them together but just different wording*

At this point the group get back to the task in hand.

As can be seen, the conversation goes off-topic and becomes personally insulting, as seen in the second comment, with the male student's ethnicity being identified and quizzed. It is not possible to identify the female student's intention here, but her persistent questioning, combined with a lack of laughter in the exchange, signifies her hostility. A brief apology is made at the end of the exchange, but this is only after the male student has been forced to disclose information that he is reluctant to share. Perhaps it is only his forbearance that prevents this from becoming an uglier incident than it already is.

In the above exchange, students are negatively engaged in a 'personal response' to each other rather than in the poem. This is complex data, and the conversation is hard to interpret. I cannot be certain about the full meaning of this exchange because I do not know the context of the student relationships. For example, it may be that the male student has labelled himself *Turkish Ahmed*. Furthermore, the content of the dialogue is obscure. The male student refers to being both in and between a war, and at times, his voice is not captured by the recorder. Perhaps he is deliberately lowering his voice because he is embarrassed, but I cannot be sure, and this also contributes to difficulties in interpreting the exchange.

Interpretations include that this conversation is an offshoot of an argument that has taken place outside the classroom. It also might be interpreted as a form of 'off-task' flirtation, although the aggressive tone of the female students does not appear to support this, and, I have argued,

there are elements of bullying here. The exchange might have nothing to do with the poem they are discussing. However, one interpretation is that it is significant that this conversation takes place while the students are discussing a poem about racism and this exchange may be in some way a response to the poem.

In Sipe's framework the 'personalising impulse' is about making links between the poem and the self. It may be that these students, who are all from ethnic minorities, are experiencing a strongly negative personal response to the content of the poem. If this is so, the personalising impulse (i.e., the links students make between themselves, their lived experiences and the poem) might be leading them to externalise their discomfort. In this interpretation the students are effectively re-enacting the spite of the poem. It could be argued that there are strong parallels between the role of the landlady in the poem and the role of female student who interrogates the male student. In the poem, the racist landlady barks down the telephone to ask *HOW DARK* an African student is.

Similarly, naming the male student as 'Turkish Ahmed' seems to signify anti-Turkish racist name-calling. From this interpretative standpoint, the personal responses these students had were strongly negative and resulted in bullying. In terms of Sipe's framework, these students might be described as moving from an (unbearable?) negative personalising impulse to a negatively acted out 'performative' impulse.

I would argue this example once again suggests the need for teachers to consider how adolescent students might relate to the sensitive content of poems. I observed the teacher prepare students in terms of the context of the poem and its content, taking two lessons to consider the theme of political and social protest, the background of the author and the voices in the poem. However, as a white teacher unlikely to have experienced racist discrimination, she may not have sufficiently considered the difficult feelings and memories this poem might evoke for her students. In the first lesson, Zara asked students to think about the most interesting phone conversation they had ever had, after which she introduced them to old-style red phone boxes. Following this, she asked the students to *play with reading it out for yourselves because that's when you see what's going on.* Arguably, she could have prepared them more carefully for the endemic casual racism the speaker of the poem experiences in the context of 1950s Britain and thought about the possible connections students might have to this.

Finally, problematic responses to poems in small groups occurred in Ayesha's lesson at Crossroad Tertiary. In this lesson, small groups of students presented their prepared thoughts about three poems in a collection they were studying by Owen Sheers: *The Singing Men, Stitch in Time*, and *Service.* They had been asked to present their thoughts on the poem, discuss it in any way they thought fit and make links with the novel they were reading. The last lesson's aim was firmly tied to the exam task. Students were given full control over the board and audio-visual equipment and asked to talk for approximately 10 minutes, introducing the poems.

This was a difficult lesson to observe because, as discussed in my methodology chapter, most students did not want to be digitally recorded, so I relied solely on note taking. There was a high rate of absence, with 10 of the 17 students being away from the class, which perhaps reflected their discomfort with the task. I noted the reluctance of students to read the poems aloud, which led Ayesha to read two of the poems. The one poem that was read aloud by a student, I noted, was read in a way that sounded *sluggish and joyless.*

In the presentations there was considerable confusion in terms of comprehending references in the poems (e.g., not knowing who Houdini is or how to pronounce his name), and students struggled to make meaning with the poems. Personal responses were made, but sometimes, they were based on incomprehension. For example, one male student interpreted the poem *Stitch in Time* through his misunderstanding of the word 'meridian'. My note at the time:

> *He thinks meridian means going on a long trip, and the repetition emphasises his journey? Rupjit* (anonymised) *is constructing a narrative of his own to carry the poem and elaborates freely for example, about 'they've* (characters in the poem) *got a better life over time'.*

Similarly, when a female student was exploring the poem *Service* I noted:

> *Waiters represent underdeveloped countries? She's making huge interpretative leaps – where are they from?* Also, I noted: *unchallenged assumptions lack of direction in presentations; this is one way traffic, students need support.*

As previously discussed in my section drawing on interview data, as 'gatekeepers of meaning' teachers face dilemmas around student interpretation of poems. In this particular lesson, the teacher allowed the students full control of the lesson and did not intervene to clarify, support

or correct misapprehensions in any way. There may have been a revisiting of these issues in a later lesson, but from my perspective, students finished the presentations with some serious misunderstandings of the poems, although they were able to make thematic links with the novel they were studying. I explore students' views of teaching and teachers in the next section on focus groups.

4.11 Summary

Small group working in the classroom has been seen to have many pedagogical and social benefits for adolescents (Gillies, Ashman and Terwel, 2008; Jurowski and Hanse, 2015). Teachers in my sample recognise many of these benefits and most included small group working within the lessons I observed. From my observations discussed above, small groups can make time and space for adolescents to develop understanding, interpretation and 'personal responses' – including aesthetic responses – to the poems they are studying. However, there is nothing pre-ordained about the benefits of small group work, and in common with other pedagogical approaches, there are drawbacks as well as benefits to students learning in small groups.

Much depends on the motivation of students to engage with tasks and, although student motivation is outside the scope of my research, I must acknowledge the occasions where I observed minimally compliant and uninterested small groups. The role of the teacher as a bridge into learning, would seem, from my observations to be critical to the success of small groups. Where there is sufficient preparation, clarity of purpose and management of group dynamics on the part of the teacher, small group work can offer a powerful medium for constructing and articulating personal responses to poems. There are a variety of ways in which teachers can introduce groups as a pedagogical tool. In some lessons (e.g., Amelia and Ayesha's), they formed a large part of the lesson, in others (e.g., Philip and Bella's lessons), small groups were embedded within group discussions. Neither technique on its own guarantees quality, but there are some practices in relation to the preparation and management of adolescent groups reading poems that are more likely to enable students to read poems for 'positive' personal meaning and response than others. These are discussed in my chapter *Conclusion and Recommendations*.

I now explore my final data set, gathered from student focus groups at the four college research sites. This provides further insight into research question 3: *What experiences and knowledge do students draw on in the construction and articulation of a personal response?*

Part 3: Findings from Student Focus Groups

4.12 Scope and Purpose of Part 3

This section brings together students' perspectives on the main research question and research questions 2, 3 and 4. As previously described, I undertook focus groups at four colleges and a total of 20 students volunteered to take part. The average size of the group was five and focus groups spoke for between 40 minutes and an hour. Focus groups were conducted between March and July 2018. Anonymised names of students and the colleges they come from are listed below.

College	*Students taking part in the focus group*
River Sixth Form	Kamali, Patrick, Patricia, Valerie, Gulshen
London Tertiary	Chantelle, Bridget, Norah, Celeste, Chen
Eastern Sixth Form	Hasad, Farhana, Shona, Justyna
Crossroads Tertiary	Bandani, Samira, Yasmin, Rehana, Ruth

I followed a broad schedule of questions to guide the discussion (see Appendix G) and these were derived from my research questions. However, the pace and shape of the conversation were influenced by what was meaningful to the students in each group. The following topics were discussed:

- Student perspectives on poems and poetry, including previous experiences of poetry and reasons for studying English A level.
- Student experiences of reading poems for A level in the classroom.
- Felt 'personal responses' to poems, including responses I would describe as 'aesthetic'.

Below I discuss themes derived from analysing focus group data. I begin with a discussion about students as readers of poetry, and what appeared as ambivalent identification as readers

of poetry. I move on to two related themes emerging from the data: efferent reading and the relationship of this to a positivistic approach to poetry. I then discuss resistant reading of poems, and contrast this with reading efferently for the exam. Fourth, I explore what students told me about mediation and multimodal approaches to reading. This includes an important subsection concerned with sound, specifically what students say about reading and hearing poems in the classroom. From here, I discuss student perceptions of a symbiotic relationship between poetry and music.

Throughout this section I argue that here is something distinctive about the student responses, which is to do with their life stage as adolescents and a newly creative faculty for responding to poems. In particular I discuss the importance of peer discussion and the role music plays in the 'personal responses' adolescents make when reading poetry.

4.13 Ambivalent Identification as Poetry Readers

To some extent student views about themselves as readers align with the widely held teacher view, previously explored, that students dislike and avoid reading A level poetry texts. Many I spoke to did not define themselves as poetry readers outside of the classroom. Students at Crossroads Tertiary said they *mostly* encountered poetry only at school. When students at London Tertiary and Eastern Sixth Form were asked: *Would any of you call yourselves poetry readers?* There were unanimous replies of *No*. Echoing the broader point made by some teachers that students dislike all reading, Rehana said *I think – the majority of the kids don't like reading at all*. Even Norah who subsequently stated she did enjoy poems, also said she did not read them: *I don't read poems, which is kind of strange because poetry is my favourite one in the A level*. Subsequently, Norah said that she enjoyed watching videos of people reading poems, finding this *expressive …more involving and completely different* from reading poems at college. A preference for watching videos of spoken word poetry was also expressed by students at River and Eastern Sixth Forms. It would seem from this that students like Norah don't read printed texts in the ways that teachers expect. They make a distinction between poetry, which is part of 'A level', and the poetry they get pleasure from watching.

Across colleges, students had clear, positive memories of reading poems in school and remembered themselves as keen readers when they were younger. Students at London Tertiary all said they had enjoyed poetry at GCSE because of *the variety of poems* (Chen), *there was so*

much more variation, gender, time, war (Norah). Valerie talked somewhat wistfully about her enjoyment of poetry reading as being in the past:

> *when I was little, you know you get these little books and they'd be like a poetry like collection, like these really small ones, so it would be like poetry about stuff, I don't know, like nature, jungles or something, I used to read those a lot when I was younger and then ...*

Farhana linked her experience of reading poems to school, *the last time I remember was probably primary school – yeah yeah … nursery rhymes* (**contemporaneous note**: all consent and murmur agreement).

There seems to be a deep attachment in these comments to the students' memories of childhood and poetry. This in turn suggests an experience of 'resonance', which Stockwell (2009,27) defines as 'a long-lasting and ineffable sense of significance' with texts.

Several people described having early experiences with poetry at home, suggesting acculturation with forms of poetry, about which their teachers did not comment in interviews. Ruth said poetry books were at home because her father enjoyed reading poems. Kamali and Valerie, both from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds, talked about their parents' cultural practice of collecting ornaments adorned with writing:

> *Me: Did poetry feature in your homes, in things that you liked as kids?*
> *Valerie: We won't say furniture like say you done little statue things or something, or the little plates, mum used to have the little plates on the cabinet, and we used to have little poems that says 'Friends are the best gift' or something like that* (interruption and crosstalk). *And you have to polish it there at Christmas time. That one, and I knew that mum had one inside the kitchen, I can't even remember what it said, but it was - it said it in Patois. My mum's Jamaican so it said it in Patois, but it was basically saying 'a home isn't a home without someone there to cook...' Do you know what I mean? I can't explain it, but do you know what I mean?*
> *Kamali: My grandma's got the same.* **(crosstalk and interruption)**
> *Valerie: I think all Jamaica /*
> *Kamali:***(quoting a line)** *What you see here when you leave here, don't take it back there.*

Patricia is also worth quoting at length as she described an early encounter with narrative poetry:

I think year 7 is when I started to learn a bit about poetry. I don't know where, but one day I got this book, I don't know where from, I think it was from the library or, it was like a free book, and it was a book, but it was poems. It was telling the story through poems, it was about this girl, and she was – it was about swimming ... I can't remember what it was called, it's going to bug me, but it was different because I'd never read a story that was told just through poems, but you sort of went through her life and what she was doing.

There is a sense of 'wonder' in this recall. Patricia can't remember the circumstances or much of what she read, but she seems deeply impressed by the experience of finding a story told in the form of a poem. Indeed, she prefaces this memory by saying this is *when I started to learn a bit about poetry.* She described her feelings about reading the book using the word *weird* three times, which suggests Patricia was experiencing poetry, perhaps for the first time, as 'estranged literary language' made new to her (Eagleton, 2007). I would also argue that Patricia might be describing, in Sipe's terms, an immersive and aesthetic early experience with poetry that still resonates with her.

These strong early experiences with reading poems suggest that some students experience themselves as readers of poetry in more complex ways than teachers might suppose. Although most of those I interviewed think of themselves as non-poetry readers this does not appear to be a fixed aspect of their identity. It may be part of their experience as adolescents that they do not enjoy reading the printed word for pleasure, and this aligns with current research. Negative emotional associations with reading indicate that adolescent reading for pleasure is at a low level in the UK (National Literacy Trust, 2022). Primary research with students aged 13-14 undertaken by the Scottish Book Trust (2023) found that the imposition of homework, enforced reading, and reading targets interfere with the pleasure of reading. However, positive associations are made with reading at school as children and with watching poetry performed. I would argue that this suggests students are ambivalent about themselves as poetry readers. However, early experiences with poetry and enthusiasm for watching poetry performed offer important cultural resources that teachers and students could draw on in college classrooms to enhance reading experiences.

4.14 Efferent Reading and a Positivistic Approach to Poetry

Across research sites students described an efferent approach to reading and a positivistic understanding of poetry. Responses can be mapped to the efferent end of Rosenblatt's (1978,1985) poles of reading. Samira, Ruth, and Rehana all agreed that they *only do it* (English A level) *for academics.* Hasad expressed his confidence in English as a commodity because it is *a highly rated subject* for university application. More specifically, Shona said *I like it when poems relate to themes in Sociology,* and Farhana said reading poems *opens you up to thinking about what different things can be about, and that's useful in life.*

Some talked about English as offering 'key skills' in efferent terms reminiscent of teachers such as Barry. The following exchange at Crossroads Tertiary College illustrates this stance:

> *Rehana: mainly* (it's good for) *our technical skills where you can just keep an eye out for things. I feel like whatever you do in A level it doesn't really help you. I feel like we should learn about how to do tax and mortgages and stuff like that /*
> *Samira: Yeah, I'm never going to be going out screaming the poem in the middle of the road like /*
> *Rehana: Because to be honest/*
> *Samira: When I'm paying rent and getting a mortgage*
> *Bandani: In normal schools, when it comes to analysing/*
> *Rehana: Yeah, those kind of like basic skills that you need to pick up on*
> *Me: You think you could do all that without reading poetry?*
> *Rehana: Yeah, you can be asked to analyse anything and it'll be easily done like not a set thing is needed to be able to do that.*

In Rehana's view, reading poems is seen as useful for honing *technical skills* and perhaps paying attention to detail. However, analysis is unspecialised and *easily done,* and essentially, art is not important to life. This extremely efferent approach to poetry can be related to Dewey's (1934) argument that in our society, 'art' is ossified and reified as an object of private consumption apart from daily experience.

Unsurprisingly, some of the students discussed above, who said that they studied English for efferent reasons, also reported efferent experiences of reading poetry, which can be mapped to

Rosenblatt (1978, 1985). Reading experiences with poems for these students are limited and related to passing exams. Rehana commented that *for English Literature, poems is one of the best things you could do because it's straightforward, and you can analyse it and make your points.* Hasad talked about reading aloud in terms of use value: *it can be useful, though, because … you remember them, especially when you're revising*.

Samira went further and described her reading as disengaged: *to be honest, I don't really read the poem. I just analyse it line by line as I'm going through it. I understand what's going on but I don't really read it.* This is an intriguing comment. Samira seems to be aware that when she analyses *line by line,* this is a limited kind of reading. She repeats *I don't really read the poem* twice, suggesting that while what she does with analysis is enough for her efferent purpose of passing the exam, she also knows there is another experience of reading that poetry offers. Her comment prompted the following exchange between students at Crossroads Tertiary:

Yasmin: *Do you know why you don't read it?*
Samira: *Don't really read it because (pause)*
Bandani: *I think 'cos you see it like something like a huge text just staring at you*
Samira*: I just see it as something that I need to analyse, that's my whole point*

Samira's focus on 'analysis' seems rooted in the literary tradition of close reading and practical criticism which emphasises the exploration of features of the text (Upstone, 2017). She expressed enthusiasm for analysis but was emphatic, saying that this did not extend to aesthetic feelings of pleasure: *No, no, I don't wanna* (get the feel of a poem). As Gordon (2018) has pointed out, close textual analysis has a strong influence over teaching and learning English in UK classrooms. It is perhaps, therefore, to be expected that some students talked about their reading wholly in terms of analysis of poems. Some, unlike Samira, described analysis as hard. Many said language and subject matter are difficult, seeing some poems as ancient, isolated texts carrying meanings that they cannot access. Bridget said that Dickinson is *so hard to understand*. Shona said *there's more analysis now* (than at GCSE) and criticised the 'Love anthology' her class was reading saying: *the world has moved on from that now, like there's technology now. I doubt they even had phones in that time it's like there's just letters to your lover.*

Like Shona, Justyna ascribed the age of poems to her dislike of reading them:

> *If you like old letters and old literature then that's for you, but for most of us we've kind of gone off those things. I think if they introduced more modern poems, I think more people would be interested in taking the subject and would be more willing to learn poetry more.*

Comments such as these are anchored in a judgement that the age of poems makes them redundant. This is essentially a positivistic position in relation to poetry and the imagination, the underlying assumption being that imagination expresses a literal truth of experience. Essentially, this means that because life in the past is not the same as it is in the present, older poems cannot express anything of relevance. Hasad's comment below firmly expresses this view, rejecting 'art as experience' (Dewey, 1934) with a potential to reach across historical and cultural boundaries:

> *you can't just give these poems to a bunch of 16-18-year-olds and say we're going to learn about a bunch of things that don't really apply to you, and you can't relate with but you have to learn it anyway. At least try giving effort …*

From this position any poem that does not reflect contemporary experience can be dismissed. Valerie, complained that Duffy, *uses all these long words and difficult words…it's unnecessary in a way.* Valerie seemed frustrated, couching her objection in utilitarian and positivistic terms: *in modern day you wouldn't ever try and put in that sentence*.

4.15 Resistant Reading in the Classroom

Personally responsive reading in the classroom does not fit easily with the need to produce gradable responses for exams. Moreover, as previously discussed (see Lesson Observation data), engaged reading is not the same as 'exam compliant' reading. In this section, I focus on what students have told me about 'resistant readings' (Willis, 2018) of poems. The concept of resistant reading is concerned with how students actively read to question the values and assumptions embedded in texts (Janks, 2010).

I discerned two kinds of resistant reading in the focus group data. Firstly, resistance to the experience of some poems which was a feature of the discussion at London Tertiary College.

Secondly, resistance to exam interpretations where these clash with students' personal responses. Both kinds of resistance cause consternation and resentment for some students.

At London Tertiary, students were reading a collection of Dickinson poems. There was a consensus in the focus group that they found their experience with these poems depressing. Celeste said that *at GCSE there was a larger range of context and poems rather than just Emily Dickinson; it was a lot less depressing.* Bridget commented: *I liked it more at GCSE ... Emily Dickinson is just depressing and stuff. We're all just depressed*. Chantelle echoed Celeste's point, saying *I wish there was a different variety on the syllabus. Emily Dickinson was depressed.* Norah summarised by saying the following:

> *Well, I think it's brought out the depression in everyone, to be honest… you know you're reading this stuff for an hour and a half, and you leave the classroom feeling different from how you walked in… Emily Dickinson is just depressing and stuff. We're all just depressed.*
> Me: *Is that true for other people?* **(All nod/ murmur assent)**

The unanimity of the term depression by members of the focus group strikes me as significant. It suggests a resonant bodily experience (Dimock, 1997) of 'overwhelming gloom' engendered by Dickinson's poems. The students are connecting with the poems and having a 'personal response', but in a way they largely dislike and resent. Norah compared the experience to *feeling down after seeing a sad film*, implying that this effect has a duration beyond the classroom. My revised Sipe schema posits an overlap between personalising and transparent responses, and this might describe the experiences of these students. They have a personalised response to Dickinson, making links between the text and themselves. This, in turn, leads them to a kind of transparent response where they feel 'swept away' by the text to the extent that they experience effects outside the classroom. The poems could be described as expressing a depression which the students recognise and are deeply affected by in a way they dislike and resent. The wholesale rejection of the experience of the poem was unique to this group of students, although an echo of their 'physical recoil' can also be seen in comments from Valerie at River Sixth Form, who had a strong personal reaction to Duffy. Valerie contrasted her feelings about calling Duffy's poems with those of Keats: *They're cringy ... it's the cringiness… I don't like it … I'm more into like – I know it sounds bad – but morbid poetry or like Keats poetry. I know he's a romantic as well but his is a more different kind of romantic poetry. His is like nature and romance and hers is just cringy.*

I would suggest that the depth of these students' resistant responses might be related to their adolescence. Characteristics of adolescence described in the literature include an expanded capacity for imaginative and empathic responses (Flavell,1977; Kegan, 1994; Mills *et al.,* 2014). Neurological research cited in my literature review also suggests stronger reactions to perceived stressful events than children or adults (Berk, 2014). Adolescents evaluate this perception of events largely through the immediate environment and judgement of peers (Sebastien, Burnett and Blakemore, 2008).

Resistance to reading poems in the classroom must be understood as being relative to reading, which the teacher sanctions. It will be remembered that in the interview, teachers expressed dilemmas about how they manage interpretation in the classroom. Discussion and interpretation are shaped by the need to produce particular responses for the exam, and teachers take different positions in terms of how much and what kinds of student 'personal responses' can be recognised in the classroom.

The students I interviewed were aware of their teachers' role as 'gatekeepers of meaning' and were sensitive to the tensions between personal response and responding for the exam. Farhana explicitly said that she has to *limit my views* to pass the exam. Students at Eastern Sixth Form laughed knowingly about the marks and phrases teachers use on their work and how these contain and shape what they write:

> Justyna: *Yeah, they underline it and it's like 'explain this a bit more'.*
> Farhana*: Yeah or how? Or sometimes just question marks in the margins.*

At all four colleges, students discussed the tension between responding personally and responding for the exam. Some had assumed that A level English would allow them more space to explore their ideas than it did. *I said when I came here, I'll do English Lit and Lang because it's a bit different, you get creative, and then you do the analysing* (Kamali). Students at Eastern Sixth Form and London Tertiary contrasted their experience of GCSE English with A level unfavourably. They said GCSE had offered them *freedom* to express their ideas and this had been part of their motivation to study A level English. In Chantelle's words (at GCSE), *it was like there was no right or wrong answer* when responding to poems. This perception of 'freely made interpretation' may be derived from the fact that, as described in the literature review,

GCSE English Literature, Assessment Outcome 1 asks that students show the development of 'an informed personal response.' In short, there may be more latitude for the interpretation of poems than at A level, which demands technical and analytical skills. The gap between expectation and experience of A level, for some, is frustrating:

> *I mean, GCSEs are easier than A levels, so you expect that it's going to be more harder but it's just that it's like yeah… you feel like you can't really express yourself so much because there's more you know, guidelines – what's it called? Structure* (Shona)
> *… in class we're being told there's no right or wrong, but then you're writing on my work – I'm not 'atting' anyone – but you're writing on my work this is the wrong idea and this isn't what the poem is about. But I don't know if that's the teacher or what the exam board wants* (Norah)

Here, Norah seems to be saying that when her teacher asks a question such as *what do you make of this poem?* she hears an invitation to express her ideas creatively. Her interpretations come into tension, however, with the A level grading criteria used when a teacher marks her work. Furthermore, Norah is unsure of the origin of the criteria being used to assess her work. Are her interpretations constrained by her teacher's individual opinion, or by *what the exam board* wants? Bridget reflected on the difference between personal and exam response:

> *I'll have an idea of it, but the teacher will have a completely different idea of it, and then you think – oh! … I guess everyone has different interpretations of poems but then you have to listen to the teacher.*

'Listening to the teacher' can involve subjugating a personal response to poems because *if you don't fit the mark scheme, then your point is not valid; you can't have your own perspective on things* (Shona). Shona and Valerie, both young black women from different colleges, talked directly about their enjoyment of Shakespeare's Sonnet 130:

> *I liked the way he was saying such mean things about her, but towards the end, he said something like he's never like change it or … I can't remember what he said, but it basically implies that he's never going to change how she is, he loves her flaws and all* (Valerie)

Shona's reading led to a resistant reading of the text. She saw herself as physically similar to the 'dark lady', challenging the dominant assumption of 'whiteness':

> *There's a line in Sonnet 130 that talks about black wires, her hair as black wires. I thought it meant that this was a black person or an ethnic minority person, but then my teacher was like, 'nah, that's wrong, let's talk about something else' …But rosy cheeks?* (Sonnet 130 has the line 'no such roses see I in her cheeks') – *you can't see rosy cheeks on a black person. It wasn't making sense, that's what I thought. So that was my interpretation of it, but she was just like – 'Nah'*

Shona is entering what Benton and Fox (1985) call the 'secondary world' of the poem and picturing the poem in terms of her own life to make rich meaning. This is an example of what Rosenblatt (2005) means by reading as a 'transactional event' where the reader activates the text on the basis of their cultural experiences. However, the class teacher denies Shona's personal interpretation even when, in this short, reported exchange, she pushes back to justify her reading: *you can't see rosy cheeks on a black person.* Shona's resentment of her denied reading is suggested by the dismissive way she voices her teacher: *nah, that's wrong … Nah.* The experience led Shona to conclude that whilst she privately believes her interpretation to be supportable, *if you don't fit the mark scheme, then your point is not valid; you can't have your own perspective on things*.

Shona was not alone in her experience that only some interpretations are acceptable in the classroom. Hasad added, to the murmured agreement of others in the focus group:

> *I've had that happen to me – sort of. I've explained a point and analysed and elaborated what my point is, but I wouldn't get marks like, for example, even in the novels, I would write 'Capote might have done this deliberately to put forward his views on'… what? I don't know, for example, homosexuality – but then it wouldn't be right. It wouldn't be right to the reader – you get a question mark* [on your work].

I think it is noteworthy that Hasad refers to *the reader* as distinct from himself. It is an alienated figure divorced from his own active reading, which must be suppressed.

To summarise, students in my sample actively read texts in a variety of ways. They have personal responses to poems, including some that resist dominant interpretations and others,

such as in the example of students reading Dickinson, that they find uncomfortable and dislike. At the same time, students are aware of and actively shape their responses to poetry in order to pass the exam, and this, in turn, may lead them to keep their personal responses private and/or undeveloped and undiscussed.

4.16 Mediation, Multimodal Approaches to Reading and the Importance of Sound

In the section on positivistic attitudes to poetry I quoted Bridget, who said poems are *so hard to understand*. A key reason for this expressed across different colleges, seems to be the language and cultural references of the poems on the syllabus. Some objected to archaic language, others to the specificity and unusual arrangement of words in poems. For example, Farhana said difficulty with reading poems is *you don't understand the language,* and Ruth, *we don't get all this 'thou shalt'.* Valerie addressed Duffy directly: *it's like, why did you have to go and use all them long, long words and drag that one?*

As discussed in teacher interviews and observations, a lack of familiarity with 'poetic language' can present barriers to reading. To ameliorate this, teachers act as mediators of cultural meaning making in the classroom. Students in focus groups recognised and appreciated the role of mediation in their reading.

(We need) *like a bit of help – you know, if you have a teacher who you know wants you to do well and teaches it in a fun way, obviously you're going to follow with that* (Bandani). Similarly, Kamali said Amelia *grounds us she makes us stay in the topic.*

Students also value the importance of mediation through 'third spaces' and multimodal approaches to teaching and groups, all of which have been previously discussed as strategies valued by teachers. For example, Farhana recalled in detail the visit to Keats' house and the effect on her of seeing his work in context.

> *I found it really interesting, especially how small he was, like his bed, even I wouldn't even fit in. He was a tiny man and even his lover she was about 4 foot 8 or something. So you got a lot of insight into his relationship, and the view from his window, and what he used to write about. From his window, he could see his lover and the poems reference that and also*

the clothes they wore. There was a box and he dedicated that just to his love. It had an effect on me – just to see the different world that they lived in compared to now.

Shona said:

The video they show about the context is more memorable than the reading… like if you see that Shelley slept on the grave of his lover or whatever, you think, 'yeah that's unforgettable, mate.'

Farhana seems to be thinking afresh about Keats as a result of her visit. Using space, artefacts, and her own visualisation, she reconstructs Keats as a living person. When she says *it had an effect on me,* she seems to be suggesting that in that moment, she experienced 'his world' as contrasting and simultaneously as real as hers. The power of imagining places, in this case by video, is also attested to in Shona's comments. Together, these comments affirm the importance of multimodal learning as this helps them connect and respond to poets and poems. Students at River Sixth Form also discussed the role that visualisation plays when engaging with and responding to poems, characterising this as an 'easy' way to relate to poems.

Patricia: (I visualise) *all the time. I think it's the easiest way, yeah*
Kamali: *Try to imagine yourself in that position. I feel that's the easiest way to relate to it. Could you imagine yourself there and in that position, I think.*
Valerie: *Or could you picture that character or that event happening …*
Visualisation and the need for mediation and support with this was discussed at Crossroads Tertiary College in the context of the Donne poem, *The Flea.*
Samira: D'you know The Flea yeah? I actually imagined it when we read The Flea. It was that proper olden time bed with that real proper you get me? **(indistinct, lots of yeah, yeah and enthusiasm overlapping voices and laughter)**
Me: What's the bed like? What colour is it?
Samira: Brown – yeah
Bandani: And with hay it's like a cabin or inn or something it's just/
Samira: It's not every day like how it is now/
Bandani: And maybe like everything's medieval/

Rehana: You see like how we have that in our heads now, I think that what we're stuck on is – I'm not saying we should have different trips but maybe something more to do with the history of that time because I think/
Bandani: Yeah, because a lot of us don't know.

It seems that in the above, students are evoking Sipe's personalising aspects of response using their imagination. Sharing visualisations animates the conversation, and student voices overlap to describe what's in their heads. Rehana cautions that imagination alone can be misleading if it is not grounded in historical and cultural understanding. The students worry about getting *stuck* and not knowing relevant contextual information with which to make responses. Here again, the importance of the role of the teacher as a mediator of knowledge is implied.

I would argue that the above quotations support the position of reader response theorists such as Iser (1978), Fish (1980), and Rosenblatt (1985), who believe that meaning is made within cultural and social contexts. In relation to this point findings from focus groups supported findings from teacher interviews and observations. Students recognise the role of small groups as mediators of meaning, reinforcing the importance of peer groups for adolescents cited in the literature (Erikson, 1968; Schlegel and Barry, 1991; Kegan, 1994).

Definitely, it helps in a group – we discuss it in a group, then Bella puts it on a screen, and we discuss it…you hear what another group says, and you can relate to it so much more (Celeste)

It gives different opinions for different sides and different perspectives of the story…you'll be like, ah, but you think that this might have a different meaning (Valerie)

Small group reading was, however, not universally popular and like their teachers, a minority of those interviewed cited managerial problems. In small groups, they *tend to get distracted* (Kamali) and lose focus; *I feel like we're chatting about other stuff* (Patricia).

A particularly strong aspect of the discussion about multimodal approaches to reading concerns the role that sound plays when making meaning with poems. It will be remembered that teachers had strongly divergent opinions about the role of sound when teaching poems. Some did not think it important at all, whilst others (Amelia, Mick, Arthur) prioritised it. For many

students, the sound of poems is very important, and they hold strong views about the experience of hearing poems.

Irrespective of ideological position or preferred teaching strategy, I found through interviews and observations that it is common practice for teachers to ask students to read poems aloud in class. The vast majority of students I interviewed expressed their strong dislike of this and a preference for hearing poems read aloud by their teachers in order to make meaning with them.

Not one student said they enjoy reading poems aloud in class. Most said they find it stressful, and the practice makes them feel self-conscious.

> *oh embarrassment, I feel under pressure; sometimes you just mess the words up…* (Justyna, Eastern Sixth Form)
> *…with poems because they're more ambiguous and there are rhythms you have to think about, and it's just – it's a bit stressful when you have 20 people in the class* (Celeste, London Tertiary)

> *There's literally no point to it* (students reading aloud). *I need to read it over and over to myself to get it, and people read in such a bland way* (Shona, Eastern Sixth Form)

When asked *how poems are read in your class,* Ruth (Crossroads Tertiary) compared her own reading of poems with that of the teacher:

> *We read it out like she reads it out or gets someone else to read it out. And when she reads it out she reads it properly, like with the beat. … if I read it myself, I'll just read it normally, just the lines … I prefer hearing it from her because the beat like the beat it reinforces the main meaning the author's trying to make and that, but when I read it, I just read. I don't do any of that.*

Ruth makes the point that poems are engaged with the art of sound and, therefore, need to be heard. She links the 'beat' of the words with authorial meanings and implies that to bring this to life is a skill which she does not (perhaps yet) possess: *I don't do any of that.* This understanding that the sound of poems is crucial to making meaning was shared across focus groups. Celeste (London Tertiary), *when we're learning them* (the poems), *they're read to us,*

which makes them easier to understand because you can kind of hear the meaning. Students at River Sixth Form and Eastern Sixth Form specifically singled out their teachers, respectively, Amelia and Tom, for their ability to read poems emphasising sound and meaning. Patricia commented, *I feel like yeah, I think everyone likes a lot more when Amelia reads it first.* Shona said of Tom: *He makes you want to listen, and you can imagine what it was like at that time.* Shona seems to be recognising her own creative power here and the fact that reading can be a shared communal experience: Tom reads, and she reads *into* that reading through her imagination. The importance of this dynamic reading experience was explored further in a discussion between students at River Sixth Form. They are discussing listening to Amelia read:

Patricia*: Yeah, it's nice; I don't know*
Valerie: *There's more soothing*
Patricia: *Yeah.*
Me*: Soothing?*
Valerie: *It gives you a whole lot, like when you're reading, you're spending too much time thinking the next word, the next word/*
Patricia: *Ah yeah yeah yeah*
Valerie: *But it's just coming, just coming at you it's giving you time to open up to accept it.*
Me*: Right, it gives you space to open up and accept it.*
Valerie: *Yeah, you're not thinking, you're just taking in what's/*
Patricia: *You're just thinking of listening; you're not thinking of reading it.*
Me: *And do you like Amelia reading it, because sometimes it/*
Patricia: *Oh yeah* **(emphatic)**
Me: *You love it? You love it when Amelia reads it...?*
Patricia: *She's got a really calming voice, and she reads it like how it's meant to be read. When you get someone else in the class to read it, there's no emotion* **(crosstalk)**
Valerie: *put no accent ...*
Patricia: *Yeah. When you have someone else in the class reading it, they're not really bothered, they won't say it with the same emotion, and it's just like monotones the same throughout, but Amelia, she'll give you a bit of emotion.*
Kamali: *And I think because Amelia's done the poems before; she knows the kind of feeling behind it so she really conveys it when she does/*
Patricia: *You get feels, you get feels.*

In the above exchange, students are focused on making meaning with the poem through listening. They refer to feeling 'soothed' and 'calm' when listening to their teacher read, and this strongly contrasts with the feelings of anxiety students discussed when reading aloud themselves. A key quality of the reading that they greatly enjoy is that it is a dramatic reading infused with emotion.

It seems that hearing poems read with emotional inflection opens a space for these students, which might be described as akin to Keats' (Ulmer, 2019) concept of 'negative capability': a state of detachment from fact and reasoning. In Valerie's words, the poem is *... just coming, just coming at you; it's giving you time to open up to accept it.*

The description of opening up in the present to the experience of poems chimes with findings in my literature review that when adolescents think, they draw heavily on their immediate environment and peer responses (Blakemore, 2018) and are capable of experiencing stimuli very intensely (Berk, 2014)

In terms of Sipe's framework, the students above are describing transparent aesthetic engagement with the text: *you get feels, you get feels*. They attribute this experience wholly to the teacher's reading and, in Patricia's case, to a 'true' reading of how (the poem is) *meant to be read*. However, from a 'reader response' perspective, a precondition for this is the responder's own ability to engage with the poem imaginatively. Like Shona (above), these students are reading poems when they listen to their teacher read.

This section has explored the role of sound, and the importance of hearing poems read aloud as a way for students to make meaning with and respond to poems in the A level classroom. Students in my sample reject the practice of students taking turns to read poems. They do understand, however, that poems are meant to be heard, and sensitive readings can evoke felt and personal connections.

I contend that for adolescent students, the importance of hearing poems is related to the particular role that music plays in their lives. This is explored in the next section.

4.17 Poetry and Music: A Symbiotic Relationship

As discussed above, sound is seen by the adolescents in my study as important for responsive meaning making with poems. More particularly, focus group discussions highlighted the role of music in their lives and what I have termed a 'symbiotic relationship' between music and poetry. The concept of a symbiotic relationship refers to a mutually dependent relationship between two variables. Coined originally in the area of biological studies and extended to many areas of social study a symbiotic relationship can be beneficial, parasitic, or neutral to one or both party (Yoon, Moon and Lee, 2022). The relationship between music and reading in young children has been previously researched (Sassen, 2012; Moore, Simonyak and Ruzica, 2023), but how adolescents relate reading poetry at A level to music is underexplored in the literature.

All focus groups discussed the relationship between music and poetry. Talking about music Ruth said, *for us it has a lot of meaning*. Without exception individual students agreed that music was important to them, and they described eclectic tastes in contemporary music such as R&B, Psychedelic Rock, and Grime. Mutual respect for differing choices of genre was expressed in focus groups suggesting the shared value of music for students. A contemporaneous note I made at Crossroad Tertiary College reads 'voices overlap and deepen as they approve each other's music saying, 'oh that's deep' etc.' Rehana (Crossroads Tertiary) identified musical enjoyment as age related *between 14 and 18 it be an age of music and stuff.* Grace (London Tertiary) referred directly to links between music and poetry *hip hop is such a massive thing now and it's literally poetry with a beat- I think that's young people.*

The importance of the role of music in adolescence is corroborated by research discussed in my literature review (e.g., North, 2000; Miranda, 2013; Saarikallio, Randall and Baltazar, 2020). Students in my research confirm the profound psychological and social importance of music in their lives.

Like Grace, Valerie connected poetry with music, but crucially, music was more satisfying to her because, although she could appreciate poems and think *ooh, that's cool, that is…I don't really get that – the vibe* (that she gets with music). She described musical experiences in aesthetic terms as *goosebumps… a shiver down your spine, like, oh my gosh!* Poetry enabled her to have more appreciation of music; *when you know about poetry, you appreciate your music more.* This sentiment was voiced across focus groups. Bandani said *I found when we*

were doing poetry that every time I was listening to or watching music or watching movies, I found things to analyse. For Chantelle, poetry helped her appreciate song lyrics:

> *when you look at the lyrics of some songs you think oh! That's a bit similar to the English we're studying – that little metaphoric moment. It's like a lightbulb going on, and you think oh! They meant THAT! Wow!*

I would argue that in contrast to Bandani's analytical approach, Chantelle and Valerie are expressing aspects of an aesthetic personal response. Chantelle's comments led to this exchange in the focus group at London Tertiary College:

> Norah: *English helps with that so much … I spend so much time thinking about it I don't think two years ago I would have listened to a song the same way that I listen to a song now.*
> Celeste: *I agree with what she's saying it's like when you hear a song and you would have gone, 'oh that's a nice line' and now you're like, 'oh, that's really deep'* (laughs) *I really get where they were coming from when they said that…*
> Norah: *Yeah, that's so sad! But I feel like, subconsciously, I'm analysing songs way more than I used to*
> At River Sixth Form, there was the following exchange:
> Valerie: *Music is poetry.*
> Kamali: *Definitely.*
> Valerie: *I feel that poetry gives you more appreciation to when you listen to music, think about the lyrics more, because they've obviously been put together in a certain way, not just to fit the beat and whatever, but they have a meaning as well and I think when you know about poetry and you study poetry you appreciate your music more.*

For these adolescents reading poetry benefits and enhances their experience of music. This kind of symbiosis has been described as 'commensalism': a relationship in which one experience (the musical) is enhanced by the other (reading poetry), and the latter is unaffected by the relationship (Yoon, Moon and Lee, 2022). For others in my study, the relationship between poetry and music was seen as more mutually beneficial.

Chen described an *internal connection* to a poem he enjoys and how he consciously mixes music and poetry to evoke an effect.

> *There is one,* [poem] *it's related to a song I used to listen to a lot so it helps me with, erm, remembering it – it's got the same ideas. 'One need not be a chamber – to be haunted', and the song's got that idea about a haunted house going through it. And I listen to that song a lot – it's called 'Head like a Haunted House', and when I listen to it, that poem pops into my head.*

The poem to which Chen referred is by Emily Dickinson, whom previously, the group had agreed depressed them. Although Chen acquiesced with the group description of Dickinson as 'depressing', he is here describing enjoyment and appreciation. He is not alone is this regard, as will be seen, Norah also talked about appreciating Dickinson. These exceptions illustrate the nuance of my findings and possibly the importance of being alert to peer group pressure in focus groups.

At River Sixth Form Patricia talked extensively about her experience of poetry set to music:

> *There was a Lana Del Rey album that came out, and there was something called Burnt Norton interlude and I think it's a poem … let me read just a little bit out; it's actually really good … I really like it. Every time I listen to it, and she's narrating it, I just have to sit down and listen …*

Patricia then read to the group an excerpt of TS Eliot's poem, which is included in Del Rey's album. She concluded: *that gave me the feels. It makes you really think, and when she's narrating it in your head and like the music is really heavenly, it's like wow*

Wassiliwizsky *et al.* (2017), referred to in my literature review, suggest that recited poetry stimulates peak emotional responses in a way that is analogous to music. I would argue Chen and Patricia are experiencing an aesthetic, personal response drawing on both music and heard poetry. This in turn, is based on a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship between music and poetry.

In conclusion, music as an art form is valued and actively enjoyed by all the students I spoke to. I would argue that the above examples show that music can act as a connection to, and in some cases, enhancement of, student experiences of poetry. This, in turn, supports the use of multimodal and intertextual teaching strategies to maximise adolescent experiences of poetry.

The picture, however, is nuanced. For some students, the experience of reading poetry acts as to support the pleasure of music, but the relationship is not reciprocal, and the connection between poetry and music might be described as tenuous. Valerie said (poetry*) is not music because music has the beat … you won't get the same vibe unless someone's reading it like passionately to you, then maybe you will probably get that vibe*. For Bridget, the connection can be characterised as 'grudging', *I don't like poetry, but yeah, I do listen to the words they're saying more in songs.* Norah broadly concurred with Bridget: *when you understand what the poet means, like when you finally understand what they're talking about, it's like oh yeah!! But not as much as music.*

At Crossroads Tertiary, I asked: *Do you get the feels listening to music?* All five said they did, but just two said they experienced this with poems, and Samira emphatically said *no, NO!* Similarly, at London Tertiary, whilst all students said that reading poetry enhanced the pleasure of listening to music, they demurred when asked *do you have pleasurable moments when reading poetry*? saying *no/not as much/mmmm.*

I now turn to my final section to explore how student responses to poems relate to my revised Sipe framework.

4.18 Personal and Aesthetic Pleasure in Relation to Sipe's Framework

As discussed in my literature review, the concept of 'personal response' is a thorny one. From a social constructivist perspective, personal responses are also shared cultural responses and this may be especially relevant for students in my sample. According to Erikson (1968), adolescents enjoy questioning realities with their peers, and the importance of peer groups for this age group has been affirmed across time and culture (Schlegel and Barry, 1991).

I believe that personally responding to poems can be an intense experience for adolescents. This is because adolescent brains are developing fast cognitive efficiency (Blakemore and Choudhury, 2006), and responsive neurons mean that adolescents experience pleasurable stimuli more intensely than at other times of life (Berk, 2014). In psychological terms, Kegan (1994) has argued, that adolescents are capable of epistemological leaps. They are able to think about reality as an object of experience and therefore contend with self-reflective thought and transformative questioning of 'realities'.

Personal responses to poems were evident from the data I collected and occurred across all four colleges. In this section, I explicitly relate these 'personal responses' to my revision of Sipe's (2000) framework for understanding literary responses. I focus on personal, transparent, and performative aspects of student responses as these are connected to aesthetic and efferent impulses.

Two aesthetic responses have already been explored in relation to music, that is, the experiences of Chen and Patricia. In terms of my revised Sipe framework, I believe Chen and Patricia are experiencing performative and transparent aesthetic responses because they actively recreate and enjoy poems. Chen also personalises his experience of aesthetic response because he actively links written text to music to exploit the pleasures of the poem. The performance he enjoys is private as he listens through headphones, whereas the performative aspect for Patricia is public: she plays the song for the class. Like other students before her, Patricia reported that the poem gave her 'the feels'. This, I would argue, is an alternative colloquial expression that Panksepp (1995) describes as 'chills' or 'thrills'. This is the process whereby music evokes powerful emotional effects felt as 'goosebumps' or shivering flesh.

Although at Crossroads Tertiary, just two of the five students said they 'got the feels' when reading poems, they did express enjoyment of poems in the following exchange:

Me: Have you any lines of poems that have stuck in your heads from this year?
Samira: I love that poem – The Flea – because I think the title itself…. And um what else (Joint voices call out) *oh To His Coy Mistress* **(overlapping voices)**
Ruth: Oh yeah, the one where he talks about the worms are gonna attack when she's dead because/
Yasmin: The two souls part company/
Samira: I like that one – that was a really good one
Bandani: My Last Duchess, 'I gave the command it was not stopped' and stuff like 'I never stoop so low.'
Ruth: *if the poem itself hasn't been so explicit and then you can find out more* **[potential for multiple meanings]**
(*Yeah, yeah,* assent from several voices)
Samira: The Flea because it's literally trying to mean/

Rehana: And it's more repetitive as well; there's repetition

In the above, recalled lines are fractured and summarised from several poems. The way that comments cut across each other and the use of 'love' and 'like' suggests genuine enthusiasm. The students definitely express pleasure, and it may be that through repetition of lines, they briefly experience, in Sipe's terms, the transparent world of the poem. Ruth, an Afro-Caribbean student, reflected on her experience of reading poems by Maya Angelou:

> *When I first discovered Maya Angelou, it was in secondary school um – she said stuff that's central to the Black experience, and I'd never read anything like it, and I remember what she said, and it gave me a shiver- yeah yeah … I did feel satisfied when I read it, but it was just different from all the poems I'd read before – they were all about love or how someone died, but she spoke about something that was relevant to me – it just stayed in my head.*

Ruth is linking her aesthetic experience to powerful cultural identification: 'the Black experience'. Her use of the terms *satisfaction* and *gave me a shiver*, speaks strongly of personal meaning and response she experienced while reading Angelou's poems. As Bandani put it: *I feel like if a poem speaks to you, if it speaks to you, you don't need to try- do you know what I mean?*

Norah at London Tertiary made a similar cultural link with her pleasure at reading the Dickinson poem *A Fly Buzzed*. She said she made profound meaning of the poem in relation to her Christian faith:

> *I think because I'm religious I can understand the irony in it. I'm not gonna lie, personally, I feel that all religious people – someone has some doubt in them. And this poem encapsulates that so much. You want to be religious so much and then death is so like… life has so much purpose in it, and then it happens, and you die, and that's a fact, there's so much physical evidence in it, and this contrast…it puts together this contrast people have in their minds between believing and not believing.*

In Sipe's terms, Norah and Ruth are engaging in personalised impulses, relating the text to their lives and back again. Norah relates the poem to existential and abstract matters concerned with life and meaning. She reflects on her own beliefs: a position that can be taken because, as an adolescent, she is thinking beyond the confines of the self, and in 'cross-categorical' ways

Kegan (1994). For Ruth, the personalising impulse clearly leads her further along Sipe's framework to a transparent aesthetic response.

Similarly, at River Sixth Form, Kamali talked effusively about the poem *Cousin Kate* by Rossetti, which is on the GCSE syllabus for English Literature. He expressed, in Sipe's terms, an intense and transparent experience with the text.

> *I love that poem… I'll have dreams about that poem, I just love that poem… I just loved it because it was such a ... even though it was a short poem it took you on so many twists and turns. And I really related to the girl who got dashed aside, I don't know why…I was like I feel your pain again, dashed aside like that and you've got a child. I felt for her. Every time I read that poem it just gives me the feels.*

In the above quotation, Kamali uses emotive words, love and pain, dashed aside, and concludes by describing a strong physical response the poem gives him: *the feels*. I believe this also illustrates adolescent readers' capacity to identify with what Eagleton (2007) calls the 'moral universe' of literary texts. Kamali, a young black London man, expresses huge empathy as he is transparently engaged in a 'secondary world' (Benton and Fox, 1985), originating in the imagination of a 19th-century white American poet.

Not all expressions of pleasure are related to aesthetic response. Gulshen specifically related her enjoyment of analysis to her 'personalising impulse':

> *if you can imagine you can relate to it and connect with it, then yeah… It's easier to analyse, but if you can't really put yourself in the poem more and anything like that, then it's a lot harder. You can't analyse it if you don't get it...I'm not sure how to explain it but it's analysing, being able to connect with it, that's what I like the most.*

In contrast to students such as Ruth and Kamali, for Gushen, personalising poems [putting] *yourself in the poem,* acts as a bridge to analysis and the pleasures of analytic and efferent reading.

4.19 Conclusion

This section has reviewed findings from four focus groups in order to substantially answer research question 3: *What experiences and knowledge do students draw on in the construction and articulation of a personal response?* Some findings also have a bearing on the previously discussed research question 4: *How is the process of constructing and articulating personal responses to poems reconciled with pressures to pass exams?*

I would argue that the adolescent students taking part in my study come across as active and reflective agents with strong voices. In relation to research question 4, it is clear that, like teachers, students are strongly aware of the need to produce particular responses in order to pass exams, and this shapes their reading of poems. Throughout discussions, students referred to assessment outcomes, and for some, the motivation to study English is aligned with passing an exam in a subject they regard as useful for university application. In this respect, many students across colleges take an efferent and positivistic approach to poetry. The picture, however, is complex, and at three colleges, some students expressed disappointment because they took an English A level with the expectation that they would be entirely free to respond to texts personally. Significantly, and regardless of their stated approach to reading poems, for most students, preparing answers for the exam is not the sum total of their reading experience. As discussed above, many students, including those who take an efferent stance to reading, construct and articulate a variety of personal responses to poems.

Responses include different kinds of resistant readings of poems, which are counter to the responses required to pass exams. One class had what I would describe as 'collective resistance' to the experience of reading Dickinson's poems, which they found *depressing*. This perhaps indicates the importance of conformity within peer groups for adolescents previously explored in research (Brooks and Browne, 2012). Those who expressed individually resistant readings of poems seemed to retain suppressed interpretations privately, whilst also producing required exam responses. These responses suggest that despite the 'pull of the exam', students can form strong personal connections with some poems.

Kegan's (1994) analysis of the social and economic context in which adolescents develop helps us understand the competing claims of experiencing poems and the demand for compliance with the exam. Adult teachers make claims on students' minds: how and what they should

know. Adolescents are aware of the pressures to behave in socially sanctioned ways and, in an educational context, to conform to the expectations of the exam. Consequently, they tend to publicly qualify their experiences and justify positions in relation to the assessment outcomes whilst also privately making and retaining personal and idiosyncratic connections to some poems.

In terms of research question 3, students draw on many resources when they construct and articulate personal responses to poems. In broad terms, students concur with teachers that they dislike and avoid reading poems, but some also reported strong early memories of engagement with poems. This leads me to conclude that students have an ambivalent self-identification as poetry readers. Whilst they may not have a strong tradition of engagement with written poetry, they do have other cultural resources to draw on when responding to poems. These are not always exploited in college classrooms, and, in some cases, personal responses are suppressed and seen as disruptive in the context of the classroom.

Students appreciate the role of teachers as mediators of meaning, a 'more knowledgeable other' (Vygotsky, 1978) who can support their construction and articulation of responses to poems. They also enjoy multimodal approaches to reading poems, including the use of 'third spaces' and visualisation.

Using my revised Sipe (2000) framework of literary responses to poems, I have been able to explore and classify particular responses to poems, and the role of personal responses to poems is important in this regard. It will be remembered that in Sipe's original framework, a personal response whereby students relate readings to their lives is seen as neither a hermeneutic nor aesthetic response. In my revised framework, I see the personal as a potential bridge into hermeneutic and aesthetic responses. This is because adolescents in particular, have an awareness of a developing self (Kegan 1994). Reflecting on self-experiences (the personalising impulse) can lead to sophisticated readings, both aesthetic (e.g., in the case of Kamali and Patricia) and efferent/hermeneutic (Gulshen).

In terms of reading, students unanimously reject the widely used teacher strategy of reading stanzas aloud and in turn. Without exception, this evoked a strong negative emotional response and feelings of self-consciousness. Students in my sample are, however, well aware of the importance of sound as intrinsic to the meaning of poems. They value greatly hearing poems

read aloud by an expressive teacher or a high-quality recording, remarking that this gives them *space* to think about and respond to poems. Taken together with comments made above about the importance of visualisation, it is possible to conclude that a century on from the Newbolt Report (1921), students can still engage with poems as a holistic personal experience.

I would argue that many findings can also be related to the life stage of adolescence. Adolescence, as discussed in my literature review, is a period of profound self-development. Biological, social, and psychological changes are all at work. For example, incomplete and rapid development of the pre-frontal cortex in adolescence can lead to increased reactivity to emotions, rewards, and sanctions (Dumontheil, 2016; Blakemore,2018). Adolescents are also prone to egocentric thinking and draw on their immediate environment and peers for feedback to evaluate themselves and their ideas more than adults do (Sebastien, Burnett and Blakemore, 2008). These developmental factors may, in part, explain the students' unpleasant experience of being made to read unfamiliar poems aloud in class. However, adolescent students are also capable of increasingly divergent and creative thought (Ross, 1976; Flavell, 1977). Many appreciate that poems are made to be heard and are able to use the space that hearing poems aloud offers to connect with poems.

Aligned with the value of sound for adolescents in my study is the significance of music. Miranda (2013) estimates that adolescents listen to music for approximately three hours a day, making it an important art form for students in my sample. As discussed in my literature review, music offers meaningful connections to life experiences and contributes to identity, agency, and adolescent mental health (Laiho, 2004). As Valerie puts it above, *music is poetry.* This indicates that music can be an important art form allied to poetry, which adolescents draw on when they respond to poems.

4.20 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have presented data from teacher interviews, student focus groups, and lesson observations to show how adolescent students in London's further education colleges personally respond to poems. The picture I have presented is nuanced. Whilst teachers can be loosely categorised as taking opposing ideological stances, they all, as skilled classroom teachers, engage in shared pedagogical practices. These include, for example, small group discussions, scaffolded learning through whole class question and answer sessions and the use

of shared reading aloud. To some extent, all teachers rely on evoking personal response to engage students in learning for the exam. Others go further to try and engage students with the enjoyment of poems. Teachers in my sample consider adolescence to be a lens through which they work with students and take pride in the distinctive nature of further education.

In contrast with widely held teacher views that students dislike and avoid reading, many students expressed ambivalent identification as poetry readers. Both teachers and students are invested in reproducing analytical and efferent responses for the exam. However, using a revised version of Sipe's (2000) framework of literary impulses, I have also been able to show how students read poems actively and move between different kinds of efferent and aesthetic responses. Through lesson observations and focus group data I have also shown how 'personal meaning and response' is also made through dialogue with peers and teachers. As Xerri's (2013) research found, teachers play a vital role as producers and containers of meanings in poetry lessons. In this respect, my findings show that adolescent students keenly feel teachers' acceptance or rejection of their personal responses to poems. In the concluding chapter I turn to more specific conclusions that can be drawn from my research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

My research aimed to explore: *In what ways do adolescents studying English in the further education sector engage with poetry at the level of personal meaning and response?* My literature review guided me to look at this through a social constructivist and reader response lens. Although there have been many qualitative studies about reading poetry which are broadly from this perspective, such as Pike (2000), Brooks and Browne (2012), Xerri (2016), and Simon *et al.* (2019), the context of further education in the United Kingdom (UK) and the influence of adolescence in personal response are both underexplored. I hope that my work contributes to filling this knowledge gap.

In this chapter, I bring together key findings from my data analysis and discussion. I begin by showing how my thesis answers my research questions. Following this, I focus on recommendations that arise from my study, the limitations of my work and indications of areas for further research. I conclude by highlighting aspects of originality in my research and contributions to knowledge.

5.2 Answering the Research Questions

Research Question 1: *How Is the Concept of 'Personal Response' Defined and Situated Within the Curriculum?*

This question has been addressed in two ways: through a review of the literature and through data collection.

Firstly, my literature review discussed the history and location of this concept in the current A level curriculum. As defined by the Office of Qualifications and Exams Regulation (Ofqual), in formal terms, the concept of 'personal response' appears explicitly only in A level English Literature as *AO1: Articulate informed personal and creative responses to literary texts using associated concepts and terminology and coherent accurate written expression*. At the time of gathering data for my research (2017–2020), there was no reference to 'personal response' in the A level English Language and Literature specifications. (In terms of the specification for

A level Creative Writing, 'critical awareness of personal writing processes' is part of AO3, but there is no explicit reference to 'personal response'.) It was, and remains, therefore, a minor part of the formal assessment regime at A level.

Perhaps reflecting the minor role that 'personal response' plays in the exam specifications, most teachers in my sample did not in any way in interview refer to the terminology 'personal response'. Three teachers (Ayesha, Amelia, and Arthur) talked about the importance of feelings, human response and enjoyment of poems and these are terms which ally with personal and aesthetic response. This might be attributed to their broad ideological position on reading poems.

I define teachers' ideological positions in terms of their stated approaches to reading in *Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion.* There are three groups: teachers who prioritise efferent reading for the exam, those who see exams as problematic and teachers as bridges into meaning, and teachers who try to prioritise responsive and aesthetic reading. Ayesha, Amelia, and Arthur belong to the last group. However, it is also the case that Ayesha and Arthur respectively taught English Literature and Creative Writing. It may be, therefore, that their interest in 'felt responses' is shaped by exam specifications as much as their own personal views.

Beyond formally defined curriculum specifications, my study explores the lived experiences of teachers and students in the curriculum. This is what Armitage (2007) calls the 'process model', the term being derived from Stenhouse (1975). The 'process model' is concerned with how students and teachers experience teaching and learning. Seen through this lens, my study contributes findings to how the concept of personal response is situated within the curriculum.

I found that although the concept of personal response may not be explicitly valued by assessment outcomes or all teachers, the experience of personal response *does* feature strongly in this study.

Engagement with 'personal response' can be characterised as a thread running through teaching and learning. This thread is traceable in lesson observations where students in both small group and whole class discussions express their feelings and interpretations of poems. It is also seen in data from student focus groups discussed below under research question 3. Notably, all teachers make an appeal to personal response to some degree, regardless of their ideological

stance. One source of this thread can be attributed to teachers' subject and professional knowledge. Teachers in my study have studied literary theories and understand that poems are versatile art forms offering experiences with language and thought. They are also trained teachers who understand that the role of a teacher in the UK requires that they understand and build on students' prior knowledge (Department for Education, Teachers Standards, 2011/2021).

Consequently, at a minimum, 'personal response' offers teachers in my study a way into engaging students. Prior knowledge and understanding are evoked in order to correct and prepare students with answers to pass exams. For some teachers, therefore, personal engagement is a technique for gaining attention and encouraging students to 'buy in' to the material they need to learn. Other teachers value 'personal response' more explicitly and try to explore what poems mean to their students. Examples of these kinds of engagement can be seen in my chapter *Analysis and Discussion* (p. 187). Dominant pedagogical techniques for prompting personal responses discussed by teachers in interviews include visualisation and small group discussion. For students at the receiving end of these different kinds of intervention, personal meaning and response is a complicated and sometimes rich experience. Conclusions with regard to this are discussed under research question 3.

I will now move to summarise my answers to research question 4: *How is the process of constructing and articulating personal responses to poems reconciled with pressures to pass exams?* This is foregrounded because the exam-focused culture of our education system provides a foundational context for my study.

Discussion of tensions in the study of poetry for exams has a long tradition stretching over 100 years, for example, Acland (1911) and Newbolt (1921) reports. These warn not to sacrifice poetry as an art form designed to give pleasure and insight, to the constraints of passing an exam (Purcell, 2013). I conclude that teachers in my study are unable to reconcile tensions between reading efferently to pass an exam and reading for personal meaning and are constantly pulled toward efferent readings by the weight of the exam.

My findings support previous concerns, cited in my literature review, about the dominance of exams in English teaching in the UK (e.g., Dymoke, 2002; Hennessey *et al.*, 2011; Gordon, 2018). Lessons that I have analysed reveal numerous ways in which the language and

experience of teaching and learning are shaped by exam preparation, a situation that is perhaps best encapsulated by Will's comment: *we are a kind of exam-taking machine*. My findings also confirm what has been found by previous research in the school sector (Hanratty, 2008; Hennessy, Hinchion and McNamara, 2010), namely that an 'accountability culture' leads to pressure to read poems instrumentally and efferently.

Further education teachers work within a national policy context that ensures a positivistic, 'banking model' (Freire, 1996) of education reliant on regurgitation of information for exam passes (Coffield, 2014). Business like systems are underpinned by the need for compliant teachers (Page, 2018), and the now familiar use of 'business language' emphasises 'delivery' and 'stakeholders' (Pring, 2012).

In essence, teachers experience a 'torn' professional identity. In one respect their professionalism is as a teacher of a subject which they studied at degree level. They are specialists in their subject and, at university, will have engaged in debates about what constitutes knowledge and understanding of their subject. Concerns about content and pedagogy in their subject area will also have been discussed as part of their teacher training. Most teachers in my study said that they want to encourage students to enjoy their subject and to achieve their best. In essence, this element of teachers' professional identity is engaged with what Holloway and Brass (2018) call 'input' – the processes of learning their chosen subject. However, increasingly and since the 1970s, beginning in schools, teachers have also been obliged to comply with uniform 'quality and standards' systems (Pring, 1996). These systems, derived from industry, are concerned with measurement, output, and efficiency (Holloway and Brass, 2018). Like their school counterparts, teachers' work in further education is subject to surveillance through monitoring and 'performance reviews'. Teachers measure, compare, and standardise student work according to exam criteria. In this way, teachers take part in systems that generate and sustain inequalities between students.

This results in a strain between two different kinds of professionalism and places teachers in a dilemma. On the one hand, they want, as 'occupational professionals' (Moore and Clarke, 2016), to engage with the 'input' side of their subject and navigate the many processes of learning. On the other, as 'organisational professionals' (Moore and Clarke, 2016) teachers must comply with market systems which stress 'output': the rhetoric of individual success and the value of league tables. The position teachers are placed in has been described as a position

of ‘cruel optimism’ (Berlant, 2006; Moore and Clarke, 2016). This describes a situation whereby teachers are obliged to invest in systems they cannot fully believe in, and which thwart their actual desires.

‘Cruel optimism’ can be specifically applied to teachers in my study to explain the chronic dilemmas they experience about exams and personal response. As gatekeepers of meaning, on externally examined courses, teachers in my study express dilemmas about how to manage personal responses to poems and, at times, they actively deny students’ personal responses to poems.

The position teachers are in regarding poetry and the exam is difficult for them. I have found that even though all teachers in my study engage with personal meaning at some level, they do not all recognise this. Dilemmas for teachers trying to reconcile personal response and exams lead to differing ideological stances. Some take the view that there should be no space for personal response in the classroom: *liking or not liking poems is not up for debate in my class* (Barry). Others are more equivocal and, expressing the tensions between different kinds of knowledge described above, consciously look for ways to encourage personal response: *I want them to have a feeling, an interpretation* (Amelia). Here are the voices of teachers in my study who, whilst teaching a subject they enjoy as art, must also curtail aesthetic experience in order to prepare students for the exam.

The tensions I have described above also apply to students in my study. Pressure to prepare for exams means that sometimes students suppress personal responses to poems and outwardly comply with sanctioned interpretations. In this respect, my study confirms previous findings from this cohort (Snapper, 2015; Xerri, 2016). Students feel caught between personal and critical reading of poems, and some express resentment toward teachers and estrangement from engaged reading.

I conclude that the concept of ‘cruel optimism’ can be usefully applied to describe irreconcilable tensions between wanting students to experience poems as art and wanting them to process them efferently for the exam.

R2 addressed: ***What teaching strategies do teachers use to prepare students to read for personal meaning?***

In interview, teachers reported drawing on a variety of teaching strategies to enable students to make content of poems 'personally meaningful'. Some of these strategies can be seen as related to teacher perceptions of the deficits and strengths of adolescent students, which I will now briefly highlight.

All teachers in my study expressed some deficit views of student abilities alongside the contrary position that adolescent students have particular cultural strengths to bring to the classroom. This seems to reflect the dual usage of the concept of cultural capital as both objectified knowledge to be passed on, as discussed in my literature review (Bourdieu, 1984) and the broader notion of cultural capital as socially acquired practices.

In many respects, teachers in this study are inventive and seek to draw on student's own cultural capital to help them engage with texts. However, there was also a consensus amongst teachers that students do not read much and, in particular, do not read poems. Explanations for this varied from the objectification of student skills: *they're lovely kids, but they're weak kids* (Will) to relating 'not reading' to adolescent development: *Adolescents – it's around willingness to read … 'Nah! Is it over two pages, Sir? I can't read it.'* (Mick). In teacher interviews a consensus also emerged that students in this study, living in deprived areas of inner London, are especially disadvantaged when reading poems from the canon, which are privileged on the syllabus. Teachers also shared a perception that their students do not have much general experience with poetry.

All but one teacher referred to their students in terms of their status as 'teenagers', 'adolescents' or 'young people'. From this I infer that teachers in my sample consider the age of their students as an important perspective through which to plan their teaching. Most teachers in my study expressed pride in working in the further education sector. They said they hope to offer an alternative to schooling and differentiate students and their teaching from that which happens in schools. They embraced sometimes conflicting notions of adolescent agency, energy, and vulnerability and across the ideological groups I have discerned see themselves as role models for nascent adults.

Five of the teachers I interviewed said that adolescent students must be given agency in the classroom to express their ideas. Two teachers went further to celebrate adolescence as an 'inspirational' time of life. Others took a more patrician view seeing adolescents as in need of adult protection. I would argue that these positions reflect wider ambivalent cultural concerns discussed in my literature review about the role of adolescents in our society. Cultural ambivalence toward adolescence might also explain the conflicting ways in which teachers spoke about students, for example, as both culturally deficient and rich/capable of agency and dependent.

I found that, at times, teachers seemed to rely on stereotypical notions of what certain groups of students bring to the classroom. I argue in my *Analysis and Discussion* that teachers should take care to ask about and not assume the resources students draw on, such as their religious beliefs.

Teachers strategise in ways that can be seen from the literature as related to a social constructivist perspective on learning. They are conscious of taking the role of a 'more knowledgeable other' (Vygotsky, 1978/1986) to mediate learning. They rely on dialogue and multimodal approaches to learning. The role of small peer group discussion for adolescents is seen as important by teachers. From lesson observation data, I conclude that peer group discussion in the colleges I sampled can lead to both positive and negative experiences of making personal meaning with poems.

A consensus emerged in teacher interviews that visualisation is a form of personal response that is important for making meaning with poems, and I observed many examples of this in the classroom. The prevalence of this suggests that teachers are sensitive to the importance of the 'secondary world' (Benton and Fox, 1985) of literary texts. In this respect, teachers want to encourage students to consciously examine how they 'see' what texts are about. Interestingly there was no agreement about the importance of sound for making meaning with poems. However, most of the teachers interviewed said, in differing degrees and ways, that sound was of less importance in meaning making than visualisation.

This, as will be seen next, is a view only partially shared by students who offer a more nuanced perspective on their reading practices.

Research Question 3: What experiences and knowledge do students draw on in the construction and articulation of a personal response?

Students in my sample partially agree with teachers that they avoid and dislike reading poetry texts. However, some expressed enjoyment of poetry at an early age and talked about the presence of poetry in other parts of their lives. This included poetry at home, enjoyment of performance poetry, and watching poetry online. In this sense I argue there is a disconnect for some students between 'poetry as read for exams' and 'poetry for pleasure'.

Essentially, knowledge that their learning is assessed in high-stakes exams explains how many students describe their reading experience of poems at A level in efferent terms. Some spoke of poems in terms of their use value: enhancing 'key skills' and university applications. However, students also experience a range of personal responses, which I match to my revised Sipe (2000) framework for personalising impulses. For some students, the personalising urge leads to deeply felt aesthetic connection to poems. As Kamali at River Sixth Form said of 'Cousin Kate': *I love that poem … Every time I read that poem it just gives me the feels.*

My classroom observations reveal how quickly engagement can move from efferent to aesthetic poles of reading (Rosenblatt, 1978/1985). I have found aesthetic engagement occurs particularly when small peer groups explore poems and where teachers make space in the classroom for personal engagement and aesthetic appreciation.

In contrast to teachers who privilege visualisation as a way into personal engagement with poems, students argue for the value of sound. Most of the students I interviewed related this to the power of music in their lives, and their insistence on the importance of this for them as adolescents, chimes with previous research (Laiho, 2004; Miranda, 2013). Most students said that they had experienced an aesthetic response in relation to music and identified 'the feels' and 'goosebumps' they get from this.

Unanimously, students said they did not get this experience from their reading poems aloud in the classroom, and they all rejected this practice, finding it a barrier to personal response. This is despite the fact that I saw students regularly asked to read aloud in the classroom, and most teachers in my sample, mistakenly in my view, perceive this to be a valuable practice.

Most students said they enjoy hearing poems read aloud by a skilful reader (usually their teacher) who could read poetry with a dramatic emphasis. Hearing poems read aloud leads a minority of students to experience an aesthetic, personal response to poems in the classroom, as Patricia commented on Amelia's reading: *you get feels, you get feels.* I would argue that, in general, the importance of sound for students is yoked to their understanding of music and their aesthetic response to this. Whilst one or two students were clear that they never experience any aesthetic response to the poems they read at A level, most say they do, and this is something that can be fostered in the classroom.

Research Question 5: In what ways might knowledge of these processes lead to enhancement of adolescent experiences of reading poetry?

In this interpretative study, I have explored key processes that shape poetry reading at A level. As previously discussed, this includes many factors, such as teachers' ideological positions in relation to reading poetry, students' own cultural knowledge and classroom pedagogy.

I acknowledge that from both my methodological and theoretical approach, any knowledge I have arrived at is contingent on many factors and necessarily partial. In the following section I make five specific practical recommendations to enhance adolescent experiences. However, these rest on two broad processes previously identified by my research questions, which I will now explicitly discuss.

Firstly, I look at the agency of teachers and students in the classroom to explore what they can bring to learning and teaching poetry. Following this I identify the underpinning processes of the policy context and the exam within which teachers and students work. I argue that these, above all, severely curtail the experiences of learning poetry for adolescent students at A level.

5.3 Teacher and Student Agency in the Classroom

I would argue that students have the right to engage with poetry as art. In essence, this means they should be given the opportunity to relate to and explore the experience of poetry from an aesthetic reading stance. In this respect, my study identifies how students and teachers can respond to poetry beyond preparation for the exam. Students in my sample have rich cultural knowledge, which they bring to the reading of poetry, and they look to their teachers to help

them engage with the poems they are studying. The majority of students I spoke to said music is the most important art form in their lives, and many students nurture a symbiotic relationship between poetry and music. The link students make between poetry and music is, I believe, significant for my study.

More broadly, I have argued that as adolescents, students in my sample bring newly expanding ideas of themselves and the world about them to their reading. This has the potential to make engagement with poems particularly rich and meaningful to them. I acknowledge that a minority of students said they are keen to work entirely efferently with poems; however, most are not. My study has pinpointed moments of aesthetic engagement with poems in both lesson observations and as reported in focus groups. These moments can be brief, but the satisfactions expressed are deeply felt. I also found that when students feel their personal responses to poems are ignored or dismissed by their teacher, this can lead to resentment and offence.

In this sense, there is a great deal of interest and ability already among students, which makes them capable of enhancing their experiences with poetry. Many teachers in my sample are aware of these abilities, and some actively search for and support spaces in which students can experience poetry as art. These spaces can be found to a limited extent within the classroom and in 'third spaces' such as visits out of the classroom and lunchtime poetry groups. However, the teacher's agency to explore students' responses to poetry is circumscribed by the need for students to pass exams. In this way, teachers are denied their occupational professionalism and subject knowledge of poetry as art. They are pushed instead into organisational professionalism (Moore and Clarke, 2016) and efferent reading in order to ensure exam passes.

Over 20 years ago, Benton (2000) described a 'conveyor belt curriculum' in which pupils' creative writing of poetry was increasingly side-lined in UK secondary schools. Dymoke (2002) researched the impact of exam board anthologies on poetry at GCSE to conclude that 'poetry has become solely, and one could argue deadening linked, with written response on terminal exam papers' (2002, p. 87). She also warned of the detrimental effect this might have on A level students' ability to respond independently to poetry. More recently, Xerri (2013, 2016) has explored the impact of assessment and teacher and student beliefs about poetry in the context of post-16 education in Malta. He found that excessive emphasis on teacher exposition and micro preparation for exams detracts from students' ability to personally respond to poems.

Snapper has argued that A level students need to appreciate that 'poems have a social and aesthetic function … [and are] … more than just obstacles produced by the educational authorities to test their literary sensitivity' (2015, p. 39). He describes the importance of discussing the bifurcation of poetry as experience/part of the formal curriculum with A level students. I agree with this, and at the end of this chapter, I suggest the analogy of a 'weighted seesaw' as a way into this discussion. I also argue that in addition to knowing that poetry can be more than a means to exam passes students are entitled to experience poetry as art. It is with this in mind that in the section *Recommendations*, I offer specific pedagogical advice for teachers to enhance the aesthetic experience of poetry for adolescent students.

5.4 Underpinning Processes: Policy Context and the Exam

Further education in the UK is predicated on individuals sitting externally assessed, unseen exams. This is particularly the case at A level, where successful performance in externally assessed exams leads to entrance into a competitive higher education market. College departments use GCSE grades as baseline scores to set targets and plan for A level students to exceed an algorithm of grade expectations. This is known as the 'value-added' feature of courses. All exam data is reported to the Department for Education and software such as that sold by ALPS (Advanced Level Performance System) is used by colleges to compare scores across institutions and set targets for improvement. This software also enables data to be mapped institutionally by variables such as the gender and ethnicity of students. Exam scores, student retention and value-added data are regularly scrutinised by senior management. Collectively, this data informs inspections from Ofsted and underpins future development of the college. Exams are a linchpin in the mechanical cycle of a college year. It is this which Will referred to (above) when he called his college *'a kind of exam-taking machine.'*

The current system of a high-stakes exam system in England has been criticised on many grounds. It leads to restrictive and performative teaching (Ball, 2003) and has been seen to lead to a diet of narrow external assessment dependent on failures. Exam failures can have significant impact on young people's life chances (Freedman, 2022). This century, both the Tomlinson Report (2004) and the recent Times Education Commission's report *Bringing out the Best* (2021) have recommended replacing A levels with a baccalaureate exam. However, to

effect this would involve an immense overhaul in terms of the wider schooling and university system.

The previous Conservative government consulted on the Advance British Standard Baccalaureate framework. This would have replaced both academic and vocational qualifications (including A levels) with a broader offer of subjects. This long-term plan would have had considerable impact on the work of further education colleges, although the consultation document, *A World-class Education System* (2024), argued for the retention of external exams as the main mode of assessment. At the time of writing (July 2024) this plan has been shelved by the new Labour Government. It appears, therefore, that preparing students to pass A level exams, whilst not the exclusive work of colleges, will remain a firm foundation of their work for the foreseeable future.

It is evident that high-stakes exam preparation profoundly shapes what happens in the English A level classroom. Teachers and students are constrained by and actively invested in learning material that will gain exam passes. For teachers, consistently low exam passes are adjudged as poor work. Low passes lead to managerial intervention, and ultimately, teachers adjudged as 'underperforming' can be dismissed under capability procedures (NASUWT, 2012). Equally, I would argue that the need to pass exams exerts a huge social demand on adolescent time and attention. It can be argued that the very identity of being a student involves buying into ideas of achieving good exam passes.

In short, the weight and demand of the exam shapes all teaching and learning. Whilst I would argue this has a particularly deleterious effect on the experience of poetry it is important to acknowledge the agency that teachers and students have in the classroom.

I believe that my work contributes to knowledge of poetry education in further education. It shows how deeply the 'exam conveyor belt' impacts on the experiences of adolescents in London colleges studying English at A level. The dominance of the exam regime at A level has a detrimental effect on students' experiences of responding to poems. One can advocate in broad terms for more inclusive methods of assessment, as Xerri (2016) does, but it's important to acknowledge there is little space for this. The need to produce certain kinds of responses to gain marks in externally assessed and time constrained exams, constantly pulls students and

teachers to the efferent end of reader response. One way in which this effect occurs is explored at the end of this chapter, where I describe the analogy of a 'weighted seesaw'.

To conclude, adolescent students in my study show that they can do more than learn material to pass exams. They are capable of engaging deeply with poetry at the level of personal meaning and response. However, too often, this personal engagement is side-lined and denied by students and teachers because both are invested in the system as it is organised. It can be argued that as a consequence of the exam system, much joy in the playfulness of poetry is lost, and adolescent students lose their cultural entitlement to relate poems to their lived experiences. Without fundamental change to the education system and its relationship to wider society, this situation seems set to continue.

5.5 Recommendations

It is within the restrictive context described above that I make the following specific pedagogical recommendations:

1. Small group work is important and utilising Sipe's framework can be useful in this.

From a social constructivist perspective, learning is primarily social and cultural (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Activity and engagement are, therefore, crucial for students to generate efferent and aesthetic responses to literature. Previous research cited in this study shows that small groups offer students more autonomy over making meaning with texts (Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith, 1995). For adolescents particularly, conversation in small groups increases participation and engagement Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith (1995); Mironova (2019). My findings echo these studies, and I recommend that, in principle, teachers regularly use small group work with adolescents reading poetry.

There are three additional and related powerful reasons for mobilising group work to support engagement with poetry at the level of personal meaning and response. Firstly, adolescent minds are developing so that they can think in newly active and reflective ways (Kegan, 1994). Secondly, group work can assist with this because we know that peer groups have special significance for adolescents as they mediate the growth of social identity (Erikson, 1968). Finally, when adolescents make meaning with literary texts in groups, they tend to make

personal connections with texts as they work to make meaning (Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith 1995). There are no recipes for ensuring 'successful' group work as there are so many factors impacting this which are outside of teacher control. However, I would suggest that Sipe's (2000) framework could be a useful 'laddering' tool to support personal meanings and responses. For example, teachers might evoke intertextual responses to poems, asking open questions such as *How might this poem present as a film or piece of music? Does any part of this poem remind you of aspects of your own experience?* Beyond using elements of Sipe's (2000) framework to support discussion, teachers might usefully spend time sharing the whole framework with adolescent students. This would help develop meta-cognition concerning their own range of responses to poems.

2. There is a need to sensitively manage reading responses in groups.

My research has shown that small group discussion can generate powerful responses and that these can, at times, become problematic. Personal responses in small groups, at times, become silenced or negatively focused on relationships between students in the group. I found personal response in small groups to be particularly troubling in two instances. These occurred where two poems were being discussed that raised issues about inequalities with regard to sexuality and ethnicity.

How and what teachers say about their subject impacts on how students in groups speak to each other and approach tasks (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Teachers in my study seem aware of this as they are conscious of their role as models for adolescent students. I would also recommend that teachers anticipate that adolescents who are asserting early adult identities might feel social and economic inequalities keenly. It could contribute to adolescent experiences of poems to have preparatory discussions of potentially sensitive topics before exploring texts. Clearly shared boundaries for group work discussion and raising awareness of group dynamics amongst students might also be of use here.

3. Teachers might consider reviewing the practice of 'read aloud around the classroom'.

Adolescent students in my study unanimously rejected the practice of being asked to take turns to read poems aloud, taking turns around the room. My small study, therefore, suggests that

teachers might review this practice. Of course, some students will enjoy reading aloud, and I assume, for example, that the student in Philip's lesson who was asked to read Yeats' poem aloud is one of these. However, students in my sample rejected the practice of being asked to read stanzas aloud, irrespective of choice and pleasure. Many expressed anxieties about the practice and for some, 'reading aloud round the classroom' actively interfered with their ability to make meaning with the poem.

Hearing poems aloud is, I have argued, an important aspect of personal meaning making and response. It increases the collective experience of poetry and reinforces insights from reader response theories that reading is a cultural event (Middleton, 2005). Reading is also a transactional event in which the 'audience plays an active part' (Rosenblatt, 1994) and sometimes, to read effectively, we need to hear the poem performed by skilled readers. The reader might be a student, especially where they identify with the language used (see Mick's experience with Grace Nicholl explored in *Analysis and Discussion*). However, students in my sample said they preferred hearing teachers read the whole poem rather than students. This is because they believe teachers can convey meanings through their reading. Listening to the poem without fear of being asked to read enables students to actively participate in the work of the poem for themselves.

4. Promote the role of sound and, especially, poems' relationship with music.

This recommendation is strongly allied to point 3 above. Teachers in my study emphasised the role of visualisation for making meaning with poems, and where teachers discussed the role of sound, it was with reservations. For example, Bella said that poems are *meant to be heard* but could not exist in the classroom, while Will thought of the role of sound and music as potentially important for adolescent students but worried about using this in case it seemed *patronising.* Students in my study emphasised the role of music on their lives, and I have described their relationship with music and poetry as 'symbiotic'. Many also expressed the opinion that hearing poems read aloud was of great importance. I was able to see in both lesson observations and focus groups that experiencing the sound of poems could evoke aesthetic responses. Previous research, cited in my literature review from the USA (Jocson, 2006) and Australia (Weaven and Clark, 2013), has explored the importance of sound and music in relation to poetry. Music as an art form is especially important for adolescents. Openly

recognising and exploring the relationship of music to poetry with adolescent students might considerably enhance their personal responses to and enjoyment of poetry.

5. Finding ways to escape the strictures of the exam and share enjoyment of poetry matters.

This finding echoes that of Sigvardsson (2020), whose Swedish study found that drawing on students' personal responses and sharing teacher responses to poems increases aesthetic pleasure in the classroom. Adolescent students in my study were enthused by teachers who shared poems they enjoyed, and they reported valuing activities outside of the classroom. There are cost implications to the latter, which may restrict use of 'third-space' learning. However, the strictures of the exam can, to some extent, be resisted within the classroom. Multimodal activities undertaken in the A level Creative Writing syllabus, which draw on students' own cultural references, might be usefully exploited in A level English classrooms. These included many online activities, for example, shared reading and blogging; posting songs under the moniker *The Song that Saved My Life*; storytelling with found objects; and making photos with smartphones to illustrate texts. It would be possible for these activities to take place alongside and complement teaching and learning at A level English.

5.6 Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations to my study. It is, by definition, a small-scale exploratory piece of work and, therefore, empirical and external generalisation beyond inner-city further education colleges should be guarded against (Maxwell, 2013). Concepts of 'trustworthiness' and 'transferability' are relevant here. Furlong and Oancea (2005) argue that the concept of trustworthiness can mean many things depending on the paradigm that research sits within. In terms of qualitative research, 'trustworthiness' refers to ideas of believability, dependability, and fair representation of people and places under exploration. Transferability is a specific aspect of trustworthiness concerned with the extent to which findings may be found in other settings by a reader familiar with the circumstances of the research Guba (1981; Shenton, 2004). In essence, where trustworthy and detailed reporting are present, readers of research will be able to assess how far findings of research may be transferred to other settings.

My interpretative qualitative study, shines a light on the ways in which adolescents in inner-city education colleges engage with poetry at the level of meaning and response. Using triangulated methods and through prolonged engagement in the field, my research explores the lived experiences of poetry reading in the classroom. I believe I have shown detailed, nuanced, and reflexive interpretations that are key in qualitative studies (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I have included and represented voices of key participants for this study: teachers and students, and these are from a range of colleges. In this sense, I believe my research meets the criteria of validity outlined by Hammersley (1992, p. 69), namely: 'An account is valid or true if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise'. I claim my research is trustworthy because it offers 'thick descriptions … (and includes) … contextual information about the research sites' (Stahl and King, 2020, p. 28). In this way, my research has capacity for transferability to similar circumstances.

I experienced some practical difficulties in collecting data. My research took place at a time of extensive merger and consolidation in further education colleges (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2016). Accessing colleges, therefore, took some time, and this was especially the case where uncertainty over the future direction of colleges contributed to industrial action. For example, staff at Crossroads Tertiary, where mergers were taking place, were engaged in a long-running dispute in 2018 over pay, conditions, and trade union rights. In two other colleges, a manager expressed an interest in my research, but staff were clearly not keen to take part, expressing the fear that taking part might increase their workload, so I had to withdraw. I have also acknowledged where there were practical limitations in terms of observation and interview data. For example, the rushed and incomplete interview with Tom means I am cautious about my interpretation of his ideological position in relation to poetry teaching.

The pandemic in March 2020 came at the end of my data collection. Whilst it did not, therefore, directly affect data collection, it did slightly affect my ability to double-check interview data. For example, at the start of Anna's lesson, she declared that *today is not so much teaching, teaching, more like, do this, do that.* I did not notice the comment during the lesson observation, but the distinction she was making puzzled me after reading the transcription. In 'normal' times I would have returned to ask her what she meant as it seemed possibly important for understanding the lesson and her teaching. The pandemic made this impossible.

Finally, I could have further explored opportunities to find out about the personal responses of students taking Creative Writing A level. Students on this now discontinued course were deeply engaged in multimodal (Massaro,2012) approaches to learning. Activities included writing blogs, taking photos, and sampling music. They also took cultural artefacts such as found objects and repurposed them in their responses to texts, acts which Curwood (2013) calls 'remixing'.

Although I interviewed the teacher (Arthur) and observed a lesson with these students, I was not able, due to timetabling and time constraints, to include any of these students in the focus group at London Tertiary College. In hindsight, I see this as a missed opportunity. It is possible that Creative Writing students may have had distinct ideas about agency and personal response to poems which could have further enhanced my research.

5.7 Opportunities for Further Research

There are several directions which further research could take in relation to this thesis. Three possibilities are:

- My work is set in London inner-city colleges where students are from a variety of ethnic and economic backgrounds. Previous research (e.g., Brooks and Browne, 2012) has shown that ethnicity, peers, and community influence powerfully how adolescents respond to texts. It would be illuminating, therefore, to explore ways in which adolescent students in further education settings outside inner cities, perhaps in rural areas of the country, make personal connections with poetry.
- My research sampled freely from poetry lessons in both English Literature and Language and English Literature A levels. I did not distinguish between the poetry texts of either and did not compare different exam boards. Comparative research could either look at English Literature and Language and English Literature A levels or explore different exam syllabuses to see if there are differences between the reading experiences of each.
- The students in my sample enjoyed teachers reading poems aloud to them and found that this contributed positively to their ability to personally respond to poems. Exploring what makes for effective reading aloud of poetry to adolescent students in the classroom would be a significant question to answer.

5.8 Originality and Contribution to Knowledge

1. Personal responses to poetry in colleges of further education

My research has explored 'personal responses' to poetry in the context of further education colleges in London between 2017–2020. I have emphasised the important role of adolescence in the process of making meaning with poems for both teachers and students. To my knowledge, this has not been explored before, and I have captured nuanced voices of teachers and students in my exploratory study. This is an original aspect of my work.

2. Adaptation of Sipe's (2000) Framework

I applied a form of Sipe's framework for exploring literary responses in the classroom. I found his framework a useful tool for my work because it maps well to Rosenblatt's theories of reader response to emphasise how social and cultural factors impact on meaning making. To my knowledge, this framework has not been used with adolescent A level students. I decided that the original framework needed adaptations for my purposes. Therefore, I expanded illustrative examples of categories to include adolescent responses to literary texts and contrasted these with those of young children (see Appendix A). Secondly, I explicitly cited the 'personalising impulse' as a route into both efferent and aesthetic reading. Adapting Sipe and using it as a methodological tool is, therefore, an original feature of my work.

3. Reconciliation of personal response with pressures to pass the A level exam

My sample suggests that full reconciliation between reading for personal response and reading poems to pass exams is not possible. While some teachers work to mitigate the effect of exams and try to cultivate personal responses through, for example, group discussion and multimodal teaching, this work is constantly frustrated by the exam-based system within which teachers and students work. There is a persistent pull toward efferent reading, and this can be helpfully described by my analogy of the weighted seesaw at the end of this chapter.

4. Teachers of poetry in further education colleges in my study are restricted by an 'accountability culture'

My study adds to those that have explored the effects of the 'accountability culture' on poetry in schools, for example, Dymoke (2002), Hennessey *et al.* (2011), and Gordon (2018) and identifies this phenomenon in the context of further education colleges. Applying the concept of 'cruel optimism' I show the negative impact of the 'accountability culture' on teachers of poetry. Many teachers in my sample express upset at the restrictions the culture places on them. It seems they must forfeit professional knowledge for 'exam knowledge'.

5. Adolescents in my study engage with poetry at the level of personal meaning and response

I found that adolescents in my sample can experience strongly felt personal responses to poetry taught at A Level. Factors particular to adolescence such as developing minds and increased self-agency and efficacy also mean that aesthetic experiences can be deeply felt at this time of life. The foundational aspect of the exam acts in some ways to stifle personal response and some students feel unhappy and resentful of this.

6. Music relates to the experience of personal meaning and response for adolescents in my study

Teachers in my sample prioritised visualisation as a means of eliciting personal responses and tended to neglect the role of sound in this regard. However, students in my sample were keen to discuss the role of sound in making meaning with poems and I have characterised their relationship with music and poetry as 'symbiotic'. A key finding therefore is that musical connection is understood to be very important for adolescents studying A Level English. The weight of this importance appears not to be shared by their teachers.

5.9 The Analogy of the Weighted Seesaw.

A seesaw is a well-known piece of playground equipment consisting of a long seat which pivots at the midpoint where the seesaw is supported by a fulcrum. Two people or more can either balance the long seat by arranging their weight so that it is evenly distributed, or they can exert pressure to make the ends of the seat go up and down.

In my analogy, a seesaw represents the classroom reading experience. Broadly speaking we can think of the students 'playing' on the seesaw and teachers managing this experience. This analogous seesaw is anchored at the centre by the cultural foundation of reading. Many elements constitute this cultural foundation. Some are nationally decided and standardised and, therefore, are not directly in control of the teacher. Others are more or less under the local control of the teacher who manages the seesaw. Examples of nationally standardised elements include syllabus, assessment regime and funded learning hours. More local elements might include teaching experience perspectives on reading and pedagogical choices made in a college setting.

The movement of the seesaw seat represents a range of reading responses. One end notionally represents efferent reading, and the other aesthetic reading. In my analogy, adolescent students rarely sit permanently at either end. This is because where they sit depends on their lived and changeable engagement with classroom reading. Most students, therefore, move up and down the seat, sometimes alone and sometimes with friends.

To stretch the analogy of the seat of the seesaw, one might envisage that, during aesthetic response, students are engaged with poems as art and experience a 'felt freedom' as they are lifted above their seat. By contrast, during efferent response, they firmly land on earth and are in contact with the currency of the poem as an exam. It is important to note that students can experience satisfaction at either end of the seesaw.

My research suggests that all further education teachers are concerned at some level with both ends of the seesaw seat. They aim to manage everyone's experience regardless of where they sit. This is because teachers know that students can experience poems in a variety of ways, and they need to engage them in reading. At the very least teachers want to ensure that no one is either flung off the seesaw or remains entirely grounded. They, therefore, stand on or hold the centre of the seesaw as students move up and down the seat. In this way, teachers try to maintain some kind of balance even as student movements destabilise the seesaw.

The problem is that the teacher's challenging task is made even more difficult by the fact that the seesaw is unevenly weighted. The foundation of the seesaw is uneven because exams dominate the experience of reading. This results in a gravitational pull to the efferent end of the seesaw, meaning that most reading responses tend to slide to the efferent end of the seesaw.

This creates dilemmas for the teacher. If s/he leaves the midpoint to try to leverage students from the efferent end, s/he may abandon the aesthetic end, leaving students stuck in the air or 'springing off' the seat, that is, feeling unacknowledged and abandoned. Alternatively, pushing efferent responses into the air can be exhausting and ineffective.

Mitigating the weighted effect of the seesaw while in use is, in principle, also not possible because personal responses to poems (where the students sit and move) are complicated, fleeting and cannot simply be teacher directed.

One possible course of action is to discuss the design of the seesaw with the students so that they are aware of the inbuilt bias to the equipment and can consider how and where to sit and 'play' on the seesaw. A drawback is that this discussion would take time and relies on transparent discussions about the design of A level 'equipment'. It also depends on student engagement and self-awareness of their own learning; however, it is one way to deal with the problem of the 'weighted' seesaw.

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Appendix A: Comparative Framework for Exploring Literary Responses: Sipe's Original Framework (2000) for Children with Picture Books Contrasted with My Adaptation for Adolescents Reading Poetry

Aspect of Literary Response	Child Stance (Sipe)	Adolescent stance (My adaptation)	Likely range of child responses to picture books (Sipe) Illustrative quotation	Likely range of adolescent response to poems (My adaptation) Illustrative quotation
Analytic Reading within the text	Efferent stance toward reading: text is an object and comments reflect an analytical approach, aim is textual mastery *Hermeneutic impulse*	Efferent stance toward reading: text is an object and comments reflect an analytical approach, aim is textual mastery *Hermeneutic impulse*	Comment on text as a cultural product e.g., pictures Focus on language Interpret narrative meaning Discuss relationship between fiction and reality Illustrative quotation: 'look at that moon – a full moon' Terry (Sipe 2000, 265)	Same as child range, with greater sophistication to summarise/synthesise predict/ infer/ criticise/ theorise about themes/ symbols/ metaphors (n.b., these activities are the focus of A Level English Lang Lit / Lit assessment) Illustrative quotation: 'I was thinking [the poem's title is Hour] sounds like OUR – like it's 'our' special time – the two of them together' FS (Amelia's class yr 1 Lang Lit)
Intertextual Reading related to other cultural products	Efferent stance toward reading: text is an object and comments reflect an analytical approach, aim is textual mastery	Efferent and possibly aesthetic stance: text as an object may be experienced aesthetically through synthesis with	Comparing the text to another eg: film, book, advertisement, TV show or work of classmates. May do this in associative,	Similar to child range with greater experience and more independent reach over cultural product and comparisons. Music is especially indicated as a

	Hermeneutic impulse	music, aim is textual mastery and exploration *Hermeneutic and possible aesthetic impulse*	analytical or synthesising way Illustrative quotation: 'I think it's going to turn out like Cinderella' Mickey (Sipe, 2000, 266)	significant source of intertextual reading Illustrative quotation: 'Miss! Sing it – we'll understand it more' FS (Anna's class Lang Lit Yr2)
Personal Reading relating text to life and back again	Neither efferent nor aesthetic but concerned with identification *Neither Hermeneutic or aesthetic impulse*	Potential bridge into efferent or aesthetic realm as adolescents draw on cultural tools and childhood experiences, sophisticated ability to differentiate between self and others *Hermeneutic and possible aesthetic impulse*	Linking the story to the self and self to the story. Positing self as a character, characters as 'protean creatures who children can personally control' Illustrative quotation: 'that's not what I would do' anon (Sipe, 2000,267)	Potential for multiple exploration of viewpoints. Potential problematisation of self and what constitutes reality can enable a variety of readings (Kegan) Illustrative quotation: 'you can tell when a teacher is maybe pissed off at a class and has that look about them. I mean we see it' FS (Arthur's class Creative Writing Yr2)
Transparent Reading within the world of the text	Intense aesthetic participation in the world of the text, no external aim to reading. Receptive reading is characterised as 'surrender' to the text	Intense aesthetic participation in the world of the text, no external aim to reading. Receptive reading is actively recreative and therefore shares aspects of personal reading	Not easy to observe as this is often a moment of interiority. Spontaneous responses and low tones of speech, interjecting reading may be indicative	Similar to child range, this response is not always easy to observe. May be characterised similarly by spontaneity and paralinguistic features 'wow!' sighs and laughter. Response may link back to personal reading impulse and identification at this

	Aesthetic impulse	*Aesthetic impulse*	Illustrative quotation: Teacher reads from story 'I will be Queen!' Several low voices 'no you won't' (Sipe, 2000,267)	age because the self is a category to think through rather than with (Kegan) Illustrative quotation: FS: I like the last line FS2: Yeah… FS1: War ! like/ FS2: yeah it's very dramatic FS1: It's stereotyping but at the same time its' true, that's the thing, it's the dangers of being out of the doors of education FS2 Mmmmmm (Arthur's lesson Creative Writing Yr 2)
Performative Manipulating the text for creative purposes	Children creatively manipulate the text often using physical expression. This may be mis- assigned as disruptive behaviour by the teacher rather than aesthetic response because their behaviour violates the norms of the class *Aesthetic impulse*	Adolescents manipulate the text in a creative and considered way not likely to be spontaneously expressed in the classroom. The receptive becomes expressive in nature. *Aesthetic impulse*	Spontaneous acting out with physical as well as emotional expressions 'carnivalesque behaviour' Illustrative response described: Children twirling around as Peter Pan in class during reading (Sipe, 2000)	Greater social restraint than with less 'acting out' but potentially more variety of creative expression managed through eg: assessment outcome for (discontinued) A Level Creative Writing No illustrative response from lesson but intertextual creativity reported in focus group: 'it's [Emily Dickinson poem] related to a song I used to listen to a lot so it helps me with erm …remembering it – it's got the same ideas. 'One may not be a chamber to be haunted' and the song's got that idea about a haunted house

				going through it. And I listen to that song a lot – it's called Head like a Haunted House and when I listen to it that poem pops into my head. And I listen to it to do that and it helps me read the poem' MS Bella's class Yr 1 Lang Lit

Appendix B: Anonymised Description of Participating Teachers

Name and college	***Experience of further education***	***Comments***
Amelia - River Sixth Form	Third year of teaching (including training year). Trained to work in FE because of her experience of younger students as an undergraduate.	Did her English degree as a mature student, works alone as the English teacher in her college within a wider humanities department.
Anna – Crossroads Tertiary	Twenty-one yrs teaching experience, the majority at this college. Trained to work in FE, never wanted to work in schools.	Works within a large team of English teachers, many longstanding. (College disrupted at the time of observation by strikes). Has a degree in English Literature.
Arthur – London Tertiary	Fourteen yrs experience as teacher of English Literature and latterly Creative Writing. Trained to work in FE, never wanted to work in schools. Always worked at this college.	Final year of teaching. About to leave the profession as Creative Writing is being discontinued. Works as the sole teacher of Creative Writing at the college. Has a master's degree in Contemporary English Studies.
Ayesha – Crossroads Tertiary	Twelve yrs experience teaching English. Originally trained to work in secondary schools. Moved to FE because preferred the content of the courses and the age of the students.	At this college for ten yrs. Previously worked in secondary. Has a master's degree in Modern Literature. Works in the same team as Anna.
Barry – London Tertiary	Nine yrs of experience teaching English. Originally trained to work in secondary schools. Moved to FE because preferred the content of the courses.	At this college for 5 yrs, spent four yrs at a school before this. Works in the same team as Bella. Has a degree in English Literature.
Bella – London Tertiary	Twenty-one yrs experience teaching English. Trained to work in FE, did not want to work with younger students.	Works part time in the same team as Barry. Has a degree in American Studies.

Tom-Eastern Sixth Form	Five yrs experience at this college teaching English. Trained to work in FE because his father enjoyed working in the sector and wanted to work with this age group.	Works in a team with Will, Philip and Zara. Has a degree in English Literature.
Mick – Crossroads Tertiary	Thirty yrs experience of teaching including senior managerial roles in FE. Was not observed teaching as had just retired when interviewed.	Did his English degree as a mature student. Has a PhD in a field related to the novel.
Philip – Eastern Sixth Form	Six yrs experience of teaching including one year in adult education. Completed his PGCE in FE part time, while working at the college.	Works in a team with Tom, Will and Zara. Has a Masters degree in English Literature.
Will – Eastern Sixth Form	Twenty-one yrs experience of teaching. Previously taught in the USA in Higher Education. Made a positive decision to move back to the UK and teach in FE.	Works in a team with Tom, Philip and Zara. Has a PhD in a field related to poetry.
Zara – Eastern Sixth Form	Five yrs experience of teaching, second year of teaching at the college in FE. Originally trained to teach in secondary schools. Moved to FE wanting to teach this age group.	Works in a team with Tom, Will and Philip. Has a degree in English Literature.

Appendix C: Anonymised Observation Sheet Used in Lessons

Observation Information sheet

Syllabus Level and lesson title ENGLISH LIT YR (1) AQA

College /date/ time L.6th form 9am 21.2.18

Room A.17

Teacher name SOPHIE

Number of students present / on register 16 / 16

Gender 4 male, 12 female

Ethnicity Mixed, Turkish, Asian, Black

Context – teacher information, aims of the lesson and previous future learning

Unseen poem exam prep: George Sephare. Sophie concerned they find this hard to prepare for. Reading practice is key - Sophie warned about independent reading - explore poem reading as class, then groups.

Classroom layout



AOB? Miscellaneous

Shared alone lesson,
nb: class have previously discussed theme of protest & political dissent

Appendix D. Table Showing Lessons Observed by Qualification, Date and Teacher

College	Qualification and year of study	Poet and poems taught	Teacher, observation date
Crossroads Tertiary	AQA English Literature Year 2	Sheers, *Stitch in Time* *(other poems were not recorded at student request)*	Ayesha: 27.04.18 (student presentations)
	Edexcel English Language and Literature Year 2	Rossetti, *Goblin Market*	Anna: 29.01.20
Eastern Sixth Form	WJEC English Language and Literature Year 2	Herrick, *To Virgins To Make Much of Time* Rossetti, *A Birthday* Marlowe, *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love* Yeats, *He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven* Essay feedback and exam skills Exam preparation students discussing poems to compare with novel by McEwan, *Saturday*	Will: 23.01.17 Philip: 23.01.17 (includes Yeats poem) (parallel classes) Philip: 24.01.17 Philip: 26.02.18 and 27.02.18
	AQA English Literature Year 1	Keats, *Lamia* (part 1) Kay, *George Square* Soyinka, *Telephone Conversation*	Tom: 03.03.17 Zara: 03.03.17 (parallel classes) Zara: 21.02.18 Zara: 21.03.18 Zara: 26.03.18
London Tertiary	OCR English Literature Year 1 AQA Creative Writing Year 2 OCR English Language and Literature Year 1	Chaucer, *The Merchants Tale* (excerpt) Rae Jones, *Decline and Fall* Dickinson (overview of anthology)	Barry: 28.03.17 Arthur: 21.04.17 Bella: 06.03.18
River Sixth Form	OCR English Language and Literature Year 1	Duffy, *Hour* Duffy, *Epiphany,* and *Rapture*	Amelia: 31.01.18 Amelia: 07.02.18

Appendix E: Indicative Interview Questions (Teachers)

Semi-structured interview schedule.

About themselves and teaching in the college: to establish their relationship to further education and the college they work in.

- Can you tell me about yourself and how you came to be a teacher in further education?
- How long have you been teaching here? What you teach?
- What is it like working at X college?
- What led you to teach in a college?

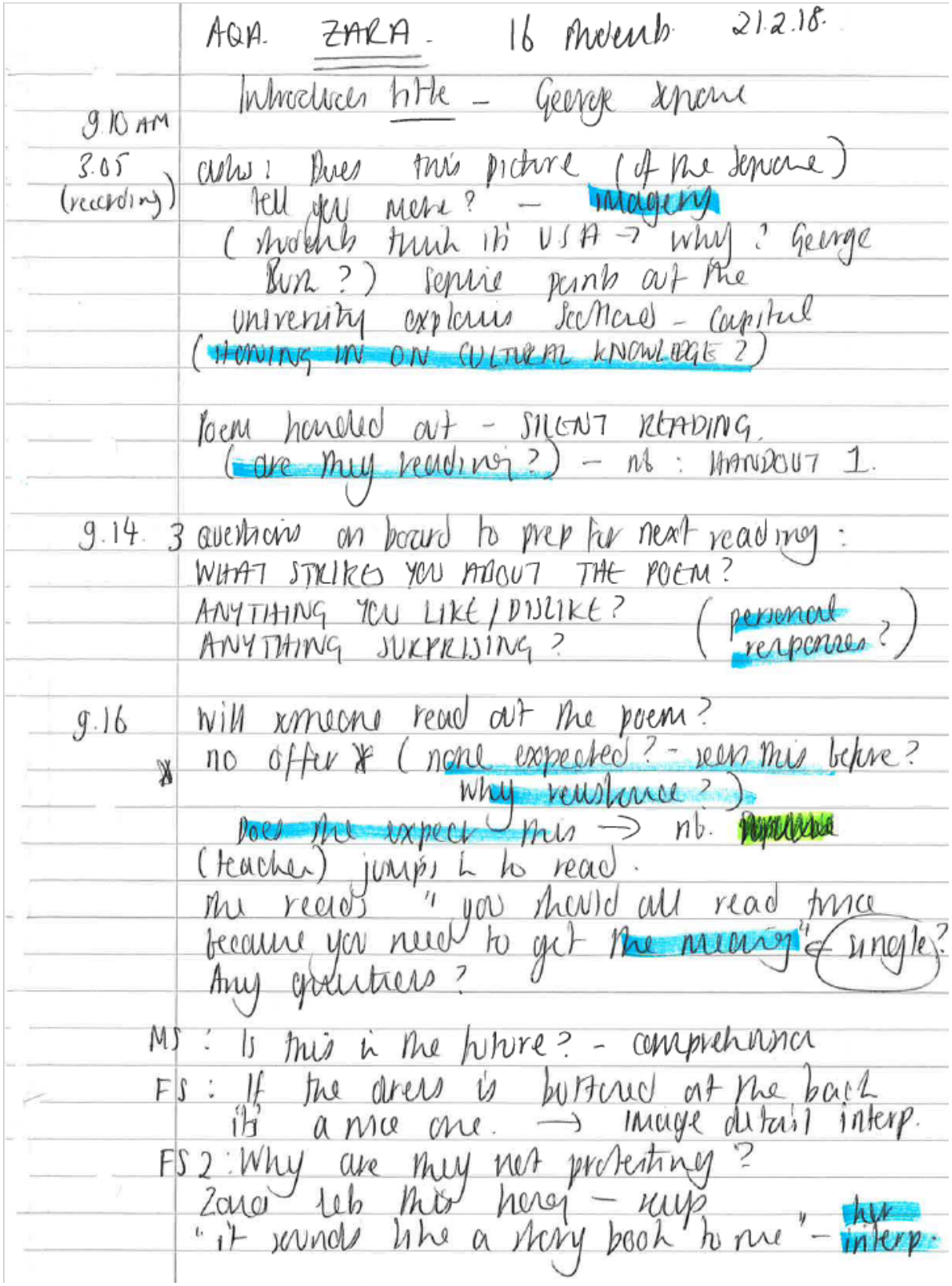
About poetry and teaching poetry: to probe their approaches to teaching and how they see their students and their experiences of poetry.

- Can you tell me if you have any personal interest or connection with poetry?
- What is it like teaching poetry at A Level?
- How do you prefer to teach poetry?
- What kinds of teaching strategies do you use? (probe for challenges that they may see as unique to poetry teaching)
- What are the most important things for your students to learn when you teach poetry?
- How do you think your students find learning poetry? (probe for barriers and connections they see students making)
- What do your students say about learning poetry? Is this typical in your experience?
- What does a typical poetry lesson look like for you?
- How do students read poems in your class?
- How do you support students to read poems in your class?
- Are there any incidents that stand out in your mind from recent teaching that illustrate any of the points you have made?
- Would you like to add anything about your experience of teaching poetry which we haven't covered?

About outcomes and assessment: to probe how they prepare students for the exam

- Can you tell me about the syllabus you teach?
- What are the outcomes which students need to show at the end of this course?
- What do you hope students will have learnt from this course?
- How do you know your teaching has been successful?
- Are there any particular challenges teaching this syllabus/ these poems?

Appendix F: Reflective Notes Made in Lesson



AQA. ZARA. 16 March 21.2.18.

9.10 AM — Introduces title – George Seurat

3.05 (recording) — asks: Does this picture (of the Seurat) tell you more? – imagery (March think it's USA → why? George Bush?) Sophie pumb at the university explains Seurat – Capital (moving in on cultural knowledge?)

Poem handed out – SILENT READING (are they reading?) – nb: HANDOUT 1.

9.14 3 questions on board to prep for next reading: WHAT STRIKES YOU ABOUT THE POEM? ANYTHING YOU LIKE/DISLIKE? ANYTHING SURPRISING? (personal responses?)

9.16 Will someone read out the poem?

* no offer * (none expected? – seen this before? why resistance?) Does he expect this → nb. [illegible]

(Teacher) jumps in to read.

He reads "you should all read twice because you need to get the meaning" – single?

Any questions?

MS: Is this in the future? – comprehension

FS: If the dress is buttoned at the back it's a nice one. → image detail interp.

FS 2: Why are they not protesting?

Zara reb this here – says "it sounds like a story book to me" – her interp.

30♀ ♂① ♂→②

4♀

MU misinterpretation

EXCEL

11.15.

[redacted] 4 stu 2 ♂→ 2 ♀

29.1.20.

Rossetti - Runner class - 4 students

- exam return - exam drew non grade borderline

AL. " not too much teacher teacher, more like, do this do that" → moving over to you to students

11.25 AL " Today is more difficult poem' ↳ expectations of students let up?

Goblin Market

♂→① who whom? NO NO — personal response.

♀→ it's easier to take response of it — what do they

♂→② like the symbolic imagery - the moral tone?

♀ temptation

② it's like a fantasy novel - imagery (efferent language)

AL it's a fantasy a fairy tail fantasy form.- what's the form? — analytic

♂→① Ballad.

AL - we'll look at the rhythm today what else do you like?

♀ I like the way the 2 sisters & how they talk the antimesis of morality?

AL what antimesis mean-? (comprehension analysis)

♀ - (explains opposites characters)

AL What do we mean by Vic. Morality? morality, women & patriarchy historical context - evaluate

AL How are men seen?

AL explains double standard (1min recording) does it reflect or oppose v. morality?

Appendix G: Indicative Focus Group Questions (Students)

About past experiences of poetry: to find out about the knowledge and experiences they already have in relation to poetry.

- Can you tell me a bit about your past experiences of poetry, this might be at school at home or somewhere else?
- Did you study poetry at school? What was that like?
- Have you ever enjoyed reading poetry for its own sake??
- Do you have any poetry books at home? Are you a poetry reading family/ anyone in your family read/like poems?
- Have you ever picked up a poetry book to read from the library to read? (which/when)
- Would you ever look online for poems? Have you? (which/when)
- Would you listen to a performance poet? Have you? (which/when)
- Have you ever read a poem or poetry book for pleasure? (which/when)

About studying poems at college on this course: to find out about their thoughts about poetry in general on their courses. To probe their experiences in relation to the exam.

- Poetry is one part of your A level study, you also read novels and plays/ other texts, write poems (on Creative Writing course). Do you have any preferences of what kind of literature you read on this course? If so, what?
- Does studying poetry in general have any value for you? If so, what?
- Can you tell me which poems and poets you have studied so far on this course?
- How do you feel when you know that a poetry lesson is coming up?
- How confident are you feeling about the exam – do you feel prepared in terms of poetry?
- What has prepared you for this?
- Of the poems that you have studied are there any that stand out for you? If so, what and why?
- Are there any poems you have particularly liked or disliked?
- Are there any poets you have particularly liked or disliked?
- If someone, say an aunt or friend asked you in general what kinds of poems you have studied on your course what would you say?
- Would you say you have felt a connection with any of the poems you have read?
- If so, which and how did that happen?

About reading poems at college: to explore the ways in which students specifically experience reading and learning poems.

- How do your teachers get you to read poems in the class? (Silently/ whole class/ listen to recording/ read a whole poem aloud or part of one?)
- When you read poems in class how do you go about it?

- When you are asked by the teacher to read a poem for yourself how do you approach that? What sorts of reading do you do? (Quickly/ slowly/ savour individual words / look for a story / spot techniques?)
- How do you most like to read poems in the class?
- Do you read aloud in class? What is that like?

Appendix H: Examples of Coding

1. Data familiarisation: Initial organisation of teacher questions for comparison on a spreadsheet.

Name	What they say about their approach to teaching poetry	Why sixth form	Professed teaching style	Egs of teaching strategies from obs	Comments on aesthetic readings	How they see student's views of poetry
(Ameila)	wants the students to have an experience of poetry that she had as a mature student. She came to love poetry as she engaged with it in later life. She wants the students to have a 'human response' to poems	A Level as more challenging plus the enthusiasm and skills of sixth form students she met as a mature student turned her on to teaching when she graduated	eclectic but based on exchange and discussion in whole class and small groups. She is supported by online research and her own reading and more widely by use of approved exam books and resources plus a mentor – she is the only teacher teaching A and AS English Lang/ Lit and Lit in the college	small group discussions lots of talking and sharing of ideas in large and small groups, use of collapsed poems illustrative student quote?'ooo I think you're right miss!'	calls this the human response. She wants them to experience poems and have a' human response' but the students sometimes resist this kind of reading 'I say right ok what do you think these words suggest … like Hour which they still find difficult. They don't want that human response it's – it's too difficult for them'.	students like rhymes and rhythm, sometimes they think all poems should rhyme. However, she does focus on sound in her teaching - see next column. She talks about students being resistant to some types of reading and the questions she asks, they want themes and she wants them to think about sounds and words

(Barry)	poems are important texts because they are useful for teaching about language and how language works- 'poetry is a brilliant work out for teachers and students' also 'they're really good texts for showing students how to do oral analysis' Strongly efferent	finds the challenge of A level satisfying he likes teaching Shakespeare for example. There are fewer behavioural problems too	use of his 'poetry toolkit'. This is Who, what, where, there are repeated questions and a teaching frame. Like Zara and Tom he relies on thematic reading first, what is this about? Situating the narrative is important for him. After this he asks them 'what is the message of the poem' Rhyme and rhythm go last, sound supports meaning	lots of engagement with the whole class punctuated by small group work. Very teacher led. He is a mediator and in teaching Chaucer he was able to introduce lots of contextual knowledge and play with the language. He uses an interlinear translation of the poem. Extensive use of imagery to support meaning making and discussion of words and their possible connotations. Hugely skilful in questioning	no overt reference to this - he was the most efferent in the way that he articulated himself in interview always relating the experience of the poem to assessment purposes. Even where he talked about students being asked to write a critical appreciation which he called 'old fashioned words' he went directly to contextual knowledge and AOs.	He is assertive about not being interested in whether students like or dislike poems - judgement based on this is irrelevant 'liking or disliking a text, I'm not… it's not up for discussion in my classroom. We're studying it. We're doing this' However he can 'digress massively when students get interested in something' so there is attention to what they like!

2. Initial coding: lessons / consideration of teacher interviews (notes)

Initial Code	Data extract (Lesson # and teacher)
Exam pressure	'This is the horror of the exam' Will L 1 'you've just got to learn it and produce it' Bella L 13 *('it' = thing)*

Exam Prep in relation to context Is this about training? Is training a theme?	'the exam board is expecting you to know the key features of the English Civil War' Will L 1 *(Context)* 'don't say stuff about Hardy, oh he was born in Dorset and was one of four children if you're not going to relate it to the poem – yeah?' Philip L3 *(Context)* The exam board would rather you did nothing than write about the Romantics in another paragraph and then say you're going to write about the poem' Will L1 *(the board- abstract thing)* 'say you're in an exam and the theme is love – which poems could you choose?'Philip L2 'there are only 10 marks for context you don't need much' Philip L2 'Context is a problem – essays lack historical political and social context' Tom L4 to me as an aside before starting lesson 'In terms of context I'm often surprised by what students don't know' Zara L10 to me before lesson started *(lack of cultural capital)* 'you've got three texts and you've got to talk about meaning and context, write it down, the secret is, the secret is to keep that concise' Philip L3 *(the secret?? What's this about?)* 'Transformation is key to that question… you may get a similar question in the exam' Tom L4
General exam (miscellaneous)	'Today's topic isn't in the mock exam, that will be on other topics which we haven't covered yet so don't worry about it' Bella L 13 *(don't worry about what we are doing as it's not on the exam it's not important?)*

	'when you read the poem in the exam you must read it twice just so you can get the meaning' Zara L 10 *('meaning' is not obvious)* 'remember in the exam it's the process you're going to have to go through quite quickly, see what the theme is, select your unseen text and your two poems Philip L2 *(pressure of time)* 'This will allow depth and that's what the exam board want. That's the trick of how to do it' Philip L3 *(tricks and secrets?)* 'The great thing about the exam is that you take what you can use. There's no mark for comprehension, for fully understanding the text you take and use what you can' Arthur (Creative Writing) LT
Drawing on types of wider cultural knowledge Horror film	'The other thing I would say is her mouth 'foamed'. When people transform into werewolves or whatever, in horror films, you don't think, 'oh they're going to save the day later on – they're the good guys!' We've got her foaming at the mouth – that makes her seem really monstrous' Tom L4
Children's stories	'It feels a bit like a story book to me, you know that quality of children's stories? It sounds almost like a teddy bear picnic kind of story' Zara L10
Film Actor	FS1 'it does sound like ego – Russell Crow! That needles in-the-arm thing – it's stereotyping but at the same time it's true, that's the thing, the danger of being out the door of education/ FS2: Mmmmm Arthur LT
Disney	Tom: right- ok immediately clapping eyes on her he can't live without her, I think on that audio ' oh please stay with me' he sounds like a kind of ignorant Disney prince so er that's something we might develop when I see you next time' Tom L 4

Religious knowledge	FS relates Chaucer's Merchant's tale to Beauty and the Beast Barry LT Will on theme of love – start of L1 Who loves God? Put your hands up We must agree these are different types of love aren't they? Write down the word agape, that's a Greek word meaning love of God…in Christianity there is an idea of God being a representation of love. Is there a similar idea in Islam? Of God being a representation of love? Human love is Eros and that gives us which adjective?'
	Discussing temptation in Goblin Market poem: MS: 'It's Adam's fault because he's a masculine role model and he should've looked after Eve. Teacher- I can't bear the Adam and Eve story' Anna L 17
Proverb	FS1: Well, it's saying – sort of like saying it like it's half nails and half roses so it's 50/50/ FS2: Maybe it's like mocking the phrase it's a bed of roses? FS1: Yeah yeah (laugh) Barry LT
Slang	Right backhand in the night then – what's that? FS: it's when you go (motions like a tennis racket or a hand slapping) MS motions a hand down palm towards self Amelia to Fs: no it's that – points to palm it's a bribe FS voices overlapping 'ah oh' murmurs of backhand Amelia – a backhander is deal, a bribe backhanded comment is talking about someone behind their back – why is she bribing the night? What are they bribing the night to do? Amelia R6F
Students express uncertainty of contextual knowledge	MS: what about your context? FS3: I know my basic context but I can't be arsed – I mean I don't know all FS2: we've know a fair amount MS: you know what you need to do to be honest, and then you can infer from the text, she's like white middle class or upper class FS3: the thing is I wrote all that context down, but I just (laughing) can't remember it! Bella L 13

	FS1 ‘when I think of Iraq I always think of war and conflict. It’s always in the headlines and loads of people did not like the war in Iraq. Mmm there’s always a negative’ Zara L10 Students in presentation of poem mispronounce Houdini and matador so I wonder if they understand the reference they are making? Ayesha L 16 Male student makes long interpretation of poem Meridian based on a misunderstanding of the term which he thinks means ‘a long journey’ Ayesha L 16
The news and politics	FS: It’s England. Teacher: you think England, why? FS: um they’re trying to show they don’t support what Tony Blair did Zara L10 FS: that caesura- the red and empire -the influence of Britain, it’s angry nature and the British empire” Zara L14
Classical/historical references	Barry: Have you heard of these people – Helen and Paris? / (mutterings of Trojan horse around the class) FS: wasn’t it that they did that whole thing with the Trojan horse because the guy wanted Helen and he can’t …. Barry: Yes … so this is um, Greek mythology. We’ve talked a lot about classical references in the text so far’ Barry LT ‘So this is an account of the Roman Empire through the experience of the teacher or is it the experience of the teacher through the Roman Empire? It kind of fits both ways. Decline and Fall itself is part of a very famous history book um… sort of the archetypal account of the

3. Developing and reviewing themes drawing on theory, beginning to use Sipe to explore a lesson.

Will's class (23.01.17) circa 34.00 on recording

Reading in groups to complete a grid which identifies /context of poets and their history /discourse and structure of the poem/grammar and syntax in relation to effect /lexis and phonology –visual and aural imagery. Group of three female students (S) are exploring the discourse and structure of the poem using a planning grid

This would seem to be asking for fractured efferent reading. Students are reading to find particular features that have to be referred to in the exam. (At E6F this is deliberately done to encourage students not to 'context dump' i.e., write about Thomas Hardy's life and not relate to the poem. This 'fault' doesn't gain exam marks). Reading and grid filling is an activity teachers embrace. However while reading in this way students do make meaning

S1: It's written in quatrains, which is 4 lines in each, um, the structure of it- some of it is one side and some the other ***(analysis)***

S2: yeah… why? ***(clarification)***

S1: it's like – remember when we did 'The Collar' and half of it was one side positive and one side was negative? But we need to look at the context and what this poem actually means ***(relating to other poem – analysis – also context is emphasised as a way into meaning)***

S2: Gather your rosebuds ***…('wondering' voice are they enjoying the sound? aesthetic? Hard to tell)***

S1: I think it's telling virgins basically to do your stuff ***(comprehension, summary)***

S2: is it about fertility?

S1: I know rosebuds and flowers is to do with fertility ***(cultural knowledge, analytic)***

S2: yeah **(*confirmation)***

S1 : So gather your rosebuds while you can because time is flying by and while you know you're ok now tomorrow you may die ***(repetition of you is this personalising ?)***

S3: yeah – one side's positive and one side's negative ***(life and death? Personal interpretation of this?)***

S1: yeah – one side's positive and one side's negative, I think so

S2 : oh so ok, it's showing the converse as well ***(agrees with interpretation by S3)***

S1: that's what I thought ***(further agreement)***

S3: what do you call that?

S1: erm… just write for now the structure is …um… unequal ***(structure of poem – analysis)***

S2: What else is the structure? Is it the sentence line? ***(what does this mean? Sentence line? Structure)***

S1: look at the beats in each line and count them ***(relating analysis of poem- sound? to interpretation?)***

(They do this and agree that there are alternating beats on each line. This they think reinforces their idea that there are positive and negative ideas in the poem. Then they go to a reference book and find the terms iambic tetrameter and iambic trimester)

Appendix I: Student Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM –Students (observation)

To be completed by students **Appendix I**

- I have read and understood the information sheet about this study ☐
- I have shared the information sheet about this study with my parents/carers ☐
- I have been able to ask questions about this study ☐
- I am happy with the answers I got to my questions ☐
- I know I can stop being part of this study at any time and do not have to give a reason for this to the researcher or my teachers ☐
- I can stop any information about me from being in this project until (date inserted) ☐
- I understand that information gathered from this study will be used in anonymised form ☐
  (I will not be named or identifiable in the study)

Signed (student)	Date
Name in block letters	
Name and address of college	
Signature of researcher	Date

Researcher's contact details

Jane Speare
[redacted]

Telephone: [redacted]
E-mail: [redacted]

This research is being supervised by Professor Andrew Lambirth [redacted]

Appendix I (contd.): Ethical Clearance

-----Original Message-----
From: Research Ethics
Sent: 13 July 2015 16:09
To: Jane Speare <[redacted]>
Cc: [redacted]
Subject: FW: UREC - outcome of application 14.5.5.10

Dear Jane,

I am pleased to advise that your application to the University Research Ethics Committee, reference 14.5.5.10, to undertake research titled "Adolescents reading poetry for personal meaning: an exploration of practices and experiences in the further education sector" was approved by the Committee. A letter of confirmation will be sent to you shortly.

Regards

[redacted]

[redacted]

Appendix I (contd.): Student Participant Information Sheet

Research Study: Teacher and student experiences of reading and learning poetry: an exploration in the further education sector

Researcher: Jane Speare [redacted]

Supervisor Professor Andrew Lambirth [redacted]

This is an invitation to take part in research I am pursuing for a PhD qualification. Before you decide whether to take part please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with your parent/carer. Ask me if anything is unclear or if you would like more information

What is this project about? This is a project designed by myself to study how teachers teach and how students learn about poems in colleges

Why are you doing this? I'm doing this as part of a doctoral qualification, (and because I really like and value poems and teaching)

Why does this matter? There hasn't been a lot of research into what students think about learning poems in colleges and what teachers do to help them learn. I'm hoping that finding out more about this could help other teachers think about and develop their skills in this area

What would my contribution be? You would be observed as part of your whole class when you are learning poems for your qualification. You might also be invited to take part in a small group discussion about some of the poems you are learning.

How long will it take? I will be coming into your English classes from time to time during this academic year. You don't have to do anything different from normal to take part in the research. If you choose to be part of the small group discussion you would be given a diary to keep and asked to come to a meeting lasting about an hour.

Will I be identified in the study? No, anything you say or do will not be traceable back to you. Every person taking part, the name of your teacher, class and college will be anonymous in any publication, report or conference paper.

Is it safe to take part? The [redacted] has strict rules about how research projects have to be managed and conducted. A Research Ethics Committee has approved this research proposal. Any information collected about you on film or in writing will be treated confidentially and kept in a secure locked place. Any contribution you make will be anonymous and at the end of the project all information collected will be destroyed.

What do I do if I want to take part? Take this and the letter you have been given home and show it to your parent/carer. If you want to take part you do not have to do anything further. If you do not want to take part please sign and return the form attached by XXXX (Date) I will not then collect any information from you and you will not be part of the study.

Suppose I said yes to taking part but changed my mind? You can stop taking part in this research at any time and for any reason by completing the attached form. This is your right and

there will be no negative consequence for your college work or any future relationship with the [redacted]. You can decide to withdraw from the research completely at any time until *(date inserted)*

Appendix J: Selection of poems discussed in Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion (Part Two: Lesson Observations)

A) Excerpt from Chaucer, *The Merchants Tale* read by Barry and discussed using interlinear translation (28.03.17)

1750 **This Januarie is ravysshed in a traunce**
This January is ravished in a trance
1751 **At every tyme he looked on hir face;**
At every time he looked on her face;
1752 **But in his herte he gan hire to manace**
But in his heart he began to menace her
1753 **That he that nyght in armes wolde hire streyne**
That he that night in arms would her strain
1754 **Harder than evere Parys dide Eleyne.**
Harder than ever Paris did Helen of Troy.
1755 **But nathelees yet hadde he greet pitee**
But nevertheless yet had he great pity
1756 **That thilke nyght offenden hire moste he,**
That that same night he must offend her,
1757 **And thoughte, "Allas! O tendre creature,**
And thought, "Alas! O tender creature,
1758 **Now wolde God ye myghte wel endure**
Now would God you might well endure
1759 **Al my corage, it is so sharp and keene!**
All my desire, it is so sharp and keen!
1760 **I am agast ye shul it nat susteene.**
I am afraid you shall not be able to endure it.
1761 **But God forbede that I dide al my myght!**
But God forbid that I did all my might!
1762 **Now wolde God that it were woxen nyght,**
Now would God that it were become night,
1763 **And that the nyght wolde lasten everemo.**
And that the night would last evermore.
1764 **I wolde that al this peple were ago."**
I would that all this people were gone."
1765 **And finally he dooth al his labour,**
And finally he takes all possible pains,
1766 **As he best myghte, savynge his honour,**
As he best could, so far as good manners allowed,
1767 **To haste hem fro the mete in subtil wyse.**
To hasten them from the dinner in subtle manner.

B) *A Birthday* by Rossetti, read and discussed in lessons by Will and Philip (23.01.17)

My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
My heart is like an apple tree
Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these
Because my love is come to me.

Raise me a dais of silk and doen
Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
Carve it in doves and pomegranates,
And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
Work it in gold and silver grapes,
In leaves and silver fleur-de- lys;
Because the birthday of my life
Is come, my love is come to me.

C) Herrick, *To The Virgins to Make Much of Time* read and discussed in lessons by Will and Philip (23.01.17)

Gather ye Rose-buds while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying:
And this same flower that smiles to day,
To morrow will be dying.

The glorious Lamp of Heaven, the Sun,
The higher he's a getting;
The sooner will his Race be run,
And neerer he's to Setting.

That Age is best, which is the first,
When Youth and Blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times, still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time;
And while ye may, go marry:
For having lost but once your prime,
You may forever tarry

D) Yeats, *He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven,* read and discussed in Philip's lesson (23.01.17)

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

E) Duffy, *Epiphany,* part of the 'cut up exercise' in Amelia's lesson (07.02.18)

Not close my eyes to the light
when the light
Is in my head,
or sleep
when only your, only thy warm skin
is my bed,
or live, when days, nights,
sightless of you, sightless of thee
are hours with the dead,
or talk sense
when words, when words,
are the cauls of the unsaid,
Or believe when belief
is a light gone out yet burning, gold, red.

Appendix K: Planning Sheet and Planning Grid

COMPARATIVE PLANNING DATED 26.2.18 + 27/2/18.

Poetry Anthology – planning chart

	Text A (unseen)	Poem 1	Poem 2
INTRODUCTION Overview of theme and contextual info (form of poems, genre of unseen text, historical info/literary movements)			
Structure and content (organisation of ideas) - for poems: the rhyme-scheme; meter; sonnet terms			
Diction and imagery (individual words; groups of these – e.g. lexical sets – simile, metaphor, personification, symbolism, pathetic fallacy etc)			
Syntax (sentence structure) – sentence types; types of phrases; enjambment and caesurae; tripling; listing; punctuation			
Phonology (sound effects) - alliteration; assonance; consonance; onomatopoeia			

L. WORDS UNSEEN + 1 L. ALL 3 C/F

NOTES:

1. Blend narrative voice in throughout the essay - e.g. first person or third person; pronouns or determiners; tones (e.g. sarcastic/ironic, admiring, pessimistic etc). It is not necessary to cover narrative voice as a separate paragraph.
2. The examples of language features that I've given in the left column are not a complete list in each case – only a selection of the types of features for each parag.
3. Contextual info should not be restricted only in the intro – it should also be blended in throughout the essay.
4. In the exam, you will not have time to do a detailed planning chart like this, but this is the framework you should be aiming for in the essay.

APPENDIX K.
PLANNING GRIDS.

Used in lesson (1) + (2)

23/1/17.

eduqas
Part of WJEC

PLANNING GRID FOR COMPARING MULTIPLE TEXTS

	Text A	Text B	Text C
Overview			
Context			
Discourse			
Grammar			
Lexis			
Phonology			

1/2 side
"Meaning here?" What it's about
1/3 – 1/2 side
MIX & MATCH these more

Will / Philip advises 'meaning' is in first (3)
Students grouped to explore aspects of poems.