

teach,

reflect,

write poetry

repeat

repeat

repeat

repeat

repeat

Poetic reflections from undergraduates at the University of Northampton, studying on the Learning and Teaching Programme

*Poetry can tell us what human beings are.
It can tell us why we stumble and fall and
how, miraculously, we can stand up.*

- Maya Angelou



Those who can, write poetry: Developing teaching assistants' reflective practice through poetry.

In 2022, the University of Northampton's Learning and Teaching Enhancement Team awarded Innovation Funding to Senior Lecturer Korrin Smith-Whitehouse to develop this writing and research project.

Poets featuring in Public Sector Poetry Journal, a writing, wellbeing and advocacy project which publishes regular poetry anthologies, were recruited for this project as part of the creative team and bespoke poetry workshops were designed for students on the Foundation Degree in Learning and Teaching, and the BA in Learning and Teaching, responding to feedback from questionnaires asking students about the

challenges they encounter when writing reflectively about their practice.

The aims of this research were to support students to develop their skills and experiences of writing professional and personal reflections, and also support and improve student experiences by creating a wellbeing space and opportunity for therapeutic; students were able to share their experiences with one another, strengthening communities of practice and developing staff's understanding of the challenges they face.

Thank you to the Learning and Teaching Enhancement team for funding this project, and to the 3 poets who worked with us on this project, designing unique workshops that allowed students to explore their personal and professional selves and the link between these two identities. Thank you also to the FDLT and BALT staff team who supported this

research and provided valuable insights into the challenges of reflective writing through interviews; their time and enthusiasm for the project was appreciated.

We are very grateful to the students who engaged with this work, completing questionnaires and embracing the workshops. Thank you for supporting this research and trying something new!

This anthology presents the work of several students who have generously shared their poems.



You can read more about the project here



And you can read more about Public Sector Poetry here

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Days of the week

Sunday night brings the dread,
Monday is far too near.
Try to sleep with all the noise,
that you can already hear.

Monday morning brings the blues,
But that is your favourite colour.
The weather much reflects your mood,
It couldn't be much duller.

Tuesday comes with its jobs,
The ones that you cannot complete.
Rushing around all day long,
Too ashamed to admit defeat.

It's the middle of the week,
Half the days to go.
You can do it just hold on,
Take a breath and take it slow.

Thursday comes around again,
The weekend is in sight.
You've spent your week wishing it would pass,
Oh, what a delight.

But fear not, it's Friday,
The weekend is almost here.
Counting down the hours,
until it will all just disappear.

Dulcie Jackson - 1st year FDLT student

School X

Control is what they have,
as they sit upon the pecking order,
being kind as well as strict,
to ensure there's no disorder.

Welcomed is what you feel,
As you are greeted with a 'hello',
Whilst you sit and wait for class,
all cosy, warm and mellow.

A safe space is what I give,
encouraging is what I do,
a positive environment is what we have,
creativity is nothing new.

Dulcie Jackson - 1st year FDLT student

Me, you, them

Equipped and ready,
I enter the building with my own identity.
I am ready to give a personal welcome to the children.
My perspective for today is positive.

You rush out and splash in the puddles.
Laughter and chatter fill the huge space.
Stopped by the teacher's whistle,
You slowly form into lines.

They are always present,
Whether it's for support or judgement,
Or even a Friday thank you.
You'll always find them stood on the playground.

Becki O'Rourke - 1st year FDLT student

Stars

*a reworking of poems from Public Sector Poetry
Journal Issue 1 and original verbatim*

Words everywhere, meaningless words,
Jumping words, difficult to read.
We are the helping hands to support
The flaring, fading stars.
It's our job to adapt, to make the stars shine.
It's all about the stars: the children,
The part of our whole: our education system.
It's our job to disguise our shit day with a smile,
Not to burden those that storm around the corridors.

Becki O'Rourke - 1st year FDLT student

I am

I am a busy, bustling place
I am where nobody wants to be and where no one has
as their intended destination
I am a miserable place where all you hear are groans
and sighs
I am the dull environment where nobody smiles

I am the colour grey
I am cool and uninviting
I am miserable and unwanted
I am the grey clouds on a rainy day threatening the
heavy downpour

I am the dreaded SATs
Everyone knows it's going to happen
And no matter how much you prepare for it
You never truly feel ready for it
I am the child sitting alone, trying to remember
everything they've been taught

I am the law opposing free speech
I am where people aren't allowed to express how they feel
I am making people feel oppressed

I am something that everyone will have at some point
in their lives

I am there to test your resolve and self-worth

I am here to let you find the shining star within the
dark grey sky - the person who believes in everything
you do

I am here to let you see that your important people
appreciate you

I am the person in the corner

I am the shy one who knows their stuff but doesn't
have the confidence to use it

I am always the last one chosen, and the first one
blamed

Becki O'Rourke - 1st year FDLT student

Untitled

They have become robotic,
All they care about is data,
To make sure they hit their percentages,
They become a number on the wheel.

I am feeling stressed,
Due to the amount of pressure I am under,
It feels so uncomfortable,
The feeling of tiredness oozes through my body.

Children are not determined to succeed,
Un-ambitious children,
Leads to lazy outlooks,
All they need is some motivation.

Carlton Beardmore - 2nd year FDLT student

Our system is broken

*a reworking of poems from Public Sector Poetry
Journal Issue 1 and original verbatim*

It's our job to be adaptive.
That just sums it up.
Resilience, resilience, resilience.
Odds are stacked against us.
Instead of love, we're teaching compliance.
We don't get recognition.
We safeguard children, but what about adults?
Joy is the tiny part.
Sadness is the major part.
Is it bad that there is nothing on there for me?

Kia Macmanard - 2nd year FDLT student

The Forest and the Trees

A meandering path through the forest lies before me,
although I don't know where it leads.
Up hills and down dells it wanders, going left and right,
hither and thither heedless of my plans.

Why do I follow a path I can barely see? you may ask;
perhaps it is the promise of a future half glimpsed.
There is a castle on a far-off hill which I keep in my eye,
where why is a word which is never feared!

My path, beset by the evolution of ideas and schemes, is
oft a choice between sheer cliff and slippery scramble.
Is this truly a path forward, or perhaps a road to
madness? And will I hold to my determination,
eventually to reach my goal?

Ian Kidd - 2nd year FDLT student

Taught out of love

*a reworking of poems from Public Sector Poetry
Journal Issue 1 and original verbatim*

Taught out of love
We'll teach the way they learn
Cheer them on when they succeed
Feed a hungry mind what it needs
We get the satisfaction
Because we know you,
We know you.

Megan Hayward – 2nd year FDLT student

More, More, More

*a reworking of poems from Public Sector Poetry
Journal Issue 1 and original verbatim*

The government is the whole,
Sadness is a major part.
Anxiety is the whole.
She logged on in the dark
And went home in the dark.
Confidential.
I wept from stress.
The odds are stacked against us
More
More
More
Every. Single. Day.

Megan Hayward – 2nd year FDLT student

Worn out

Worn out is a tired town,
a town on its knees,
in desperate need of renewal.
Everything is old, familiar, and damaged.

Going from one place to another is tiresome.
it no longer brings joy.
Worn out was once beautiful,
captivating and inspiring,
now it ebbs like the tide in and out,
washing up old broken things.

Worn out is almost black,
it billows like the dark thunderous clouds in the sky.
Consuming all within view.
Nothing else can be seen when it's around.

Worn out is the lesson before the end of the day,
dragging,
and causing people to lose their cool.

A long day..
No one wants to learn...
It drags on....

Worn out is a place no one should reach.
In an ideal world, it wouldn't exist.
There would be a law,
ensuring that people learned how to rest,
and how to take time for themselves.
Worn out must never happen,
as it brings grumpiness and lacks patience.

Worn out tells me I should slow down.
I should stop and rest.
It reminds me I can't do everything,
and I shouldn't attempt to achieve everything, just because.
It teaches me to say "enough"!
And "hold on, I'M NOT OKAY",
I need some time for me.

Worn out came to visit,
I really didn't want to let them in.
Worn out has no manners and barges on through.
I never invite worn out over,
yet they turn up all the time.
All the ideals I want to do,
Worn out laughs at and says NO!
Worn out is bossy!

Lois Fransch- 3rd year BALT student

The desk

The desk without room
Hardly a space
Too much to organise.
Paper spread.
Cannot find my afternoon lesson.

Undrunk drinks,
dehydration.
Energy drinks,
Will I set a bad example?

Let me stay in this mess,
Away from all the children.
Time checking.
Carting my life from class to class.

Emails, I hate them!
Over 8,000 to clear.
I think I might be a hoarder,
I might need that next year?

Too late, I've got to get to lesson.

Lois Fransch- 3rd year BALT student

Child's view

Look at this mess!

She expects us to work without any.

What a hypocrite.

I can't even tell what she's trying to do.

When we're in the classroom

it's always you're talking too loud.

At times she copes with a mess,

But at the end, not a scrap left in place.

That is why she's frantic at every lesson arrival.

Does she even enjoy the job?

For all her moaning,

At least she cares whether we succeed.

Lois Fransch- 3rd year BALT student



Dulcie Jackson
Becki O'Rourke
Carlton Beardmore
Kia Macmanard
Ian Kidd
Megan Hayward
Lois Fransch

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