



FEATURE

There are only really two rules to follow

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There are only really two rules to follow

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Across the UK a significant sector of Further Education 'Teaches English to Speakers of Other Languages' (TESOL). With an increase in refugee populations, local authorities and national governments alike commit funds to this provision as part of their commitment to resettling refugees. This provision takes many forms and involves many different kinds of teachers and volunteers who often use a range of activities and mediums to enliven learning and provide more than a knowledge of grammar and syntax. British Colonialism has a lot to answer for. Those who in small, everyday ways step into that breach inspired these lines:

There are only really two rules to follow

They say it takes a village to raise a child
Often enough it's the entire globe
That goes into the making
Of a Further Education TESOL Faculty.
TESOL teachers are an odd bag
So many restless wanderers
Year after year, decades,
Qualify and are off to see the world,
Paying their way with the Queen's English
Exporting often what they are escaping.

But language is always a rubbing along.
Purity of vowels is a figment
Of the imagination.
What's exchanged by these itinerants
Slants English,
Mixes in a subtext of subversion
Comes with accents of ambiguous allegiance.

There are also those who travelled
Under duress--
As the only economically viable way
To continue to teach what they love:
English Literature,
Job cuts from humanities faculties at home
Sending them abroad.

Some went with suits and ties
In their suitcases;
The international schools of global capitalism
Need teachers too.
However unlikely route these wanderers took,
Many came back to raise family
Or tend the one that raised them.
Repurposing their skills for home soil.
The ranks of further education TESOL teachers
Are a motley lot,
But each more like the other
In crucial respects,
Than when they first left British shores.

Most teach out of generosity,
An impulse to open the door wider
Give away the crown jewels of
Correct idiom and pronunciation.
One teacher told me:
There are only really two rules to follow:
Start with what they are interested in.
Be Kind.

Furthest into communities
Most varied in support they offer
These vagabonds come home
Bring their wanderlust to classrooms

Where they greet
Kurdish sisters from Syria
Cousins from Sudan,
A wife from Spain,
Grandmothers from Pakistan
The mechanic from Iraq
A musician from Afghanistan.
These classrooms of different voices
Have a marketplace familiarity.
Class is as much a haggle
A trading of words for festivals,
Customs, weekend pastimes, and favourite meals.
Where you tell me yours,
I'll tell you mine is the stock in trade.

Though leaving with English,
TESOL teachers came back to FE classrooms
With a smattering of Arabic
And greetings in Urdu and Farsi,
Enough to grease the wheels of learning,
Enough to anticipate some learner's perplexity
That in English there is a difference
Between the sound "B" and "V",
Enough to know that not in all languages
Are words written with vowels,
That commas in some cultures are useless.

This is the curiosity and tolerance
That extends the gangplank.
Learners step onboard classes
Held in community centres,
And tutorials in their own home,
Or one to one sessions
Out shopping in their neighborhood
So the word can be handed to them
With the peach itself.

Here, they learn the words

For further FE ventures:
The classes in electronics
Sound design and small business accounting.
From the break time conversations
The possibility of library cards,
Doctor's appointments, driver's licenses
And five a side football club memberships
Begins to take shape.

There are textbooks, digital audio resources
And magnetic alphabet strips.
But mostly its following along,
Laughter, boredom, rubbing out
Confusion, more laughter,
Filling in the blanks, starting again,
Hours of
Starting again.

Deep trauma, anxiety for those left behind
Still to face the boats
Hand with the scars of conflicts and worse
So much of the chaos
Carelessly set in motion
By blundering imperial swagger
so many years ago—

Yes, yes, these are here too.

Brutality is never mentioned,
But hunches its shoulders silently
Whilst the conventions of civility are
Offered, accepted, sedimented
Into bridgeheads of a different possible future
That may offer grandchildren
Of teacher and learner alike,
Side by side, a kinder language
In a common home.

Creative Writing as contribution to academic debate is part of the narrative turn in social sciences. Developing academic discernment into creative writing flows from developments at the beginning of the century, perhaps best known, Norman Denzin's (2003) *Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture*. As Clough (2008) argues in another seminal contribution, *Narratives and Fiction in Education Research*, truths about educational issues can be told using fictional devices. The transformative research paradigm in its effort to more clearly portray dynamics at the heart of social justice issues draws upon poetry, for example as Leavy does so within the *a/r/t* method that explores the interface between artists, researcher, teacher identities (Leavey, 2010). Patricia Leavy provides guidance on poetic and other creative methods in *Methods Meets Art: arts based research practice, 3rd Ed. (2020)*. This piece comes not from a particular research project but from observations and conversations with colleagues over several years that crystallised as a consequence of a stint volunteering in a TESOL class.

References

Leavy, P., (2010). *A/r/t: A Poetic Montage*. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(4), pp.240–243.
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