

Reflection IV

We started class with a presentation on Slam poetry, and were exposed to the benefits of introducing poetry again into the classrooms.

I love poetry! It is something that everyone in high school can do, and it helps them organize their thoughts about a certain subject. Writing poetry is so freeing. There is no need to rhyme, no need to worry about conventions; what matters is how you feel about something. For that reason, it is also very cathartic. When I was in high school, I filled up three notebooks with poetry and short stories. I remember how much those helped me cope through those years, and how much I wrote about hurtful things that were happening around me. Putting those feelings out on the page removes them from within and makes them somehow manageable.

It seems like nowadays poetry has been losing its favour. I have seen so many publishers state that they do not publish poetry. Is the assumption that people no longer read it? Slam poetry, and songs such as the ones from Mackelmore, and the success and impact they have, certainly show that this kind of rhythmic literature is still well received. In fact, people naturally identify with it very much, even from a subconscious level. Besides, poetry is a much easier way to start than getting a pen and writing a novel; how will we discover the new great writers, if poetry and creative writing is not encouraged?

As a teacher, I want to introduce poetry back in my classroom, and it was one of the things I tried to do on my last practicum; but the results were overall negative. As soon as they heard the word “poetry”, the teens shut down and refused to do the work. Some of them mentioned that they could rap, but not do poetry. I told them that was the same principle, and they could certainly rap the assignment. The fact that it was still labeled “poetry” in their minds made the assignment

ultimately unsuccessful. I want to try this again, perhaps framing it as slam poetry and showing some examples. Last semester, I had a much more successful time with the rap song assignment, and the students got very much into making their own rap song about mitosis. I can see these types of assignments be very much a portion of my assessment. But this would be mainly expressing the subject matter through poetry; the real strength this media has, however, is when dealing with feelings.

We heard how slam poetry helps young teens answer questions, such as “who am I” and “why am I here”. This is true for all poetry in general. I read an article on how keeping a journal helps make you happy; seems like putting emotions down on paper help your brain process through the negative parts, much like writing notes about a subject helps you process the subject. Poetry does the same, as well as writing song lyrics. Adolescence is a difficult time of growth and figuring out the world, and so encouraging feelings to be expressed and processed helps teens keep their mental health intact.

We also spoke about aboriginal languages and the need to somehow introduce them into the classroom. I find that I disagree with the methods described in the presentation, however. Having a few phrases memorized does not seem enough, and the silly repetitive songs are a poor attempt of making up for the overall decimation of their varied languages. It is in fact much weaker than the efforts currently done by the schools when learning Spanish or French. So... basically we almost destroy their language, but hey, here is a phrase book, so you can ask where the bathroom is. Why isn't more being done to introduce this as an actual class, and having more of an actual effort transmitting each dialect into each place where they originated? That's how you change the tides, not by introducing a few phrases as a curiosity item.

Maybe something that should be encouraged is for the families to teach their kids their dialect, just as an ESL family would teach their children. Maybe the best solution would be a

general campaign by the government, giving incentive to first nations to pass on their culture and heritage, including their language. Anything that we *alone* try to do seems just too little, too late; and who are we as non-native teachers, to try and teach a foreign language which we don't really know? We should unite if the languages are to be revived.

Instead of botching a lesson, bringing guest speakers and having small workshops sounds like a much better idea. Finding the language which used to be in your area and inviting someone to come and give a presentation, and having a workshop with the kids spanning a couple classes, could have a better and more meaningful impact. It would also help kids treat it as a serious thing, an actual language, rather than as a bunch of gibberish. A visit from an elder could put this in context. I wonder how easy this would be to orchestrate.

If I ever teach language arts, which I hope I do, I would also ask the students to actually research and produce a short play, something lasting at least five minutes, in the language assigned. If we're going to expose people to phrases, then we should expose them to meaning as well. One thing to consider is that the dialects will not be saved if the first nations people don't start encouraging themselves to learn it again. It is very, very easy to lose a language. My daughter moved out of Brazil when she was four, and lost her Portuguese almost completely, as my ex forbid us speaking Portuguese in the house. She has slowly started learning by herself, and now can communicate in Portuguese with our family, but it has been a long road, and she had a lot of motivation. Without reason or motivation, learning a language falls second place to everything else happening in life; it is a very difficult thing to do.

Finally, we did a game activity, and finished the class with a quiz; I thought it was funny that in my table, I was the only one with only one true statement. Looking around somehow helps me think; I started paying attention after class, and found that I do this even with people I know well, such as my best friend. I look around particularly when there is a break in the conversation,

as if my brain is trying to catch up and process. If it is a short conversation, I keep eye contact and leave, but in an actual conversation, I am looking all over the place and processing the information. This is probably not quite normal, but not much about me is, so what else is new?

I thought the question about “thinking faster than we speak” was funny, and I answered based on my daughter... as most of the times, it seems like she speaks much faster than she thinks, or that she can’t filter what comes out! I guess I do that too, and maybe it is a matter of maturity. She is practically 22, so she has been getting better.

This English Arts course was not what I had in mind at all. I was expecting a much more traditional approach, simply out of ignorance. I still didn’t know that movies, theater, graphic novels, rap, lyrics, slam poetry, etc. were considered valid methods for teaching English. The techniques and exercises we learned were excellent and made a huge impact on me. I feel much stronger and more validated, and able to finally defend my “crazy” projects to whoever has a problem with them – something I couldn’t do in previous practicums. I am so happy that I can be creative and that is OK! I loved this class. I really hope to teach an English Language class sometime in the future. My favourites now are Arts, English and Pottery. Science has fallen out of favour, but it may be my sponsor. I hope to continue to grow and to continue collecting amazing class ideas; this summer will be a busy one...