

The Word: What's in It

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ABSTRACT

This piece reflects on the poet/participant experience of Pop-Up Poetry, and the complicated immediacy that arises at the table, on the typewriter, between the poet and the participant. There is a deeper psychology going on than one might expect. It's demanding. It's fun. It is often emotional. And it's always a surprise.

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That's how we begin when we *do* Pop-Up Poetry. We do *it*. I hesitate to call it a performance because it *is* and it *isn't*. Is it a communion? Maybe. It's definitely a participation. Richard Harrison, my fellow Pop-Up poet, and I have had long conversations about what happens in the in-between as the poem arises in the particular intimate space of the poet, the interested person— who I will call the participant—and the typewriter. We begin with a word.

First, it's the sound of the typewriter, the song of the keys' clack that draws us in. I use *us* deliberately. The antique beauty of the machine is important to the participation. The curious potential participants arrive and one at a time sit across the table from the poet (note that the typewriter is *between* the participant and the poet). The poet asks the participant for a word, any word, that is personally meaningful in any way. Then comes the narrowing and the unpacking of why that particular word was chosen and the opening of the experience of the word for the participant. Then, into the typewriter, and then the poem. It sounds simple, but it necessarily isn't. Rather, it's demanding and often highly emotional. It must happen in a hurry (about 5–7 minutes per poem) because others are patiently waiting to participate. For the poets, it takes concentrated focus and skill, plus a lifetime of writing and study of the features and creation of a poem.

The 2022 SoTL Symposium in Banff was no different for us as Pop-Up poets, yet it was. In his opening keynote presentation, Dr. Randy Bass spoke of navigating the unexpected after the necessary shift in education's focus from teaching to learning. His words were perfectly bookended by Dr. Gabrielle Weasel Head's closing keynote highlighting Indigenous pedagogies of community learning and continuous transformation. Both speakers had me thinking about what happens when we *do* Pop-Up poetry and its relevance to SoTL.

Among the vast array of words given to me by individual participants during the Pop-Up sessions at the conference, the most frequent was *authenticity*. And there it was. The sun shone through the window. Central concepts from the various talks were unpacked again and again at the Pop-Up table in important, personal, and particular ways. Authentically. Not only did the poems arise, but so did very intimate individual responses.

The concept of *authentic* moved very quickly from conceptual to personal. Participation in Pop-Up created a particular space for this to happen. We felt it happening. *It* was often full of raw emotion. There were many tears and a lot of laughter. And there was the poem. The experience of it. Another transformative takeaway from the conference.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Beth Everest (beverest@mtroyal.ca) has recently retired from her creative writing position as associate professor in English, Languages, and Cultures at Mount Royal University. She continues to write, edit, and participate in the absolutely electrifying endeavour of Pop-Up Poetry.