

Inclusive Practices and Poetry

Session 1:

Poem for the first session:

A Welcome

To this hearth, which is a heart, welcome.
Welcome to our hearts. Welcome to our breath seeking to be song.
May those without a place tonight find welcome here.
May those without a tongue be brought to utterance.
Welcome to the stone that has now mouth to cry with
Welcome to the leaf that trembles on the edge of speaking.
Welcome to the owl's high lonely questioning.
May our ears catch answers.
May the Word which hovers above our heads find hospitality.
May the song which crosses between the living and the dead be part of what we sing.
Welcome to the fabulous Names of things.

Paul Matthews

Exercises of exploring where one may touch the void and uncertain territory in writing with others in 3 exercises. These exercises are more to learn about boundaries with students, rather with inclusive groups.

1. Naming

We listened to each other's name and every participant was asked to share something about their name. Everyone else took notes. The task was to create a poem, using what they had heard, using words as close as possible to what each person had said about their name.

On one hand we may experience amazement of what other hear in our words and something that is close and every day to us. Through hearing what the other said, we can make the inaudible audible in our poem. On the other hand, one can easily 'step into the void' and create images with words one hears that overstep a boundary and are not redefining someone in ways they may not wish to be defined.

2. Reality and Fantasy (see: Paul Matthews, *Words in Place*, p63, *Pondering Rock*)

Each person was asked to take a pebble into their hand, feel it and write down 5 words describing the experience of the pebble. We then exchanged the papers with the words and added a made up word. With 3 out of the 5 experienced words and the made up word we write a poem. We then collected all made up words and with 3 of these words and 1 real word, we wrote another story with 3 fantasy words and 1 word based on actual experience.

In writing 2 contrasting stories, the realisation and effect of writing based on actual experience and writing through fantasy or made up components. Both can be useful, but one needs to know if one is writing about someone's lived experience or if one is intending to write a fairy tale, for example. What does the co-writer try to express? What do we want to express?

3. Cooperative writing

Work in pairs. Fold a paper in half lengthwise. Write a sentence, beginning with I am on one side and pass it to your writing partner. The writing partner writes the end of the sentence on the other side and passes it back. The partner completes this half with another 'I am..' sentence on their side. This weaves back and forth.

When opening the paper a co-written poem appears that has a new, unforeseen meaning to it- something that can only arise in cooperative writing.

(See: Paul Matthews: Sing Me The Creation- a Creative Writing Sourcebook', page 34)

Session 2:

Poem for the second session:

The Ground that Love seeks

Whose word could be truthful enough
For the Stone to accept it?

Who could have beauty enough
to speak for the Rose

Who could be innocent enough
to utter what's at the heart
of a Wolf or a Goldfish?

Whose word could be grounded
in love in enough to sound
what is most deeply Human?

Paul Matthews

1. Story Stones

We created 'story stones'. Although they arose from people collecting pebbles at beaches and decorating them, the actual poetry work, using story stones, came from the home school movement. In drawing pictures on pebbles, one can set a theme and allow people to choose. A few blank pebbles allow people to request a picture or draw one themselves when they need it.

2. Choosing pebble

Participants choose 3-5 pebbles each- depending on the size of the group writing together. People can also share a pebble, if they both like a particular pebble.

3. Listening to each other

Every person in turn introduces their pebble by naming it and then saying why they chose it. The writer will take notes and make sure the space is a safe space, where listening is intense and respectful. Everyone takes a turn and even those not able to join the table, may dip in and out and let us know their choices and are listened to- even when they are not saying words- noises or actions can be poetic, too. People can speak for each other, if it appears respectful and the person spoke for appreciates it. Someone can also 'unsay' something by saying they don't want something to be noted.

The note taker listens and says initially nothing, Everything written should be as close to what is said as possible. Often one already hears stories arising, turns of phrases resonating with others.

4. Creating a poem

Taking a night or two, one looks at all notes and out of what people said with preferably little additions other than grammatical, one creates a poem or poems with all what was said. One may change sequences, may repeat things people said.

5. Getting consent

One goes back to the group and shares the poem. People need to agree and own their poem. People should feel heard and their words sounding with how they meant it- or would have liked to have meant it. The poem needs to be heard by others around them. Festivals and communal gatherings are a good opportunity for this. One can use a poem and make it visual. Shadow puppetry seems to be very helpful.

Developing further after *Story Stone* work has been established:

When people are familiar with story stones and all participants have developed trust in this way of working, one can also help people to write poems without the stones.

Grievance work:

When telling someone a loved one has died, one can ask them about their memories at the same time. In this period, where people are first remembering, but before shock sets in and grief, they often love to express what they remember of a person. Taking notes again as close as possible to what the person said, one can often make a poem, the person can share with others, their families. But one can also use it to help the person by reading it daily for them for a while. They then also have a very moving contribution to a funeral's eulogy.

Here is a poem that was written in that way when someone's mother had died:

Remembering my Mum

When my mum and I
Spent time together
We made lovely tea trays

We put out cups and saucers
And tea pots- but no milk jug
All on a tray.
For mum loved black tea.
Then we had black tea and a lovely chat.

When mum and I
Spent time together
Edward, my brother,
Would pick us up for

Lovely days out
To see grand houses,
Have tea breaks in coffee shops

And Chinese meals
On our lovely days out with my mum.

But now I am saying
'Good Bye to you, mum'
With love in my heart for
Your journey to heaven.

(by Ruth Cavanagh, published in 'The Lantern Weekly' and as part of the Order of Service at the funeral)

People who know this work, have started to request to write their own Memory Poem and express how they would like to be remembered. Some of these poems are amazing and one may want to look also at birthday poems- how do I want my year or periods in my life to be expressed in celebration?

You can find how someone created a poem of how they would like to be remembered after they died in a webinar by the PCPDL Network from 10th November 2021 at 48.11min:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIn5A4x5hz8&t=65s>

Resources:

'Sing Me the Creation- A Creative Writing Sourcebook' by Paul Matthews , Hawthorn Press, Stroud, 1994

Words in Place- Reconnecting with nature through creative writing by Paul Matthews, Hawthron press, 2007

Story Stones: [online] <https://artfulparent.com/story-stones-ideas-storytelling-rocks/>
(and many others)

PCPLD webinar on remembrance: [online] Remembrance: Including people with learning disabilities, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIn5A4x5hz8&t=65s>, posted on 21.11.2021, 48.11 min-50.33 min

Burga Liddiard, May 2022