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Episode 106 – Poetry in schools – revisited (05/09/2017)

Transcription by David Turner

Producer: David Turner – **DT**

Host: Jacob Sam La-Rose – **JSL**

Guests: Miriam Nash – **MN**; Keith Jarrett – **KJ**

Introduction:

DT: Hello, this is Lunar Poetry Podcasts, I'm David Turner. I'm supposed to be on a break from podcasting but something has been bothering me since September last year. We

started our last series off with a discussion about poetry in schools back when we received our first lot of Arts Council funding. At the time, I had just started using some new recording equipment and editing software and looking back I don't think I did the best job on editing it so I've had another look at it. I don't think I'll do this with any other episodes but like I said, this one has been bothering me and with kids going back to school this week here in the UK it seems appropriate to revisit the subject.

This conversation originally went out in two parts in episodes 77 and 78 so if you want to check out a much longer version you can scroll back through our archive. Jacob Sam-La Rose hosts this discussion and is joined by Miriam Nash and Keith Jarret, they talk about the work they do within schools with poetry education, how they got into educational work in the first place and what they wish they'd known when they first started out.

There are lots of great tips here for those already working as educational facilitators or those thinking about moving into this area of work as well as teachers looking to introduce poetry into their lessons. You can find links to Jacob, Keith and Miriam in the episode description if you want to book any of them to teach or lead workshops in your school. Also, if you want to learn more about teaching poetry get yourself over to Jacob's website as he's regularly running workshops and seminars about become a poetry educator.

Since recording this conversation Keith and Miriam have both released collections. Keith's, *Selah* is out through Burning Eye Books and *All Prayers in the House* by Miriam is out through Bloodaxe Books.

As always you can follow what we're up to at www.lunarpoetrypodcasts.com where you can also download a transcript of this conversation and follow the progress of our latest Arts Council funding application which I submitted last weekend. We can also be found at Lunar Poetry Podcasts on Facebook and Instagram and @Silent_Tongue on Twitter. If you like what we do then please tell your friends and colleagues about us either via social media or you know in person. This original recording was made possible with funding from Arts Council England.

That's enough from me. I'm supposed to be on a break. Here's Jacob, Miriam and Keith.

Conversation:

JSL: Welcome, this is the Lunar Poetry Podcasts. My name is not David Turner, this the voice of Jacob Sam-La Rose. I have two lovely, lovely human beings and poets with me, Miriam Nash and if we had a sound board you'd be hearing applause right now. And the one, the only, Keith Jarrett. So, for anyone who doesn't know you guys, I mean shock horror. Someone who doesn't know your backgrounds and who you are and what it is that you do. I'm going to start with Miriam. Miriam, tell us something about yourself. Who are you? What is it that you do?

MN: I am a poet, I'm an educator, I'm a sister. Important! I've been doing... I've been working in education with poetry for about seven years. I was introduced to the work by your good self and yes it's pleasure today to sit around this table.

JSL: Absolutely lovely. I love that sense of the various different roles. Must not forget that Miriam is also a sister very, very important. Alongside all of the other work that is done. And Mr Keith Jarrett tell us something about yourself.

KJ: Hello, I'm Keith Jarrett. I'm also good sibling, I hope, I'd like to think so. I am a poet, I also write fiction and I'm also an educator and have been part of the Spoken Word Education Project for a few years and I'm trying not to count them because time is flying really fast! And that's just some of what I do but at the moment I am a full-time PhD student and I'm developing my creative work while also looking at research and religion.

JSL: As some of the 13-year-olds I was working with earlier today might say "deep!". For anyone who doesn't know what it is that I do. Hi I'm Jacob Sam-La Rose. I'm the current artistic director and lead lecturer for the spoken word education program. I run the Barbican Young Poets program, I also am the artistic director for the Barbican Junior Poets program and we now have a Barbican Alumni poets program.

I support a range of different communities and collectives. The Burn After Reading community, for example. A large part of my work is given over to supporting the development of young and emerging poets, as well as being a poet and performer and educator myself. I've been working in and out of classrooms in various different educational facilities and institutions and spaces and community spaces for, oh I don't know. As Keith was saying, perhaps too long to count but something, if I had to put numbers to it something around 20 years now. So it's a joy to be sitting in this room about to embark on a conversation around the work that we do as poets in education.

So, I was having conversations with two people who were shadowing me earlier today and talking about my first experience of running a workshop and of being in a classroom and how it was that I got comfortable with that sense of leading something along those lines. What were your first experiences, how did you actually get into the work that we're talking about?

KJ: I think I was just asked... If I'm correct, because I can't really remember my first ever experience of doing a poetry workshop in a school. I've done other things, I also taught English as an additional language. And I should have known better but I walked into a classroom and went, "eek, what do I do now? Right! Why aren't you writing? Why aren't you interested.

So I think I really didn't know what I was doing in my first sessions. I think I was just called, and it was probably National Poetry Day, and I was asked to go do something and get the kids entertained in writing. So it was a really loose brief and I just loosely thought, yeah I can do it.

And then I did a mentoring project which was really about looking at certain pupils at risk of exclusion and so they wanted me to do a workshop where I'd be getting them to write poetry and Rap and using that as a way of bringing them in. Again it was a really wide brief and I was very inexperienced and I cringe, I really cringe thinking about those early days and the time where I'd just sort of hide in the stationery cupboard and think, what am I doing?

JSL: And how was that workshop that you were asked to do around poetry and rap and that kind of expectation. I mean, was it an expectation? How did that sit with you, how did that feel in terms of that sense of please deliver a workshop that relates to poetry and rap for us?

KJ: It actually... The story of that is a bit longer and it came from some mentoring work that I wasn't very well prepared for either. Where I was working with primary school age children at risk of exclusion and I wrote a report based on that. Which then went out to a number of schools and one of them picked up on what I did and said, "oh brilliant and you write poetry! How about you do something with poetry and rap?" Which sounds good but then I wasn't really supported. I was on my own, it was, I... Yeah I do cringe.

But, at the same time, I see the good intentions behind it. You know, Rap is a part of poetry by it can be a separate discipline and there's this kind of expectation, "oh, there's something cool, why don't you go and do something cool with the kids?" Like, that'll stop them committing crime and it didn't quite work out by that. But I did form some really good relationships with young people through realising that I was slightly out of my depth [**JSL:** right] and then trying to correct it.

JSL: Yeah I have this kind of vexed relationship, essentially I kind of fall on both sides of the divide with regards to the relationship between poetry and rap and expectation around that. I remember the earlier part of my career I did have a period of time where I flirted with hip-hop as a kid. So that was at one point very much a part of my culture but I kind of moved beyond that for my own self.

While I still love hip-hop music. I would never consider myself to be an emcee as such and like you I respect that rap is an art form in itself that has ways of working and skills associated. So there is a part of me that remembers a time when there was this expectation because you were of a certain perceived background, "Because you do some stuff with words right? That's hip-hop as well right? So you say you're a poet but hey come in and speak to these kids and do some rap stuff with them!" It's like, not quite that simple. Yeah, I totally appreciate that. So Miriam what are your hip-hop workshop skills like?

MN: I'm occasionally asked if I will rap by a young person [**JSL:** fantastic!] but I say no because I wouldn't do it justice.

JSL: I want to be in the room if that ever actually happens.

MN: Although, I am quite good on the Hamilton lyrics. I kind of fell into running some workshops or running a writing group for peers when I was doing my undergraduate degree at Goldsmiths. And through that I met Spread The Word, the wonderful organisation,

through that I met the poet Sundra Lawrence and through that I met yourself on a on teaching project, poetry project in schools in Harrow.

I wasn't teaching on that program myself, I was supporting it in a kind of administrative way, which has been another part of the work that I do producing and administering projects for young people. And that was a very formative experience for me, seeing that work and seeing the power of that work and being involved in it but also being able to look at it before I had a go myself.

And then I obviously had the incredible luck and the incredible privilege to work with you as one of your 'shadows'. And I think we worked together for almost the whole year actually. And I remember I worked with you in a number of different schools in a pupil referral units and museums. And so, I really got to see it... Yeah, I was a very, very lucky member of your 'shadow' community.

Yeah so, I got to see that work happening in some different settings and then some way into that we were both working on a project at Erith School in Kent with the wonderful Doug Bloom. And so, as part of that I ran my first workshop in a classroom on my own but you were there to support that. So, I did have a very supported entry in to poetry and education as a workshop leader which I, you know, think about and talk about actually all the time in my work. Because, part of what I'm able to communicate is that I do this work.

Not only the teaching and not only the workshops but you know I feel I am a poet because of the support of yourself and other poets who made it possible for me to even see that this was a job that. However strange and tenuous it may sometimes feel I could see it there and I just thought this is incredible work that I didn't know was happening. And I was not only shown that but able to be brought into it.

JSL: Listeners I am blushing right now you can't see this through the airwaves or over the digital streams but yes. Thank you for reminding me of some of the work that we actually did back in the day. I want to celebrate the administrative side of what it is that you've done and maybe we'll come back to that. Because I mean for all of us in the room, we have these varied perspectives so you know, experience of doing this work as teacher as well as poet and facilitator. Experience of not just being the poet in the classroom but also supporting the poets in the classroom and liaising with teachers and venues to ensure that that work happens and to make sure that everyone's supported.

I'd love to come back to some of that a little bit later in the conversation but I also want to pick up on that sense of the support that you said that you had. Because again, I know for me, when I was upcoming and learning my craft and learning what it meant to be a poet at the front of a room that wasn't a performance space but that was actually a learning space. You know a lot of that I learned 'on the hoof' so to speak. There were very few if any actual pedagogical workshops or workshops around the notion or the craft of how you pass your skills on to students or how is that you work with other people in that way.

So a lot of what it is that I've taken on, I mean obviously I've studied since then, but a lot of what I picked up in the early days was just through doing it and figuring out what it was that

worked and going into a workshop and saying; "Okay that didn't quite work as I planned, I'm going to have to rethink that and come back with something different. Why didn't it work? Okay, let me try this the next time." But now we have, and I mean this isn't necessarily accessible for all but there's more support for these kinds of things.

So again, Keith you have an experience of going through the spoken word education program. Miriam you had an opportunity to be supported by not just me but other teachers that you had access to. Tell me something about that experience of the kind of support or the kind of investment in development as an actual craft that you may have had. And what that meant to you in terms of your development.

KJ: I first met Peter Kahn a few years ago and he contacted me via recommendation from someone else, we had a Skype conversation. He told me about this radical project which was starting, which is a collaboration between him, different poetry organisations and Goldsmiths. I thought, wow okay this is very interesting. I'd never heard of anything like that before, an opportunity to do what I'd been doing. By that time my I'd worked in schools doing poetry projects, mentoring projects as well, where I was slightly more comfortable in the classroom than my first experiences of hiding in the cupboard.

Going through the process of being in a traineeship almost and then also having that academic backup to it being at Goldsmiths and doing the MA and having colleagues, other people who are undergoing the same process. For me, that's just been infinitely valuable and I just don't understand why it hadn't existed in the way it had before and why there weren't more opportunities for people to do that.

Just even basic things about how you present work and present examples and obviously there's the teaching stuff of... You know, thinking about people who might have dyslexia or problems with vision or whatever and thinking about how you present your material but then how you demonstrate, how you prompt poems, how really simple basic things which I'd never thought of like; Okay if I'm going to set an exercise for students to do I should have done it myself first and I should have a template poem of my own as well as another example.

Things like that, no one told me that until I actually went through that process of training and I thought, 'wow'. I feel like they were wasted opportunities where I was in schools where actually pupils who weren't engaged, they may well have been if they got it and if I'd had that, you know, extra background. I'm not saying I'm a perfect teacher or workshop leader and I'm not saying that everyone is going to pick up something from a poetry workshop. But I feel that having that background, having that training has hugely helped me teaching but also generally how present myself to other people.

MN: I think the support that I had was what even got me into the classroom and you know made me feel like I could enter that space. I remember, it used to be so terrifying, I mean the night before I would go into a school... Particularly when I started to go in all on my own, you know first you have to find the school and it's really early, it's on the other side of town you know, it's got several entrances. You know, you have to get in first of all.

JSL: I'm thinking of a particular school in East London that has two different sites, I think that we all are familiar with. And you could be at the lower site and actually realise that your workshop is supposed to be at the upper site or something crazy. Yeah, yeah.

KJ: Ten minutes walk.

JSL: Yeah yeah.

MN: Then you have to find the teacher and you have to be presentable but you're sweating and you weren't quite sure what to wear. And finally you get into the classroom. But, so you know that support was really, really important in giving me the confidence to be able to know how to enter into that space and talk to teachers and you know, make sure that I knew what I needed to know and feel that I could ask questions.

And I guess even with that support still when I was starting I thought that I was supposed to know things. You know I thought I was supposed to just be able to get on with it and you know that that was a requirement. And you know, if something went wrong I would feel really bad. Whereas now you know I think, one of the wonderful things about having some more experiences you know I think, well things don't go as planned all the time. And part of your role as an educator is to be able to adapt and see what's happening and kind of be aware of yourself in the space and not get lost I guess.

You know, not get lost among all the ideas of what you think you're supposed to do because if you're so caught up in, you know, presenting in the right way. If you're so worried about getting it right you're actually not in a position to give support and energy to the students.

JSL: Hallelujah.

KJ: Yeah.

MN: So you know, you need to be able to have that support to be able to do that. To arrive in such a way that, yeah that you're there for them. I guess every teacher has to go through some kind of wrangling with themselves in order to get there. But it's so much easier to do with other people.

JSL: Yes. It's fascinating, the first year of teaching for just about every teacher that I've ever, kind of, spoken to or had any kind of interaction with, that first year of teaching is like a hellish experience. While you figure out who you are and how you relate to the work that you're being asked to do. But then you learn from that incredible kind of, you know, intense period of pressure. And just trying to do right by your students and by everything that you know you're supposed to be offering them and you come out on the other side of that a better teacher, ideally.

There's so much in what you've just said, both of you that I really want to celebrate that... Particularly, three things that come up from what you just said Miriam in terms of our relationships with failure. The notion of being present in any space where we're teaching and that relationship with improvisation and being able to think on our feet.

That thing about failure is such a big thing because we have to be able to hold the possibility that things aren't necessarily going to work as planned but also we have to balance that against the fact we've got these various different stakeholders in the room, right.

So we've got the students themselves but we've also got the teachers or whoever the representatives are of the institution that we're working in. And they have they all have their various different expectations. So we have to kind of balance that sense of, "well hey, look it might not go according to plan but we'll do something". With this sense of, "well these guys are expecting something and these guys are expecting something", and I'm kind of you know beholden to what it is that they expect!

Balancing that can be a really challenging thing, right. So there's that, there's that sense of being present in the room. I love that sense of presence and being completely kind of just there, right. Being in the room and alive to what's being offered and not just following a script. Being responsive, this notion of responsive teaching I love that idea and that's something that I try and put over to all of the spoken word education students I'm working with now. That sense of responsive teaching being able to shift and respond to what it is that your students are giving you back and how...

I mean, the number of times I've turned up in a workshop space and what it was that I was told would be, you know, the situation... Or, here's the brief and you get there and it's like, this is nothing like what you told me was going to happen. This space is completely different these students are completely different. The teacher who I'm speaking to in the room is saying that actually this is a workshop about, I don't know, naval history and I thought it was going to be about whatever and we had these conversations, we set it all up.

So being able to think on feet is so important and it comes back to that sense Keith in terms of what you were saying around expectation and I'm fascinated by that and I don't know if you guys have any thoughts on these lines specifically. The notion of facilitating or teaching, there is this expectation of us as kind of creative professionals or freelance literature workers, whatever. That some part of our income will come or be derived from facilitating or working in a classroom environment. And it really comes back to, for me, this question of beyond that expectation, why are we doing this work? Right?

Surely it's not just about the money, it's not just about I need to be able to earn X amount from this teaching activity in order to be able to survive as a quote unquote poet. Surely there's something more in terms of why. I mean, why do you guys do this work? Why is this work important? Is it important to you? Why do you guys do this work, what's it all about?

MN: To me it feels really integral to my work as a poet. Because I feel like writing on its own is wonderful and it's so amazing to spend time learning that craft and reading and working with other poets. But I think being able to work in education, whatever that means you know, and that really doesn't have to mean any one particular thing. You know, I don't just mean working in schools but taking the poetry into different settings. For me that feels really essential to what poetry is, what poetry is for.

Yes I have those moments on my own at my desk where I think, yes this is it! But I also have probably even more moments where I'm working with somebody, you know, whether it's an adult or a young person. Whether it's someone who has experience or is writing their first poem where there's this recognition that we're working with creativity here. And that's an incredible thing as well, I mean that's such a privilege to be able to work with people on something that is so personal.

Because you know having an audience is about communicating the work that you've done but using poetry in education is communicating the process and communicating that wrangling, that learning that you're doing yourself. I think that's really important about this work is that whenever I go into a space I'm just reminding myself that the people I'm working with are creators in their own right. And they may not identify as creators at that particular time but they are because we all are, and yeah, so that's why I do it.

JSL: There's something beautiful in what you just said that I might come back to after I invite Keith to say a few words about why it is he does its work. But that notion of the relationship between process and product in the settings that we work in and again how a lot of the expectation... Unless you have someone that you might identify as a champion teacher who kind of understands and really does appreciate and really values the work that you're doing, there's a sense of, "yeah we want them to write poems".

"All this kind of airy-fairy processed stuff? Nah, nah, nah!" "What we want at the end of this period of time is, we want 30 poems, or we want 10 group poems, or we want this... You know we want the finished anthology or you know..." The focus on the actual product is... You can appreciate the importance but to create space and to actually create an ability, or to allow for that space to focus on the process that can be communicated beyond the session that you're leading, yeah yeah I celebrate that. Keith why?

KJ: I'm going through a process where I feel really weird at the moment because I spend all of my days, probably about between six and eight hours a day I spend at a computer just transcribing interviews that I'm doing as part of my research. And it's driving me crazy, in a good way because I know it's temporary and it's part of a bigger project which I'm really excited about.

But I know that if I just sat on my own writing poems all day and not communicating in other ways, interacting with people, sharing process and sharing how I do things and how different possibilities is just as important as me having my creative time or my time alone to work. You know, with me and my computer or laptop or notebook or whatever it is.

I think as much as I crave that a lot of the time and especially at the end of a long day where I'm in a school teaching and I'm like, "I just want to be on my own and work!" I crave that but if that was all that I had to do in my life I wouldn't be satisfied either. So it's a weird thing because sometimes I do almost hate it.

And especially working in schools and that was another thing with the spoken word educator project, I'm no longer embedded in a school. And you know, after my last day and

after really missing some of the kids that I was working with, suddenly, I was like yeah I'm free! I don't have to put up with all of the pressure that goes into being in a school.

I find schools incredibly depressing places. The institutes themselves and the management and the way they kind of work. But, it does something working in there having those challenges having the conflict between the head teacher who wants no problems, no fuss, nothing controversial. The teachers who want results, the kids who want either to be entertained or to do something that engages them. And you who wants to make it different. Like, all of that, and as a creator as well you want to have your own artistic integrity rather than go into some curriculum or you know...

So there's all of these conflicts and that challenges, it creates a lot of heartache and stress and I'd probably have more hair on my head if I didn't ever work in schools. At the same time there is something so valuable and so rewarding and I've also had some of my... Undoubtedly some of my best experiences just being in a school, getting to know pupils who I learned from as well.

I have learned as a poet to write, through teaching poetry and being challenged in all of that. Yeah, it's something that does scare me, I have to be prepared for it. I have to be prepared to teach and it isn't easy. It feels like some, you know, it's that expectation, "oh you write, you should teach it as well." It's not easy to do it properly, especially in schools. I think working with younger people is a particular challenge. But I couldn't see myself not working in some form or another with young people helping them to create poetry.

JSL: I think it's worth pointing out, part of the model of the spoken word education program. Which was as you said that sense of; Okay, for the first year you'd spend that time working alongside whoever the lead on the program was, having seminars around both the craft of writing and the craft of teaching. But then also you'd be in a school one day a week I think it was for you all year, right?

KJ: Yes.

JSL: So you're in one day a week working alongside Peter who was leading in that year and with the facility... It was kind of on the job training, that facility to try things out, see how they would work. With, again the kind of support that Miriam was talking about with someone like Peter in the room who would be able to feedback to you after you'd run that workshop. But then the second year, once you've gone through a year of that kind of instruction that kind of training, the second year you take on a school for yourself. And you'd be in school. Your generation of spoken word educators, you had, was it four-day weeks.

KJ: Yes, four days a weeks.

JSL: So, I stepped into the program and took it on in the second year of the program which is when you guys were just starting your placement. And one of the thoughts I had that I put in place the following year was that, I felt the four-day week... There needed to be a bit more flexibility for people around that...

And again, one of the things you were touching on was this notion of balance, right. Being able to balance your needs as working artists between the work that you do in concert with other people. The work that you do in spaces that are filled by other people. The work that you do that it's feeding into other people's development but also the work that you necessarily need to do as a writer in that space between you and the page.

And I mean the whole thing about the spoken word education program at the moment is a sense of that balance between you as teaching artist and you as poet in your own right doing that work. It's powerful stuff to hear you talking about that sense of what it actually takes to be in an education institution. I mean hats off to all of the teachers any teachers that might be listening into this conversation.

MN: Yes, they're amazing.

JSL: All of us who've worked in any of these kinds of roles can appreciate and have some appreciation for the work that it is that teachers have to do. You know, crazy hours Monday to Friday plus whatever time is that they put in from their own time, preparing lesson plans and making sure that they're ready for the next week ahead. You know there is so much that is asked of them and as a teaching artist in a role, if you have that kind of full-time or almost full-time placement. I mean four days a week essentially becomes five days a week.

KJ: Yes.

JSL: Because you're there and you are delivering work for those four days but your fifth day which is supposed to be kind of time out for you to be writing and doing you. Really becomes, "do I have everything I need for the next week?" And that's something I think we forget, regardless of whether you're a spoken word educator, a resident artist or any other program you might be working on. I think one of the things we sometimes forget to account for is that preparation time, it's not enough for us to just turn up. "Hey I'm here now. Let's write some poems!"

You know there is that preparation time that when we fail to account for [it] we kind of end up bankrupt in terms of time and we kind of lose that... The time has to come from somewhere and we lose that time for ourselves, which is really important. I know self-care is a big thing that I want to talk about in a moment.

But Keith I just wanted to come back to something, you were talking about this notion of relationship with students and how that is formed in terms of, I think it was and you can correct me here. But I think it was that sense of what your needs might be in relation to what it is the needs of the students might be. Was it something along those lines?

KJ: Yeah. There are so many different conflicting needs and it's a bit like you know if you pick up a children's book in a bookshop. The bookshop isn't trying to sell to the child necessarily, it's the librarians and the parents who have the money. But at the same time the child needs to be interested enough to you know... If it's a series, they're going to say, "Mummy, Mummy I want the second one" or "Dad I want the second one."

So you're or my challenge always is thinking you know, who's this for? It's for me, but then actually, what does the pupil need, what do I want to get out of them? You mentioned also, like about you know, not necessarily having the same...

Having an idea of what a class is going to be like but then having different expectations. When I'm told that they're a certain ability or you know... I'm told different things about the pupils, or not, again I have an expectation. Oh, okay so this is what the teacher expects of them and so this is what I want to get out [of them]. And I'm constantly challenging myself to, okay I want to get them to be... You know, if this is someone who has never written I want them to write a poem for the first time. So there's my own ego in this.

JSL: So you set yourself those kinds of challenges?

KJ: Yeah. But a lot of that is my own ego. Whereas, really you know, what is in that child's interest? Maybe, actually they just need to chill and have some time where this is the first time that they've even had the idea that they could express themselves. But then at the same time if this child wants to express themselves but I know that this school has a particular rigid policy and says you cannot talk about gangs, guns, crime. You know they've got a whole prescriptive list then I've got that challenge on top of it.

Okay, what takes priority? Is my own politics going to take precedence over the schools, or what I think might be in the child's interests? So I'm constantly thinking about that, I think it's... I was going to say it's easier but it's not. When you're embedded in a school when you're there more than just once then you can really take on board those challenges a bit more.

Along with the preparation there's emotional work, so you've got to factor that into your preparation time. But then you know, if it's just a one off, you're flying into a school like... In that preparation I've, sort of, got tiny little key points. Okay. let's try and make sure that they all write ten lines, but at the same time. You know, let's really get to what I want from that. Is it to be fun? And for them to not be put off by poetry by the end of the hour.

JSL: Do you have these kind of base line... I mean regardless of whatever the workshop might be. Each of you, do you have your own kind of personal manifesto in terms of... For every workshop that I might go into I want to be able to leave these students with an appreciation of poetry, for example. Or I want to make sure that they have this understanding of how metaphors might work.

Do you have your own set of, whatever the workshop is, here are three key points that are just a part of my practice when I go into a space that I want to try and ensure that these students are left with generally?

MN: Yes and no. Yes, in the sense of things that I kind of want to be in the room or, kind of, core experiences. But no in terms of, you know, a line requirement or everyone has to write a poem even. The first one is definitely what you said, it's fun and that's something that you taught me very early on. It's like, you need to have fun delivering your workshop.

And that helped me a lot in getting through, kind of, the first fear of going into a classroom in the early days just thinking that, "oh fun!"

JSL: So easy to forget yeah?

MN: And thinking, okay you know... So that's why, you know, it's relevant, me being a sister because, you know, being with my sisters is that we have a lot of fun. Like, with my sisters I'm probably sillier than with any other people, you know. And so I guess I try and just get a little bit of that. Often, you know, if I'm going in for the first time I won't know the students. But to try and have a sense of fun.

And then I think there's something else which is very easy to achieve but I'm glad to kind of think of it as a core thing or experience, is that you know, they get to meet a poet and they get to ask them questions. And, you know, obviously I'm going in so that's very easy, that's already kind of ticked. But it's like there gets to be some exchange where they get to interrogate, "what is a poet, what do you do?"

So I have to remember never to take for granted that you know, that they will understand what a poet is or what my role is and why I'm there. So yeah I think that's a really important one. It's not so much a requirement but I do find myself working with the notion of specificity and using a detail. Almost more than anything else in terms of technique because even beyond you know, thinking about what a poem is I want them to understand how language sticks with us in our minds. And I want them to have an experience of that.

So usually that's going to be an initial session by me sharing probably a poem by myself, maybe a poem by someone else and asking them like what they can actually remember after hearing that in the air without being able to read. Because that's helpful in every situation in which they're asked to write in school. You know, even in speech actually, being able to convey something in a way that people will remember.

JSL: Keith, can you add anything to that list? In terms of the things that you... When you know you're going into any kind of workshop, whatever that workshop might be. Are there any kind of base principles, base considerations? Regardless of what the specific content of that session actually is. Are there any base principles that you generally adhere to in terms of what that experience should offer the students that you're working with?

KJ: Well my first one is a negative which is just, I don't want to ruin poetry for them.

JSL: Right.

KJ: And that's so easy to do. The other one is, connection and something I learned from being in the school where I was for a year was not to write people of. Which is a tough one because I did it in different ways, because I would target... My aim was, initially I really want to go for the... Because of my background in mentoring and exclusion and all of that I was concentrating on the kids who were deemed bad or deemed at risk of, you know, being... Or having behavioural issues or whatever and then also the kids who are super interested and wanted to come to 'spoken word club.'

So I thought okay I'm going to go for those and people in between I wasn't that concerned about. But at the same time, I mean, looking back that was really naive. There were a few kids that I think I really could have paid more attention to and one in particular by the end of that year she was so fantastic and helped mentor other kids in poetry and was such a great experience.

So, my greatest thing even if it's a one off is to try and take each person on their own merit as much as I can. But then that, you know, say it's a class of thirty and it's an hour, that's not very feasible. But even just to like get everyone to say their names and just to make sure that I get eye contact with everyone. And just to say... And keep positivity going as the bare minimum, never to dismiss anyone.

Even when I'm trying to get them to work, even if they are like, ah I can't be bothered and I know I've only got this one workshop for one hour with this person who I'll never see again. I'm going to keep an atmosphere of positivity that, one won't put them off but two will make them think wow actually maybe we've connected and there's something... So yeah, in short, to open doors if I can. To keep them open if they're already open. [JSL: Yeah.] And that's it in a short... You know if I don't really know them beforehand.

JSL: Just in terms of my own thinking around the kind of base principles that I like to bear in mind, I try to give over or try and leave my students with some, some kind of technical awareness. Even if it's one point, some kind of technical awareness or technique that they can use in terms of the craft of writing or in terms of their poetry, right. And that kind of goes towards this sense of, I want to make sure that they're left with something that exists beyond me.

So it's not just about me being in the room being the poet who's arrived, who's giving them this, "hey great experience!" And then disappears for a little bit. But that sense of, here are some skills and it's not just about me, it's about your relationship with this thing that we call poetry.

I want to try and ensure... And again I had that experience similar to you Keith of being brought in to work with students who are identified as failing or who have difficulties in the education system or whatever along those lines. And for so many of those students and for so many of the other students I work with regardless of whatever their background is or their sense of attainment or achievement, I want to give them the sense that poetry is something relevant.

Yeah, something that is accessible and something that they can claim as their own. It's not just this kind of old dead thing over there... Which also leads into this, kind of, conversation between poetry and it, kind of, comes back to the poetry/rap thing that we were talking about before... Miriam, I'm still keen to hear you rapping... But that whole sense of the relationship between poetry not being cool and the things that are cool. So that sense of... The relationship between poetry and spoken word, for example. And how we brand things as spoken word to make them accessible.

Poetry is a broad field and I want to challenge you, I want to push you a little bit. You might say you like this part of that field, which might be defined as spoken word but I want to show you that that's just one point on a large map. You can travel across that map as much as you want, there are so many different places that you go.

We've spoken a lot about our experiences, if we were challenging you to offer up any thoughts, any advice to an emerging poet-educator who wanted to do more work or who has perhaps run some workshops but is looking to 'skill-up'. Looking to figure out how to do better, how to succeed, how to develop their vision of success and what success means in a teaching experience.

What kinds of things would you put forward from your own experience that people should maybe bear in mind?

MN: To come back to the notion of support, that we've talked about a lot. I think it's really important to ask yourself, where is my support coming from. It's easy when you're starting out, I thought, "okay what do I need to do, to be able to do this work?" To be able to be there to get there and be in that room and be able to handle it.

But I, you know, I was thinking about external things. I need to meet this person, make this connection. I you know... But not about the support that's needed. And you know, we need to ask the organisations that we work with, the schools that we work with for support. And in order to be able to do that we need to have a sense of what that support is.

And so I think, you know, the way to get that starting out is to talk to other poets who have been doing it for longer. The others who are just starting out and even by having a small support group, you know, between poets who are working in different settings. Those things are really important.

JSL: So maybe starting something up for yourself if you're not aware of something that you can join? Just being able to say, "Hey guys we're doing... We want to do this kind of work. Let's say we band together and share experiences?" I mean there is so much that's happening now in terms of spaces that are being set up for people to learn or... I mean there's the Apples and Snakes' masterclasses, for example. You know, there are things that are happening but beyond those to be able to kind of create some kind of community or community of practice for yourself?

MN: Yeah, absolutely and just to make sure that you have support... The support that you need wherever that comes from. Yeah it may take a while to fully understand what kind of support it is that you need. I'm really grateful to certain poets that I work with and in particular this year, Jasmine Cooray who... For reaching out and saying, "Okay I'm doing this work, you're doing this work, some other people are doing this work."

And we don't have supervision, we don't have regular supervision which is built into some other professions. And you know we need to do whatever we can to ensure that the organisations that the schools that we work with help us to get that, but we also need to

take responsibility for it and give it to each other and ourselves. That's, something really important.

And again, I guess it takes a little bit of experimentation but to try and figure out what kind of teaching work you actually want to do and what kind of work you are suited to doing. And that's something that I remember you challenging me on Jacob, from very early on. And it's great isn't it, as a learner you know years later you sort of have these moments where you think, "Oh this is really really what Jacob meant!"

And now, you know I think yes, it is great to go and experiment and I would encourage people to have the support that they need to be able to bring their work into different environments. Don't feel like you always have to be the person leading it, go and be a shadow. Go and shadow different artists, expose yourself to different practices. Read books. But also you know, all the time be reflecting on, where does it actually work for you, where does it spark for you?

You know, for example I think for quite a long time I felt like I needed to be able to do the 'one-off' workshops, where you go and do the assembly in the school and then you work in different classrooms. I occasionally still do that work and it can be great fun but, you know, I had this mistaken idea that I sort of needed to prove to myself that I could go into almost any situation that.

JSL: That you're capable of it?

MN: Yeah and you know, actually I much prefer working on longer term programmes. I think I'm much better suited to working with a slightly smaller group of students over an extended period of time and it's very valuable to know that.

JSL: There's this part of the teaching practice, in terms of the way that I conceive it anyway, which is you have to create space for your students to learn for themselves. And in Caribbean culture there is this phrase, "if you can't hear you must feel". And again the flip-side of that can't hear must feel thing is you're going to learn. You're going to learn for yourself if you can't take it...

Again, actually what we're celebrating there is, it's not just about me telling you what it is that you should know. It's about you figuring out for yourself in a constructed space, right. And it's a joy to hear some of that thinking kind of land. Yeah.

But also that sense of actually really, genuinely getting that sense of. Well look, there's a lot teaching that needs to be done in this city, in this country, across the world. Not everyone needs to be teaching the same thing or in the same way, you're doing yourself and you're doing your students much more of a service if you're figuring out who you are as a teacher. What it is that you can provide and yeah great challenge yourself but figure out where you're best placed and push that. Yeah, love that.

Any other tips that we want to pass on any other tools?

KJ: I would just go on a practical level of just making sure each time you go into a workshop you know that you've covered the bases of... From as far as what you've been told and to try and get that information. So I know generally speaking I'll try and do a 'Prezi Presentation' but that requires the Internet and a projector.

So just making sure basics like that [are in place]. Do they have the Internet do they have a projector? There are some schools I've been into which don't allow USB sticks to be used and I didn't know that until I walked into a school, tried to like... And I thought, "Come on!" and I couldn't use that. And so then that created a whole different set of problems.

JSL: That's like your IT department saying, "We're not going to accept any foreign USB devices because they might corrupt our network with a virus or something so forget that.

KJ: So I get it now but it's just so annoying because every other place that I go, like a USB is kind of the minimum and with PowerPoint or even Word I could have done something just by accessing the documents that I had. But I had no way of doing that.

Then also just knowing if you don't know the place that you're going to, especially if it's a school or something like that. Just knowing who to go to for specific... If there are any issues come up, who do you refer the pupils to? Are you going to be there on your own, is there going to be someone else there with you? And then again, what the different expectations are. You know, do they want you to do turn-tabling with without your consent.

So just having absolutely as much in writing as possible as well as on the phone, just having good contact with whatever space you're going into. And then again just checking my own motives. Obviously it's lovely, you know, sometimes I have gone into a place thinking, "Great it's, you know, a couple of hours and I'm getting paid which is nice". But actually, I'm here to share my experience and my knowledge and my craft. So, just making sure I'm at the right place to do that.

JSL: And I'd jump in and I'd support... In terms of what you were saying about having things on paper so that you can always refer back to them. You know having those conversations.

I know again, with all love to the teachers that we work with. We all know that everyone's busy so we know that sometimes email conversations are delayed because marking needed to be done and so on and so forth. And really you're the poet who's possibly only in for the one session or only in once a week or once every fortnight or something like that so there are other priorities that get in the way.

But having that conversation via email so that you've got that kind of chain you can look through and refer to and if someone says well we thought you were coming in at this particular time and you were needing this you can actually refer back to. When actually it was clearly said and disseminate to this body of people that this is what we needed just in case there's any confusion. You know having that kind of recourse is, I think a very good thing.

Along the lines of paperwork, making sure you've got your DBS, your CRB and your public liability insurance and all those kinds of things. Just making sure that you are covered, it's the kind of stuff you hope you don't need but if you do need it's good to have in place, right.

And knowing that there are organisations... So for example, I believe that NAWE still does this. If you sign up as a NAWE member you get your you get your public liability insurance and you can do your DBS through them as well. And there are other organisations that you can approach along those lines. There's an organisation called The Artist's Network which isn't necessarily about literature as an art, but yes signing up for The Artist's Network gives you a fair amount of cover or gives you access to a fair amount of cover for public liability insurance and indemnity, which I found out about when I was running workshops for the Tate Modern.

In terms of, again the practicalities... Having that awareness of what the culture of the school is and what the procedures are if something happens. So from simple things like you know... Again we were talking about appropriate dress within a space, knowing that you're probably not going to be going to school wearing a cap or a hat because in some settings... You know even if you are dressed neatly but still wearing a hat there is actually a school rule against headwear. You know, knowing that before you go in.

Whether it is that kind of stuff or whether it's if something happens in this classroom then a student will... I mean generally you should have a teacher in the room anyway ideally depending on... You know, if you're employed almost full-time as a teacher or a member of staff then maybe there's a slightly different thing there. But if you are an artist who's being brought in to run a short-term workshop then largely you should have a teacher in the room with you as a representative of the school in case anything happens that needs a member of staff to be aware of or to march things through procedures.

We all know, however, that there are circumstances where you'll arrive, teacher will be there for the first five minutes and then say, "You've got this? You've got this! Great, good, I'm just going to go off down the corridor and just take care of this other thing from the next..." Never see them again. Yeah.

So kind of knowing what the procedures are and what's appropriate. Knowing or having some sense of... If something happens in the room or if there's a discipline issue then you're actually going to that office 'over there'. An awareness of the rules or the regulations or the kind of procedures around disclosure, for example. If something's said in the room that suggests that something's going on at home that needs to be escalated? Knowing who it is that needs to be informed of that.

Not putting yourself, for example, in a position where you promise, "Okay, no one else will see this material. I promise it's just you. It's just on this piece of paper." But then you see that piece of paper and you're like, "Wow there's something happening". And now I am duty bound to report this or pass this on to someone else who has a responsibility for disclosure in this space. Have any of you had an experience where a student has cried in one of your workshops?

KJ: Yes.

JSL: How did that feel?

KJ: A few times. There was... Particularly under, I'll call it a traineeship though I was really shadowing Peter Kahn for a while, going into the school. And he developed one particular session that was guaranteed to have at least one pupil cry.

JSL: Right.

KJ: And I've since just done it as a one-off workshop and again like with him, they're balling. It's quite a generic thing you know it's, I mean the title is like, "What it's like to be... For those of you who aren't". And there will always be a few kids who will do something silly you know, what it's like to be a spaceman, for those of you that aren't. But then will be someone who like, what it's like to be bullied and they'll go really in deep and then suddenly the atmosphere in the whole room changes.

JSL: Yeah.

KJ: People are like, whoah and then the tears come and whatever. And it's brilliant because I feel, wow, something has been opened and accessed. However, it's how you deal with the aftercare.

JSL: Yeah.

MN: Yes.

KJ: And how that is perceived by the institutions. Some schools and school managements will think that's a very negative thing, suddenly there are these kids crying and being emotional and it doesn't fit with the school ethos. Or, things have come up in that which I then have passed on and disclosed, because I do immediately. And this is something, again a big one...

Like before the writing process saying look this is your opportunity to express yourself. At the same time you know, things that we say about each other we're not going to gossip about each other in the room we're not going to allow certain things to leave the room. However, if there's something that I'm slightly concerned about, and it's good to know the name, I might just have a chat with Mr 'So-and-so', or Mrs 'So-and-so'. And that will be good because, you know, the whole point of this exercise is to open up a bit.

That said, we don't want everything to be going outside the room. So if you couch it in those terms generally speaking it works.

JSL: You frame it so there's an awareness of the fact that if anything does flag up [**KJ:** Yeah] you may well pass that on to an appropriate person? [**KJ:** Yes] Right.

MN: I think it's a really good example that you bring up, you know, this exercise that people can take in a quite humorous or light direction and if they want to they could go somewhere more serious. But I think it's really important to have those options and to never be pushing people, even without realising, because that's...

You know, we would never try to push someone to reveal something they didn't want to but if there's an implicit feeling that in order to fulfil the task you kind of need to dig deep, you may not realise how difficult that might be for certain students. So, to always kind of make sure that writing a poem about football is as celebrated as writing a poem about your little sister's illness.

JSL: Yeah. So we're creating spaces for these things to happen right? Rather than saying you must be this way or that way. [**KJ:** Yeah.] So in terms of that kind of, "Oh you came in and you made the kids cry. What's wrong with you? You're the poet was the fluffy stuff about clouds and things!" So there's that kind of, on one extreme, that sense of doing the light fluffy work. On the other extreme there's a sense of, "Well I'm the poet. I'm supposed to come in here and then go deep and bring out all of the trauma." And all that kind of stuff.

That notion of creating the space that the students need, I think is so powerful rather than pushing them in any one direction but giving them those options.

KJ: And that's the other thing, like, where else is there the opportunity to deal with death in school?

JSL: Right.

MN: Exactly.

KJ: Something like that. But at the same time don't push it. I know as someone who's been a participant in a workshop that at any given moment there are things that I want to write about and I don't want to write about. Things that I feel safe writing about, things I don't feel safe writing about. So like just providing that opportunity to go with it.

The other advice is just to allow a lot of air in the workshops to go in multiple directions that don't force humour and lightness. And that don't also force stuff that can be really heavy because, I mean... Yes, sometimes I do want to talk about death and sometimes I want to talk about roses and sometimes both.

JSL: At the same time in the same poem, yeah. Where else is there for our students to talk about their inner most thoughts and feelings? Their experiences and their perceptions on the world to bring their insides out in some way in a space that is supportive? For them to kind of stand up and read that work, put forward that expression and to have a class or showcase, an audience in that showcase, put hands together and say, "We hear you. We hear you and we celebrate what it is that you've just written and offered." Those are special spaces they really are yeah.

Along the lines of these kinds of requirements and things we should bear in mind as people going in to schools and running workshops and working with teachers and working with students and doing this work. Someone talk to me about the notion of looking after yourself in this, because so often we're forgotten.

So sometimes I run workshops, in fact I run a lot of workshops for people who do this kind of work and I'll say okay so who are we serving when we're in a classroom? Who are the stakeholders? Who are we thinking about when we're running a workshop? And the first thing that most people will say is, the students, obviously students we're there for the students!

Okay, that's good but there's more. Okay so who else? Oh! Okay the teachers maybe, because yeah actually some of the work that we do benefits the teachers. We're supporting their thinking around what poetry can be and how poetry can work. And we're supporting their understandings of who their students are, they get to see their students in different ways.

So yes, the students and the teachers, yes! And I'm like, actually there's more, "Who else?" Yourself, right. What are your thoughts on that, in terms of that notion of looking after yourself in the work that you do. How important is that for you as a consideration?

KJ: Yeah I mean we've kind of skirted around it but one of the big thinkers on, you know, pedagogical theory was Paulo Freire, he critiqued that kind of banking model of education where you know you have the teacher who's like at the top of the pyramid who's sort of imparting knowledge and sort of pouring knowledge into these empty vessels the pupils and they must get as much logic as they can.

But that top down view not only is hierarchical, not only belittles students and necessarily aggrandises the teacher but it also just ignores the importance of the pupils in some way. As people who already come into the space with a lot of knowledge and a lot of value that they can add. So I know whenever I go into a space whether it's with adults but more often we have young people that I'm getting something from them.

Sometimes it's just mannerisms and ways of talking. And I'm paying attention to that because I love language so I'm thinking, "Oh, wow they're saying that in that way. Okay interesting." So sometimes it's just that, it's their sense of humour, sometimes it's their sense of optimism. I can be quite pessimistic at the moment with politics and everything else. But they're like really young and hopeful you know, they don't think the world's going to end.

It's the humour most of all, especially the so-called problematic kids, even when they're insulting someone, they'll say something so creative, I'm like wow. That's amazing, that's really great.

They're coming with different cultures and different first languages sometimes. And sometimes if I get it right and if I'm getting things out of him they'll say, well actually in Turkish or whatever we'll say this. So suddenly I'm getting poetry. So if I pay attention to

myself as a learner and as someone who is soaking up stuff then it changes the whole dynamic. And then you know obviously I'm the adult in the room and there needs to be some respect for authority but at the same time it's not a hierarchical one.

It's just, I happen to be in control and I'm the one being paid. You are the one who's forced by law because you are a minor but actually you have value. And I'll try and be honest about that as well and say look, you know I think what you have to contribute is amazing.

JSL: There's a way in which you're also being fed by that interaction, you're gaining from it. With regards to that kind of 'pedagogy of the oppressed' and all that kind of thinking of 'the bank of education' is also a guy called John Maeda who put forward this notion of the relationship between traditional leadership and creative leadership.

And the model of traditional leadership is kind of analogous to the notion of the orchestra and the conductor where the teacher is or the leader is the conductor and orchestra follows. Whereas the notion of creative leadership was put forward as being analogous with, the jazz band. Where you're a player within this kind of collaborative space and you may lead some of the standards, you may lead how things are moving, and again you're responsive and you're listening and you're in the mix with things. And again, that notion of being fed rather than just being solely the lead of that kind of experience is a beautiful thing.

Is it fair to say that we teach from the heart?

KJ: Yeah.

MN: Yes.

JSL: We have a care for the work that we do and for the people that we interact with, right? So how do you sustain that energy? Where does energy come from and how do you keep that fire and how do you keep some of their energy for yourself?

MN: Well it is a challenge and I think, you know, in many ways... Because the way that I've been working in education is quite different to the spoken word educators program where you're, you know, essentially a member of staff within a school. And there is a great privilege in that role of being able to come in to a space and come out. You're not carrying all the weight of that institution in the way that the teachers do every day.

You know, they engage with that space absolutely every day and that you know... We all see and know the incredible work that that is. If I'm teaching in the way that I want to teach, it is very much from the heart and that can make me very porous as well that can make me actually quite vulnerable in a way, if I'm not taking proper care of myself. It can be very overwhelming to come into contact with this many people, this many stories, and to be that open.

And, I know that I have a sensitivity there and that's part of what makes me who I am and that makes me want to do this work with writing and teaching. But if I'm going into a space and I'm not able to, kind of, fully hold my own then I shouldn't be going into that space.

JSL: Right.

MN: And I guess the tricky thing with that is like, with any work that we do is that it's very easy to up a front. It's very easy to, you know, get good at what you do and be able to sort of go through it without really being in the right mind set to do it fully, in a way that kind of fully respects the students the teachers and yourself.

For me, it's involved a lot of learning about taking care of myself, taking time off when I need to. You need to check in with yourself and say, "Okay, how are you doing? What are you going to do to make sure that this day is okay for you? Okay, you're actually going to go out for the lunch break and not be in the staffroom where you'll have to speak to a lot of people. Or, you know, you're going to arrive a little bit early in your classroom so you get to see that room and just take a breath."

But, you know, what are you going to build into your day so that that happens? And I think it is about these sort of small actions. Oh who am I going to call after my session just to say, "Oh this went great or this didn't go so great"? So that you're not carrying everything by yourself.

JSL: Do you have that experience where you kind of pick up and realise that you're actually in the middle of a period of time where you haven't been looking after yourself? And all those good things that you should be doing have just fallen by the wayside because you got busy and it became really difficult to keep all of that stuff up and you kind of realise what it is are you actually missing? Have we all had that experience?

KJ: Yeah.

MN: Yeah of course.

JSL: It's so important, but it is so easy for those things to fall by the wayside. It needs to become part of our practice.

MN: Also it can be shared. [**JSL:** Yeah.] I think we shouldn't underestimate the people that we work with, the teachers you know. If you are on a slightly longer term program you can get to know you're, the teachers that you work with and you know, be able to have a little conversation. A little wind-down afterwards, debrief, "How did it go?" We need those things, we shouldn't think that we can just function completely on our own.

JSL: We are not machines!

KJ: If you do find yourself in a situation where you are kind of on your own and you do feel you've kind of been left to your own devices... Just the basics of, proper sleep and decent nutrition. Especially if you're like going from class to class, just making sure you are

eating properly and sleeping properly. I find that helps and when I start to let that go it's usually because there's other things going on and I'm feeling a bit stressed and overwhelmed. And then you know sure enough a few weeks later I am ill or you know something's not quite right.

JSL: For sure. What is our work worth?

MN: It's that great question that you get asked, you know, if you have some time where students can ask you questions and it's the first session, there's usually someone who's like, "How much are you being paid?"

JSL: Yeah. What is our work worth? So ya'll have been teaching in various different ways and guises for, you know, a fair while now, right? Do you still have that kind of awkward moment when someone asks you to come in and run a workshop and maybe they haven't pitched the fee yet and you're like, "They haven't pitched a fee yet! At what point do I actually start to talk about a fee.

Do you guys still have that kind of thinking, that thought, that awkwardness around asking for monies for the work that's done? Or asking for a fair set of monies for the work that's done?

KJ: I can be really awkward anyway with emails and stuff, with conversations even. It just depends what space I'm in but it's best to be just upfront from the get go.

MN: Yeah!

KJ: On a couple of occasions it's been expected that it would be free, which is weird. But otherwise it's good to know beforehand and just... There are polite ways of doing it and I think that comes with the practice of just saying you know... Even having it as part of a list. You know, so what kind of a fee, how long? You know basic because again when they say half a day you know, half a school a day can mean like from 08:00 till 14:00. Which you know, a full school day is only an hour and a half extra, so it's like okay. So things like that come as part of it.

And I know Apples and Snakes and other places do actually say what the kind of expected going rate is so you can find out, you know, if if people are really being insulting by offering you fifty quid for a whole day. And travelling up to, you know, some place where it'll cost you that much to get there.

I know that I do a better job if I feel that I'm not being insulted. You know, I'm being paid a decent amount and I'm expected to turn up and it's professional and then I behave like a professional. But if they're sort of just treating it like, you know, it's a little favour then of course I'm not going to come in... As good as my intentions are my spirit isn't going to be the same as if I feel I'm doing a professional job. So yeah that's my rambling answer.

JSL: Miriam, your thoughts on that sense of awkwardness in terms of what it means to have that conversation around monies when it comes to this work? Because you know there is this sense of, you're an artist you should enjoy doing this! That kind of thing.

MN: Yeah I think what's tricky about that as well is that, because we generally get paid daily rates and the daily rates may seem high to people who are on a regular salary. And that's really understandable but it's just a very different way of being paid. So you know, if your daily rate is £250, £300 this may sound like a lot of money. But when you factor in the fact that you cannot do that work every day, necessarily and that you're bringing in your...

You're really bringing in your expertise and the job that you're doing is not something that you can do in an everyday way, you're actually being paid to come in to do something special. And so you can't go about your business in an everyday way you know. So I think that it's really important that that is being valued and understood.

And I feel really lucky in that the teachers that I'm working with at the moment. I've been having a really good experience with the schools I've been working with in the last year. Because I've been trying to work more with schools that are delivering long term programs, there's already that investment and that's amazing. To be able to work with teachers who on top of everything else that they have to do, are putting on this after-school program. Or making sure that in the incredibly stretched timetable there is time for this thing.

I don't know that I feel awkward but I still don't necessarily feel great at negotiating on my own behalf and I think that's something that we, again can easily take for granted. Like, I'm a writer, I'm an educator I know I can deliver a great workshop and I love what I do but that doesn't necessarily mean that I have all those skills of being a freelance professional. You know, I'm not necessarily great at all the mechanics of that.

JSL: That's a really important part of it, that notion of... I mean a lot of what we've been talking about in this time has been, how we manifest as educators, as poet educators, or artist educators, or teaching artists in educational spaces. But there's a large part of this conversation that really is about how we operate as creative professionals how we do that work of promoting ourselves, how we do that work of managing the administration and how we do that work of managing the finance of what it is that we do.

I mean, we were talking a little bit earlier about the notion of the work that we're doing of being almost unregulated. As you were saying, there are no supervisors necessarily you're working for yourself but that also means that you are responsible for setting your pay grades, so to speak.

So yeah there's an awareness of the market that we exist within and what the economy is, right and what a fair rate might be in relation to generally what budgets are available from schools and all that kind of thing. But there's also a sense in which if you're constantly going by just what the set rate is... So again for example, we might use the measure of an Apples and Snakes rate which I think is fantastic in terms of an understanding of a baseline.

But if we continue to take that as simply the baseline there is, you know, where do you go in terms of, as you grow and develop experience? Are you always going to be at that rate and how is that rate indexed, for example, to inflation? Do you get a pay rise at any point in this career?

You know we have to think about how our work can be sustainable for ourselves and how it is that our work, as we consider it as work. How it is that our work facilitates the lives that we live in the same way as anyone else's work in any other sector or industry will facilitate the lives that they live, you know.

Alright, there is so much to speak about, there is so much else that we could talk about but I hope you the listener have gained something from this conversation. I know it's been a joy to the in this room with Keith and Miriam. Thank you, Keith, thank you Miriam.

MN: Thank you.

KJ: Thank you.

JSL: You are more than welcome and thanks to David Turner and Lunar Poetry Podcasts for making this possible and making this happen. Thank you for listening.

End of transcript.