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Perception, Language and Excavation

1) *Memory and Language* - Create a link between experience and emotion through poetic language. This establishes that the starting point examines what is familiar. Keep in mind that what is familiar is often linked to negative past experiences. Poetic language can help bring some intense personal thoughts and feelings to the surface. Be aware that this risk always exists.

- A) "I remember....."
- B) "I don't remember....."

2) *Language* - Poetic language can employ quick bursts of energy and emotion. It offers youths an opportunity to explore the possibilities and limitlessness of language as it banks on hyperbole and "poetic license" as paradoxically subversive yet redeeming tools. Also, poetic language insists on transgression as a transformative medium because it asks that the poet break down the rules and conventions of grammar.

Coupled with these ideas, poetic language offers students a sense of "ownership", the development of a private language that speaks to them as individuals. It is a language invented by each poet, not one that can be taught. As an instructor, you are acting as a guide more than you are as a teacher. Poetry can only be brought to light, it cannot be taught in the conventional sense.

3) *Two Ways of Using Poetic Language* -

A) *Making music* - Through the devices of repetition and rhyme, poetry creates music, becomes a celebration of the primitive aspects of language. This rhythm can intensify and reinforce meaning.

Note: Repetition is not just evident in one poem. It must be followed through a body of work. Both instructors and students should examine a body of work for repeated words, images, symbols and themes as they either consciously or sub-consciously emerge.

B) *Painting Images* - In my opinion, metaphor is the most powerful aspect of poetry. Use of metaphor creates complex associative links between image and instinct, the eye and the inner mind. A good poet trusts his/her ability to make metaphorical leaps in association. This process brings out the visceral impact of poetic language.

Note: Ambiguity resides in the realm of metaphor. I am not so concerned that the image or, for that matter, the poem makes complete or even partial sense. The work must speak most directly to what is needed. If letting go is needed, then the poem must reflect that abandonment imagistically. Some students' works occupy a place deep beneath the realm of concrete language, and often they are discouraged because they travel beyond our ability to comprehend their meaning. For me, every poem has meaning. That meaning may serve only the poet.

- 4) *Developing a Dialogue with Self* - As students are developing and refining their craft, they should be encouraged to keep a journal of ideas, a place to put quotes from poems that have inspired them. The journal should be used as a means of making students more self critical. They can use journals to critique their poems, to discuss the process of revision, and to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses.
- 5) *Poetic Form* - As your students are gaining a stronger use of language, they should explore the structure of their language. The physical layout of the words on the page says a great deal about the thought process that created it. Every poem is both a linguistic construct and a work of white space architecture. Students should be taught to use the negative space in their poems, to employ pauses and shape changes to reflect the changing tide of sounds, ideas and images.
- 6) *Revision* - The benefit of revision is that it requires a re commitment to the work. Here, the young poet must reenter the work. Revision builds the habit of discipline. At the same time you're helping build and strengthen the intuitive process, you should also be aware that the process is significant. One arrives at something meaningful through a combination of enlightenment and reflection. Revision develops in your students a sense of obligation to the work.
- 7) *Limited Censorship* - In the workshops, I employ very little censorship. My students know the boundaries and seldom test these boundaries. The true poetic process **MUST** take place on their terms. If their interest is to explore the depths of their anger, then they must, within reason, be allowed to use poetic language that functions best to flesh out that anger. Pain, confusion, anger, street life, violence and identity conflict are the most common themes and subjects presented in our workshops.

Note: The act of empowering language is contingent upon our acceptance of a poetic process that begins with our students on their terms. Often, language is a disempowering experience for these youths. It is presented to them in various negative shapes. Attorneys and judges define them through legal jargon, staff psychologists label and categorize them, guards bark commands at them and they use puts downs on each other as a means of defense or assault. Poetic language is a dialogue with self, and we must judge its use as little as possible.

- 8) *Vocabulary Building* - As students gain confidence in their poetic abilities, they should be encouraged to read books and newspapers with the intention of extracting new words. I tell my kids to keep a notebook handy when they are reading