

Ways we learn

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Exegesis

This poem was written following a conversation with a group of Intermediate level, Family / Systemic Psychotherapy trainees at The Centre for Systemic Studies, Wales, 2024. We had been reading Kurio and Reason's (2022) "Voicing rivers through onto-poetics: A cooperative inquiry" which had been quite a provocation. Later the same day we had all participated in an action research exercise with the river that runs by the venue we use for our teaching being a co-researcher, alongside the human participant-researchers. It had been a moving day and had raised many important questions about how we learn and what we are taught about learning; about how some learners and some ways of learning are hidden from view. One of things I was moved to do was to write this poem as feedback to the group, working with the words that I had been listening to. It aims to amplify the important messages about alternate ways of learning and knowing.

Citation Link

I have been experimenting with using poetry as feedback in group learning contexts. I had recently created a poem at our Student Conference (Pontypridd, June 2024) using words and phrases that I had "collected" or I might say been "tuned into" during the day. I had been inspired to do so from hearing a colleague, Tracy Breathnach, do something similar at a conference I co-hosted recently at The University of South Wales (Storytelling for Health and Wellbeing, Cardiff, June 2024). Clare Wenham (2022) has written about her use of poetry in couples therapy work; and Danna Abraham (2024) (featured in this issue of Murmurations) has written about using poetry in her educational practices. All of these practitioners have inspired me to keep experimenting with this device as a witnessing practice. My experience thus far suggests that people feel heard, witnessed and honoured by this practice; and are appreciative of the creativity the response both mirrors and invites.

Ways we learn

*Where on earth do we begin?
 Is this the way we learn?
 What is the how and how is the what?
 How are we educated?
 What's been beaten out of us?
 Maybe it's the knowing that rivers have souls
 and are bothered by the destruction*

*We can learn from each other
 Generation to generation
 Species to species
 Matter to matter
 If we notice what we are doing
 If we receive the echoes
 In spaces like these
 Where there are no rights and wrongs
 No definitive truths*

Ontopoetics

*We may plant our own seeds of uncertainty
 We might take a moment to ask:
 What makes a difference?
 What thresholds do we cross?
 And what does this mean to us all?*

*A transcontextual sensitivity
 Open to all the data
 All of the sacred
 It is past, present and future
 Screaming out where we have been
 And where we might be going
 Wading through the rivers of overwhelm
 And the rivers of hope*

References

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