

“Mind and Memory, Understanding and Delight”

Views of Literature and Memory in Education

Abstract

Recent educational reforms proposed by current Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, have polarised educators, particularly in regards to the topic of memorisation. To many a return to memorisation is a regressive step, a step back to an era before education became child-centred. Yet there are those who support the move, as a more Conservative opinion favours the return to more traditional ways of teaching and learning. The aim of this project is to outline the current educational debate and examine memorisation in a different but related context, particularly, the deeper and more complex role of memorisation in literature and religious traditions. These often overlapping areas provide an alternative outlook on rote learning, one that views memorisation as a path to spiritual understanding and learning ‘by heart’. The ongoing relevance of memorisation in education is furthered when one considers the drastic rate of technological advances. Information is limitless and can be obtained at the touch of a button; essentially what we know and how we know it are two questions that cannot be ignored in the memorisation debate. (To identify the current role of memorisation within education, a range of international curricula was examined and the requirement of memorisation within the UK and Canadian literacy curriculum in the primary sector, for example, was shown to be virtually non-existent. To develop a deeper understanding of the role of memorisation in education in earlier decades, a range of people were surveyed about their own experiences of rote learning in education in the past 40 -50 years. Finally, individual interviews were conducted to gain deeper insight into those experiences to determine the personal experiences of those who were asked to memorise literary passages.)

Keywords: Memorisation, Literature, Religion, Educational Reforms, Poetry, Rote Learning.

Preface

The subject of this study is one that I have laboured over. It is also one that I have become utterly fascinated by. Originally, my views on memorisation in education were extremely negative; it seemed to me an archaic and outdated practice. My initial argument was a dismissal of Michael Gove's emphasis on memorisation in the new English curriculum, as I considered this a regressive step in the current 'child centred' classroom. However, I found there was a clear distinction between rote learning and learning by heart. Surprisingly, there are many others out there who are already advocating and campaigning for the memorisation of poetry. Among these advocates are many poets and literary enthusiasts. This project has provided me with the opportunity not only to further my own love and enjoyment of poetry but it has opened my eyes to an alternative way of learning. Through contacting various professionals in the 'poetry memorisation' field, I now feel that there is essentially a gap in children's learning. I hope this project offers an insight into the many benefits of memorising poetry and its huge influence in both past and present literature. I hope that I have been able to capture even a small aspect of such a topical, political, educational and controversial issue.

“Mind and Memory, Understanding and Delight”

Views of Literature and Memory in Education

Memorisation, although a key part of education across centuries, has remained at the centre of many educational disputes and remains a topic of controversy in educational circles today. Dating back to the time of the Ancient Greeks, the memorisation of literature was a vital aspect of education. Gove’s intentions have fuelled the argument around reverting to an era of memorisation and rote learning, particularly as his intentions include having, “pupils master formal English through poetry recitation, debate and presentation”(The Guardian, 2012). The author of *A History of Education* (1950), Luella Cole, notes how children were educated in the Ancient Greek period. With less emphasis on reading and more on memorising: “Even before the boys could read they listened to and memorized excerpts from Homer and Hesiod.” This practice dates back to a time when little was written and the oral tradition prevailed. This is evident in a variety of Greek literature, namely the works of Homer. “The Homeric poems are oral composition[s]” therefore they weren’t written and depended on “oral transmission” to “preserve the substance of a long poetic narrative” (Kirk, 1967). However, in a time where any information is accessible at the touch of a button, is there still the same necessity for memorising? Current Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, is “convinced that ‘memorisation’ is a key tool in his drive to raise education standards” (Channel 4, 2012).

The role of memorisation in the classroom is a topic that polarises and divides, however the necessity of memorisation in a number of religions remains unchallenged. In the Catholic faith, the intentions of memorising within the Catechism essentially parallel both Michael Gove and the words of the Ancient Greeks. The Catechism (2003) describes how “The memorization of prayer... is important to help learners savor their meaning”. This in a sense supports Gove’s theory that “Memorisation is a necessary precondition to understanding” (The Week, 2012). However, the complexities behind the term ‘understanding’ differ for both parties. In regards to religious understanding, the aim is to experience deep and spiritual understanding of the word. In comparison, Gove’s understanding is perhaps more superficial and less holistic, with more focus on memorising for educational success. Essentially, both ideas of ‘understanding’ reflect the work of Plato in the *Phaedrus*, whereby reading or finding out information is simply not enough: “for by telling them of many things without teaching them you will make them seem to

know much, while for the most part they know nothing” (Jahandarie, 1999). It seems that despite their differing areas for memorisation, all three have the same intention. They all agree on the importance of memorising, prior to and in aid of, truly understanding the proposed subject, be it prayer or poetry or something entirely different.

Alongside the importance of a deeper understanding of the word, memorisation and recitation provide the opportunity to create a sense of togetherness through both prayer and poetry. In recent years, the Catholic Church has, “urged Catholics around the world to memorize the most common Catholic prayers in Latin” (Catholic News Service, 2005). These were the words of Pope Benedict XVI, in 2005. His reasoning was to, “help Christian faithful of different languages pray together.” In a sense, speaking the same words in a common language is the key to creating a sense of community and continuing the ritual of prayer. This ritualistic concept is not unique to the Catholic faith, within the Islamic tradition the act of ritual is, “an obligation of the faith” with prayers “to be performed five times a day”. The ritual element is not only found in the prayer, but also in the actions. During prayer Muslims must turn their face towards Mecca, the birth place of the Prophet Muhammad. This act is to signify unity, its purpose is to “connect believers to one another” whilst prayer “connects the believers to God” (Islam Religion, 2006).

Not only does prayer and ritual create connection and understanding, but it also acts as a source of recall and remembrance. In Judaism, the Passover provides opportunity for the unification of past and present. This is achieved in the re-enactment of the Exodus story and it is, in a sense, a complete and holistic memorial experience, invoking both the physical and spiritual through the word and the act. This is reiterated in the Catholic mass, where the combination of word and symbol recreates the Last Supper. This is not only an act of memorial, but an invitation for the congregation to embody Christ in their receipt of the body and blood. The internalisation of the prayer combined with the outward act of receiving the bread and wine draws comparison to the memorisation of poetry. *Poetry By Heart* co-founders, Julie Blake and Andrew Motion, remark on how to, “speak a poem which has been remembered is to voice a text which has come to be owned and embodied by the act of memorisation” (Poetry By Heart, 2013).

The centrality of prayer within religion is evident, with the words and acts paramount to the continuation of tradition, ritual and community. However, in both the Jewish and Christian traditions the idea of contemplating the memorised word is significant. Psalm 1 outlines how one “meditates on his law day and night” (Bible Gateway, 2011); meditating on the word provides an experience that is much more than simple memorisation and recitation. Instead it creates opportunity for a fuller and more spiritual understanding. It is also interesting to note the

translation of the term ‘meditate’ in Hebrew; it translates as ‘ruminate’ which essentially means to “turn over in the mind” [The Free Dictionary, 2009]. The idea of using memorisation of the word as a starting point for true and meaningful understanding has undeniably existed for centuries and continues throughout the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths. However, this existence and necessity of memorisation in various aspects of modern life poses the question. If memorisation benefits and aids true and spiritual understanding of the religious word, in which way could it benefit the appreciation and understanding of poetry?

Through researching the progression of memorisation, beginning with the Ancient Greeks to present day, it is evident that the development of Christianity has had an impact on education. This is particularly true in Northern Ireland, where the Christian tradition is predominant. This is apparent through the Religious Education element of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and the Alive-O series that runs throughout Catholic Maintained schools in the North. In many schools prayer is an intrinsic part of school life; however, it is interesting to note that this has little to do with curriculum and more to do with school ethos and tradition. The Northern Ireland curriculum does not encourage pupils to memorise prayer. In fact it isn’t until Key Stage two that pupils are expected to, “Read prayers from the Bible, and other sources” (DENI, 2007). In the Catholic tradition, prayer is a vital part of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Part Four of the Catechism is entitled Christian Prayer. It is here that the intentions and focus of prayer within the faith are explored and explained. And it is here that one can identify the many resemblances between memorising prayer and poetry. This encourages one to consider why in a time where “attendance at weekly Mass is on a steady decline within Ireland” (Hickey, 2013), the emphasis on prayer remains in schools. Just like rote learning and the memorisation of poetry, there is a stigma attached to the Catholic faith in Northern Ireland, where there is “a population that is struggling in their relationship with Catholicism” (Hickey, 2013). Yet, despite this negativity surrounding the church, the influence of prayer and the importance of prayer memorisation in school continue.

Within the Northern Ireland curriculum, poetry appears in all Key Stages from Foundation to Key Stage 4. In the Foundation Stage, poetry appears briefly in the Literacy curriculum. Opportunities for children include:

- listening to a wide range of stories, poems, songs and music.
- listen to a range of stories, poems and non-fiction texts read to them by adults/other pupils.
- use rhymes, poems and patterned stories as models for structuring their own writing (NIC, 2007).

Poetry is essentially used to develop children's phonological awareness and linguistic ability. At this early stage children will have a small bank of memorised pieces, ranging from nursery rhymes to songs but not poems explicitly. In the Catholic school children will be well practised in the recitation of prayer and daily prayers will already be committed to memory. And so the ability of the pupils to memorise is not the issue at hand. Instead, the worth of memorising poetry is. As pupils progress through the school, poetry remains similar in Key Stage 1 and 2 as it was in the Early Years. In Key Stage 1 children will:

- listen to, respond to and explore stories, poems, songs, drama, and media texts through the use of traditional and digital resources and recreate parts of them in a range of expressive activities
- read and share their own books of stories and poems including the use of digital resources;
- read, and be read to from a wide selection of poetry and prose (NIC, 2007).

And in Key Stage 2, they will:

- listen and respond to a range of fiction, poetry, drama and media texts through the use of traditional and digital resources (NIC, 2007).

It is somewhat surprising that poetry is given more emphasis in Foundation and Key Stage 1 as it would seem that children would be better prepared for exploring and understanding poems as they develop and mature. However, it is apparent that poetry is used in the earlier years as a means for developing language and quite simply enjoyment. It is interesting to note how in Foundation and Key Stage 1 poetry being read by and for pupils for enjoyment is perhaps the only time children will experience this in their entire education. This is another factor, perhaps, to why poetry is held in disregard within the current education system. Children have very little opportunity to experience poetry how it was intended. To be listened to, read aloud, performed and committed to memory. In Key Stage 2 poetry is referenced once in the entire Literacy curriculum, which is hugely disappointing. With such lack of significance, how will children ever experience or prepare for the poetry they will be faced with in Post-Primary and beyond? Not only does this lack of preparation seem worrying, but children have no opportunity to perform pieces they have enjoyed or committed to memory. Essentially, their experience of poetry is limited and so the cycle of 'poetic fear' continues. As children progress into Post Primary, more focus is placed on poetry as it appears in the GCSE examination. In the Literature Unit of Key Stage 3, there is one section dedicated to poetry. The section is impressive in the sense that there

are sections dedicated to other areas of poetry, besides analysing and dissecting. There are opportunities for:

- Empathising through poetry.
- Poetry for inspiration and comfort.
- The sound of sense – from poem to performance (NIC, 2013).

However, despite the various opportunities pupils are provided with in this unit there is still a vital element missing. Children are encouraged to perform, but they aren't required to recite from memory. One area of this unit that would perhaps benefit from committing poetry to memory is the "Empathy Through Poetry" section. This is due to the idea that poetry that connects and provides meaning to the reader is rarely forgotten. Of 10 people surveyed about their experience of rote learning, 3 claimed to have memorised poetry during their education. Two of the three memorised for examinations, but the third recalls a poem from heart because of the particularly traumatic experience outlined in the poem that they could relate to. The ability to recite this poem aloud gave the speaker the opportunity to express themselves through someone else's words and was also a comfort to know that another had suffered the same experience. In this sense, Pullinger's (2012) claim that, "Imitation, paradoxically, gives rise to individuality", is very much accurate. Essentially, poetry in a way is extremely cathartic, in the same way that many people find comfort in prayer. Particularly in today's climate when there are many vulnerable young people, schools should provide opportunities for pupils to express themselves creatively and in a way that makes it easier to discuss issues, through using the voice of another. It is this sense of togetherness and relating to the poet that creates another link with the purpose of prayer in the Catholic tradition. As stated previously, Pope Benedict XVI's call to pray together in a common language aimed to create a sense of community whilst continuing the tradition. This is also true of memorising poems; they act as a source of community. They provide a language that, when known by heart, creates a point of reference or an understanding that can be used by many different people to explain the same meaning. Ultimately the memorisation of poetry is not only based on the ability to memorise or to recite, but to engage people and create a togetherness that is very much lost in today's society. This is another example of how poetry and poetry memorisation is progressive, it provides opportunities for community and expression that are difficult to find elsewhere in education. The current education system tends to deny that it is purely results based, with an emphasis on encouraging children to "engage in active learning" (NIC, 2007). It is determined to distance itself from the past, particularly the "payment by results' inspection regime of the 19th century" (Poetry By

Heart, 2013). Perhaps this explains the abolition of memorising poetry and literature. With such a tainted history, it seems that it is an aspect of learning that many would like to forget. However, in actuality poetry is very much the opposite of fact, figures and results. It not only provides pupils with a creative outlet and opportunities for community and togetherness, it also enriches their cultural and literary knowledge.

Conclusion

Investigating the history and tradition of poetry memorisation has resulted in a variety of interesting and significant findings. The practice dates back to the Homeric period, when “poems were composed without the use of writing” and passed on through “oral transmission” (Kirk, 1967). This oral tradition continued with the development of Christianity, whereby there was a dependence on “the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching” (Vatican) the Word of God. Throughout centuries both practices of memorisation and the oral tradition have remained in education, with children expected to memorise large pieces of literature and recite prayer from memory. However, in current day education there has been significant changes in curricula. The act of memorisation has ultimately disappeared from the classroom. With more emphasis on ‘active learning’ and memorisation considered as an out-dated, out of fashion practice it is understandable why many feel strongly about the lack of benefits and opportunities poetry memorisation provides. Also, the tarnished reputation surrounding memorisation is not forgotten and in some cases was used in the past as a form of punishment during a time of unforgiving and somewhat brutal schooling.

An element of memorisation that has survived in education is the memorising of prayer. From the development of Christianity in education, dating back to the Medieval Era, religion became a more prominent aspect within the school setting. With more focus on, “memorizing the Lord’s Prayer” (Cole, 1950) the emphasis on committing poetry and other works of literature to memory was of less importance. In comparison, education in Northern Ireland remains unchanged in regards to the memorisation of prayer, particularly in Catholic schools. When the act of learning prayer by heart is compared to that of poetry, there are many similarities. This type of memorisation is essentially taking the information ‘to heart’. In the Catechism’s outline of Prayer, it states “To know and understand is much more valuable than just knowing. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain”. (Vatican, 2003) This in a sense supports Michael Gove’s theory that “memorisation is a necessary precondition of understanding”. (The Week, 2012) However, Gove’s intentions are solely based on improving pupils’ educational and cultural standards. Whilst both prayer and poetry do have educational and cultural elements, they are more concerned with how we internalise the knowledge they provide and use it on an individual level. The knowledge we acquire through memorising prayer or poetry is very much subjective to the individual. It is unlike other areas of the curriculum, such as science and maths, as it is open to interpretation and gives the reader the opportunity to develop an opinion. Education should not only be about facts and figures and succeeding in exams, but a holistic experience based around creating an informed and interested individual. Through giving pupils

the opportunity to become immersed in prayer or poetry, they are ultimately being provided with an opportunity to learn and acquire knowledge in a different and unique way. According to poetry researcher Debbie Pullinger (2012), “this knowledge...is acquired not by looking objectively, from the outside, but subjectively, from within.” In regards to the current education system, this is an extremely unique view on how information should be processed. Again, poetry provides an alternative way of learning. It is not used for the sole purpose of being written and examined, but used “within” on a personal, social and spiritual level.

Within the current Northern Ireland curriculum there is some contradiction regarding the teaching of poetry. The poetry section of the Key Stage 3 Literacy curriculum places some emphasis on exploring the role of memory within poetry. However, there is very little opportunity for children to use their own memory and there are no opportunities for children to recite from memory. This is quite ironic as poetry itself is an art form that explicitly explores the experiences and memories of the poet. If children are not provided with opportunities to use their memory or in fact reflect on their own experiences, then they are essentially not experiencing poetry as it was intended. The reason behind dismissing poetry memorisation seemingly reverts back to the negative connotations surrounding its past appearance in education. However, it would perhaps serve better to learn from the past as opposed to complete dismissal. If more emphasis was placed on the benefits of poetry memorisation then perhaps this unfortunate past could be forgiven. In a reflective and progressive profession such as education, one should not simply dismiss the past because of how it was practised, but instead “Remember the wisdom out of the old days” (Yeats, *To His Heart, bidding it have no Fear*, line 2).

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Appendix

Section A: Review of International Curricula

Section B: Surveys of Individual Experiences of Rote Learning

Section C: Interviews

Section A: Review of International Curricula

To gauge the prevalence of the role of memorisation in today's educational world, ten different Literacy and English curricula were examined. The aim of the investigation is to identify the number of times the term 'memory' is used within the documents. The next step of the study is to identify whether the term 'memory' is used in reference to pupils memorising as a demand of the curriculum. To determine the intentions of the curricula, the term memory was searched for in variations and spelt in both the American and English way e.g. memorize, memory, memories etc. were all researched. This will essentially demonstrate whether children are actively encouraged to engage and participate in memorising in any of today's curricula. The results are as follows:

Table Showing Collection of Curricula Reviews

	Curriculum:	Number of times the term 'memory' is used:	Number of times the term 'memory' is used in regards to pupils memorising text:
1.	*Canada (Ontario) – Elementary Level ¹	7	0
2.	*Canada (Ontario) – Secondary Level ²	7	0

¹ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/language18currb.pdf>

² <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english910currb.pdf>

3.	England – Key Stage 3 ³	0	0
4.	England –Key Stage 4 ⁴	0	0
5.	Scotland – Key Stage 1/2/3/4 ⁵	0	0
6.	Northern Ireland – Key Stage 1 ⁶	0	0
7.	Northern Ireland – Key Stage 2 ⁷	1	0
8.	Northern Ireland – Key Stage 3 ⁸	0	0
9.	Northern Ireland – Key Stage 3 (Poetry curriculum) ⁹	7	0
10.	Wales – Key Stages 2/3/4 ¹⁰	0	0

Analysis of International findings

³<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/e/english%202007%20programme%20of%20study%20for%20key%20stage%203.pdf>

⁴<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/p/english%202007%20programme%20of%20study%20for%20key%20stage%204.pdf>

⁵ http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/all_experiences_outcomes_tcm4-539562.pdf

⁶http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key_stages_1_and_2/statutory_requirements/ks1_language_literacy.pdf

⁷http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key_stages_1_and_2/statutory_requirements/ks2_language_literacy.pdf

⁸http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key_stage_3/areas_of_learning/statutory_requirements/ks3_english.pdf

⁹ http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key_stage_3/areas_of_learning/english/Poetry.pdf

¹⁰ <http://learning.wales.gov.uk/docs/learningwales/publications/101013englishncfwen.pdf>

The findings in this study demonstrate how, in regards to literature, the role of memorising in current education systems is seemingly non-existent. In none of the texts investigated are there any references made in regards to pupils memorising or committing to memory. In Canada, the term 'memory' is used in both the Elementary and Secondary areas of the curriculum. In the Secondary curriculum, children are encouraged to explore a range of 'oral texts', it is in this exploration that children are to use their own memories. One example of a memory activity that children should engage in, is to "discuss their memories of a recent news item in a small group and then review the story online to check the accuracy of their memories" (Canada,2006). In this sense children are encouraged to test their memories in a small way, but this in no way encourages pupil memorisation. The main use of the term 'memory' within both Elementary and Secondary curricula is in regards to remembering the spelling of words, "e.g. memory tricks that are used to help remember the spelling of a difficult word" (Canada, 2006).

The School of Education at Syracuse University in America sums up the situation of memorisation accurately when they outline the change in curricula: "The standards demand more out of students to think critically – instead of relying on memorization – and to go deeper into material, instead of covering broad areas of knowledge" (Haley, 2014) It is difficult to investigate the role of memorisation in American education as there are many curricula available. However, this statement made by an education institute indicates the regard in which memorisation is held by practitioners. At present, there is much contempt for the practice of memorisation and by educators, in particular, it seems a thing to be feared and avoided.

The only other curriculum to refer to the term 'memory' was the poetry-specific element of the Key Stage Three Northern Ireland Literacy curriculum entitled 'Poetry Quest'. When this .pdf is searched for the term 'memory', it becomes clear that the focus is not on the memories of pupils but the memories of the poet, specifically "two of Heaney's sonnets in memory of his mother" and "Leontia Flynn and Nick Laird's memory of their fathers"(NIC, 2013). Essentially children are required to study and reflect on the memories and experiences of poets and their work, but using their own memory seems limited in terms of what is expected in the literacy curriculum. However, within the Poetry Quest document, when the term 'memories' is searched for, a different result is found. Albeit small in number, 'memories' is only mentioned 6 times; it prevails over the term memory and also differs immensely. In some instances children are encouraged to reflect on their, "memories of parents" and to explore "memories or associations that the poem suggests to them" (NIC, 2013). This encourages children to identify with the poem and to experience it on a deeper and more personal level. However, it is only encouraged a small number of times and children are not encouraged to memorise or commit the poem to

heart. This suggests an interesting paradox, the literature being studied understands the importance of memorising but the pedagogy doesn't.

Within the Poetry Quest curriculum, the terms 'study', 'explore', 'reflect' and 'analyse' appear collectively 31 times. In comparison, the terms 'memory' and 'memories' only appear 8 times and mainly refer to the works and words of other poets. This demonstrates that the main focus of the curriculum is on preparation for the poetry exam and not what the poem can offer the reader. But it must also be noted that there is a performance aspect to the Key Stage 3 curriculum, the term 'performance' appears 16 times in the document and ranges from performing "in small groups" to "whole class reading for performance" (NIC, 2013). Again, the curriculum advocates simply reading the poem aloud as performance. But the internalisation and memorisation of the words are much more beneficial to both the pupils' understanding of the poem and the performance. According to *Poetry By Heart* co-founders, Julie Blake and Andrew Motion, the impact memorisation has on performance is paramount. When discussing the contestants, they remarked on how, "They proved beyond doubt that to speak a poem which has been remembered is to voice a text which has come to be owned and embodied by the act of memorisation" (Poetry By Heart, 2013).

Currently, poetry is used as part of the Northern Ireland Literacy Curriculum in both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2; it is one of the main features of GCSE and A-Level English Literature. As mentioned previously, it is not stated in any curriculum that pupils are required to commit poems to memory. And the focus on performing and enjoying the poem is but a very small feature. From the early years to the final years of education it is easy to identify why poetry is an element of the curriculum. In the younger years it encourages children's phonological awareness and develops their ability to engage in rhythm and rhyme. In a sense, in the early years poetry is an essential aspect of literacy development. In the later years, poetry is used for developing analysing techniques and furthering pupils' awareness of specific literature. As mentioned by both Gove and Heaney, it is also a way of encouraging pupils' knowledge of culture and society. However, both men advocate the memorisation and performance of poetry. But it is difficult to research the specific benefits this will have on the speaker. As stated previously, there are many similarities between memorising prayer and poetry. Particularly in regards to giving the speaker an outlet of expression, reliving the traditions of centuries past and simply being made aware and part of a culture. However, there must be more specific positives to the act of committing poetry to memory and performance. It seems that to search for this information, one is met with a variety of inconclusive results. There is very little information available about how and what pupils were taught in regards to poetry in the past 100 years or so

in Northern Ireland, perhaps this is due to the fact that, according to the DENI, in 1981, “the majority of primary schools had no written policies on the curriculum” (Valley, 1989). And so the experiences of those who were educated at this time is paramount.

Section B: Surveys of Individual Experiences of Rote Learning

Background and nature of the surveys

To develop a more in depth understanding of the type of memorisation experienced in past education, ten people were surveyed. To investigate the widest variety of experiences, the ten people surveyed attended school at different times in the past 40 – 50 years. Some of those surveyed attended school as recently as in the past 2 years. Instead of embarking on a journey of discovering educational reforms in the past 40 years, it proved more beneficial to survey personal experiences of memorisation in education. The professions and educational experiences of those surveyed are diverse and wide-ranging, as were the types of schools that were attended. This study was carried out in the North of Ireland with the exception of two of those surveyed, who attended school in England and the South of Ireland. It is important to identify those who attended school in the North of Ireland as this may influence the level of prayer found in their school experience. The aim of this investigation was not to pinpoint exactly when memorisation was removed from the classroom, but to gain an awareness of the different types of memorisation that have appeared in schools over the years. Other areas for exploration are:

- The areas of memorisation that have continued and remained.
- The areas of memorisation that have been removed completely.
- The correlation between the type of school attended and the element of memorisation required.
- The effect age has on the level of memorisation required in schools e.g. are there any differences in the material memorised between an individual who attended school 20 years ago and an individual who attended 10 years ago

Table of Results of Individual Experiences of Memorisation in Education

Person Studied:	Country they were educated:	Educated in the past ____ years:	Current Profession – education related/non-education related:	If educated in NI attended maintained/non-maintained school:	Area of curriculum memorised:	If prayer is memorised, which types of prayer:
Study 1:	North of Ireland	0 – 10years.	Non-education related.	Non-maintained	Times tables, prayer.	The Lord’s Prayer.
Study 2:	North of Ireland	0 – 10 years.	Non-education related.	Non-maintained	Times tables, prayer.	The Lord’s Prayer.
Study 3:	North of Ireland	0-10 years.	Education related.	Maintained.	Prayers, times tables, songs, dialogue for play performance, foreign languages.	Daily prayers, Sacramental prayers, main Catholic prayers.
Study 4:	North of Ireland	0 – 10 years.	Non-education related.	Maintained.	Prayers, times tables, songs.	Daily prayers, Sacramental prayers, main Catholic prayers.
Study 5:	North of Ireland	0 – 10 years.	Non-education related.	Non-maintained.	Times tables.	N/A
Study 6:	North of Ireland	30 – 40 years.	Non – education related.	Maintained.	Times tables, prayers, foreign languages.	Daily prayers, Latin prayers, Sacramental prayers, main Catholic prayers.
Study 7:	North of Ireland	20 – 30 years.	Non-education related.	Maintained.	Poetry, prayer.	Daily prayers, Sacramental prayers, main Catholic prayers.
Study 8:	England	20 -30 years.	Education related.	N/A	Poetry.	
Study 9:	South of Ireland	20 – 30 years.	Education related.	N/A	Poetry and literature.	
Study 10:	North of Ireland	30 – 40 years.	Education related.	Maintained.	Poetry.	

Analysis of Individual Experiences of Memorisation in Education

It is evident that those who attended school in more recent years experienced a different type and style of education. Those who attended education between 20 – 40 years ago could recall more emphasis on memorisation, particularly in regards to literature. Out of the 5 people educated within that 20-40 year time frame, 4 were required to memorise poetry through rote learning. Three of these four learnt for educational purposes and could recall small fragments of what was learnt during this time. The memorisation of literature and poetry appears in none of the education experiences of those who attended school in the past ten years. This is due to the change in curriculum, particularly in Northern Ireland, where the focus is very much on “whole curriculum skills and capabilities” and engaging children in “active learning contexts across all areas of the curriculum” (NIC, 2007).

However, the impact and resonance of poetry and poetry memorisation should not be dismissed simply because it does not fall into the ‘active learning’ category. One of the individuals who attended school in Derry, in the North of Ireland, around 30 years ago is of particular interest. In the city of Derry there is great emphasis placed on the local Feis which is both a competition and celebration of Irish culture. The individual who took part in the Feis, and the poetry recitation element of the competition, could remember large fragments of the poems they had to learn. One poem in particular that they could remember in its entirety was one which related to a particularly traumatic experience in their life. This poem resonated because the reader could connect with its meaning on a deeper level and it provided an outlet for both expression and pain. As stated by Pullinger (2012), “Imitation, paradoxically, gives rise to individualism”. This is particularly fascinating as it seems that poems which have a meaning and resound with the reader can be used in a cathartic way; committing to memory has proved beneficial to this particular individual.

In regards to the prayer aspect of the study it is interesting to note that in a majority of schools in the North of Ireland, both maintained and non-maintained, there has been a continuing emphasis on the memorisation of prayer. In non-maintained schools this emphasis is seemingly not as great as that of maintained schools. Protestant historian, Philip Schaff, states how “The Protestant goes directly to the Word of God for instruction” (CCEL, 2004), in comparison the Catholic Church places more emphasis on creating, “a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer” (Vatican, 2003).

Section C: Interviews

Background and Natures of the Interviews:

As an extension of the previous survey, four people were interviewed about their experiences of memorisation in education. Three of the four interviewed had memorised poetry during their time at school in the past 20 – 40 years. However, the final person interviewed participated in the *Poetry By Heart* poetry recital competition in 2013. The aim of the interview was to identify the perception of memorisation by those who have experienced it. One of the interviewed is currently a Priest and Lecturer of Religious Studies; this individual was interviewed to help identify any similarities between the tradition of poetry memorisation and the long lasting tradition of memorising prayer. However, their own experience of memorisation was of particular interest. They attended school in the South of Ireland and so their experience of memorisation was slightly different to those experienced in the North. The aim of memorising poetry within their education was for the Junior Certificate exam, it was an essential element of the curriculum to pass the English Literature area of the test. The individual interviewed seemed positive about their experience and could remember and recite parts of literature and poetry they had committed to memory. In regards to how memorisation has benefited them, they remarked how poetry provides a voice to express oneself. They also noted how the poet communicates mystery, depth and transformation which are invaluable resources in their role as both a Priest and educator.

Two of those interviewed were past Secondary level English Literature teachers, neither of these educators required their pupils to memorise poetry. One claimed it had simply ‘gone out of fashion’ when they began their teaching career. However, they did remark how they had to memorise during their own education and felt this developed their “sensitivity to language”. Both teachers claim that if they were to teach a Literature class now, they would encourage their pupils to memorise poetry and literature. The second interviewed has taught English Literature in Key Stage 3 and 4 and was Chief Examiner for A Level English Language. This individual demonstrates their support for the memorisation of poetry through their role in the Senior Project Development Team for poetry recital competition *Poetry By Heart*. *Poetry By Heart* has, in a sense, created a ‘third way’ in regards to poetry memorisation. It is funded by Michael Gove, but does not follow rote learning. It supports committing poetry to memory and identifies the social, educational and cultural benefits of committing poetry to memory.

Detailed Case Study of Interview with 2013 Poetry By Heart Competition Winner Kaiti Sultana

The final person interviewed about their experience of poetry memorisation was Poetry By Heart 2013 Champion Kaiti Sultana. Kaiti's experience of poetry memorisation is of particular significance as she is the only individual interviewed who has attended school in the past 10 years who has practised poetry memorisation. Not only this, but she made the choice to take part in the 2013 poetry recital competition. Kaiti was questioned on why she initially took part in the competition, the benefits she felt came from participating and how she was able to commit the poems to memory. This was her response:

“I decided to join I guess because I had just really gotten into poetry on a level within school that I enjoyed and appreciated. I've had experience with poetry recitation because with the LAMDA Verse and Prose examinations, and such an opportunity hadn't been offered to me before, that is, recitation as a competition. The fact that they gave you such a wide choice was also inviting, how I had a say in what I would perform. I got introduced to the different poetry offered as well and it turned into a tool for exploration and enjoyment as well as a competition. I hadn't really appreciated poetry recitation until the competition as I found that I really did take the poetry to heart. My experience before was more so based on the performance and memory of the poem.

The competition has encouraged me to explore more poetry and acted as an avenue to appreciate poets. The fact that they put a face to a poem made me understand the poem is a person's creation, and there's a story and a voice behind each one of them. It's also made me appreciate arts and literature in general by applying the same principles to them. Especially linking Sir Gawain to abstract works of art that I hadn't appreciated before or disregarded, I now appreciate in a new dimension, from how they make me feel and how they suggest how the painter is feeling; I don't know what they mean, like many people don't understand what I say in Gawain, but it makes you feel something unattainable without recitation.

I learnt my poems in different ways through how I felt. I do think it depends what I am learning, circumstance and how I feel on the day. I began by researching Gawain and trying to figure out what I was bringing across; I watched the Armitage documentary and read his translation. Then I worked out the sounds phonetically. Then I worked to around my schedule; to and from my school bus stop was a 15 minute walk and I set myself to learn a line in the morning and have remembered it by the night route home. Sometimes I learnt more, sometimes it took me a few days to learn a line. For The Fish, I painted a picture in my mind and built it up step by step advancing through the poem; it really accommodates to that as it's that type of visual poem. For both, I wrote down the words, often just the first letters of the words so I could say it at a similar pace that I would usually, but feel safe thinking I can visualise the letters on the page. “

Analysis of Detailed Case Study

Kaiti's experience ultimately provides an insight into the benefits of poetry memorisation. It has not only improved her performance, but it has also deepened her understanding of poetry and truly given the words a voice. As mentioned previously, the memorisation of poetry has great support among the poets. Poet, Ted Hughes, dedicated himself to the memorisation of poetry and, "learned the entire poetical works of W.B. Yeats by the time he was twenty-one" (Pullinger, 2012). Kaiti's experience in memorising poetry is a perfect example of how the practice could be incorporated into the classroom setting. It is also the most recent experience of memorisation in education that could be found through researching the topic. And in contrast to those who have experienced rote learning in the past, this experience has been both positive and rewarding. It has provided opportunities to a variety of young people who perhaps would never have engaged in memorisation, nor developed an awareness and appreciation of poetry.

Kaiti, claimed, "I hadn't really appreciated poetry recitation until the competition, as I found that I really did take the poetry to heart". It is evident that this experience was not simply about taking an element of rote learning and having pupils conquer recitation, but it was much more than that. From the competition Kaiti began to, "understand the poem is a person's creation, and there's a story and voice behind each one of them". The competition has provided a great insight into what is to be gained from poetry memorisation, with pupils outlining how participation "improved my confidence and inspired me to try more new things" (Poetry By Heart, 2013). It seems that the one thing preventing poetry memorisation and performance from taking hold in schools is the fear of how it was executed in past education systems. However, this should be no reason to shy away from the many opportunities that poetry memorisation can provide. The tradition of prayer continues in many schools, children are immersed in the words and expected to commit these words to memory. If these expectations were held in poetry, then children would perhaps have a more holistic and cultural experience of literature in education.

It is interesting to note that Poetry By Heart is a government funded project by Michael Gove. This is significant in comparison to current poetry recital competition in Ireland, Poetry Aloud, which is an independent project. Perhaps this funding demonstrates the attempt at changing attitudes towards poetry memorisation. Co-founders of Poetry By Heart, Julie Blake and Andrew Motion (2013), outlined their intentions and fears for the project, "In an age in which we have started outsourcing memory to computers, the 2013 Poetry By Heart competition was a bold step into the unknown". But the results of their competition were nothing but

positive, with students being encouraged, “to think about the sounds of a poem, not just what it looks like on the printed page” (Poetry By Heart, 2013). It is interesting to note the type of schools that participated in the competition, 76% of schools were state schools and of these schools 79% were Secondary, with only 14% of participating schools being Grammar (Poetry By Heart, 2013). This in a sense highlights how poetry memorisation and recital should not only be looked upon as education for the gifted literati, but education suitable for everyone.