

## Poetry: A Means of Creating Deeper Place Connections

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## PRACTICES AND CURATIONS

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### Poetry: A Means of Creating Deeper Place Connections

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The article examines examples of poetry writing by Year 9 UK secondary geography students to represent their interpretation of a sense of place. Poetry writing forms part of an exploratory investigation into ways of engaging a geography class with the study of place. Place is a key concept within geography (Cresswell 2015; Lambert 2017) yet Rawling (2018) recognizes its meaning remains elusive. The students glean their contextual understanding from research and a day's multisensory fieldwork. Poetry writing through its careful choice of words supports the students to represent the individual ways in which they connect with a place's past, present and in some instances consider its future. The activity encourages the students to express their affective and cognitive place understanding. The students use different modes to support the representation of their poems. The process of creatively representing their poems reinforces the students' ability to communicate their unique place messages. Poetry writing allows the students to engage with a place and informs their conceptual understanding of its diverse elements.

The poems contribute to Cresswell's (2008) interpretation of a sense of place as “\_ the meanings, both individual and shared, that are associated with a place” (Cresswell 2008, 134). The esthetics of place he argues requires further development in school geography (Cresswell 2008). The focus is on the content of the poems and the students' use of multimodal means to communicate their place understanding.

The findings draw on my PhD research into an alternative place pedagogy which provides students with layers of contextual experiences to create a sense of place. The students build their locational knowledge of Wroxham and Hoveton in the Norfolk Broads in the east of England through research, a guided river boat tour, walking and exploring during a day's multisensory fieldwork. The conceptual framework is influenced by Somerville's (2010) place learning through the body, stories, and contact zone developed from her work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Geographical understanding is informed by Massey's (2005) interpretation of place being dynamic and “\_ the throwtogetherness of place demands

negotiation” (Massey 2005, 141). Both academics are querulous of representing a static view of place (Massey 2005; Somerville 2015).

There are calls to find ways of creatively and affectively engaging young people in the study of place from the UK (Rawling 2010, 2017), and Australia (Somerville 2010; Somerville et al. 2011; Somerville, Power, and De Cateret 2009). The Australian *Love Your Lagoons* (Somerville et al. 2015) place-based sustainability curriculum project in south-west Sydney uses poetry as a means of engaging and connecting school students with their local wetlands. Writing poetry from being in place Rawling (2008, 2011) argues should form part of a geographical education to esthetically engage young people with their world.

Poetry is interpreted here through Madge’s geographical lens of “a creative act that uses language” (Madge 2014, 180). Poetry is receiving recognition for communicating messages about place (Acker 2020; Armitage 2014; Cresswell 2014, 2020; De Leeuw and Hawkins 2017; Griffiths 2018; Lorimer 2008; Sheers 2008) and for enlivening fieldwork (Boyd 2017; Paiva 2020). Geopoetics combines geography’s critical lens with poetry’s creativity (Magrane 2015) which Magrane et al. (2020) consider stimulates new ways of engaging with the planet’s geographical issues. For example, Magrane (2020) recognizes geopoetics encompasses an embodied approach to place with narratives in varying designs.

In linking poetry with multimodality (Andrews 2018) demonstrates the genre’s ability to use the affordances or strengths of different modes to enhance a poem’s message. A mode is interpreted through Kress’s (2017) lens of being a socially and culturally shaped form of meaning. Multimodality, Kress (2010) recognizes could link cognitive and affective understanding. The following poems illustrate the students’ use of multimodal means to create a geographical sense of place.

## DISCUSSION

A geography class come to know a place through layers of multisensory experiences including listening to a tour guide, taking photographs, sound recordings, sketching, walking, and investigating. These influence how they engage with their study location. The students worked in self-selected groups throughout the research from planning to representing their findings. Being part of a group encourages the students to be active participants and talk through their ideas with their peers. The approach supports Kress’s (2010) awareness of meaning emerging from social interaction.

On returning to the classroom the students are given blank sheets of paper to create their sense of place including a poem for their fieldwork location. The haiku style and acrostic poems demonstrate the students use of the genre to express their place messages. The students and class teacher opt-in to participate in the research yet can opt-out at any point. The students are given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

The first poem in Figure 1 is collaboratively written by two students while sitting on a park bench. The poem communicates their impression of the location’s mood through “[A]rea so serene.” The students use the present tense to share their sense of wonderment for their surroundings. Their choice of words gives an impression of a living and moving landscape with water that “trembles” and swans that “float.” The students notice the symbiotic relationship between the water and the swans. The selection of words and photograph demonstrate they have taken time to appreciate the esthetics of their surroundings.

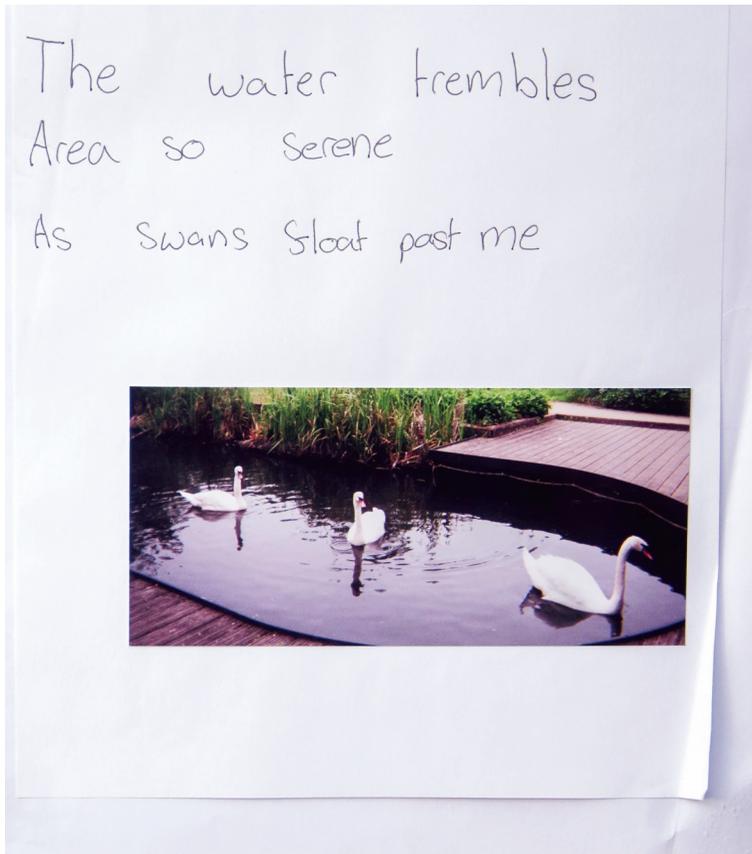


FIGURE 1 In situ poem.

Together the poem and photograph communicate a vicarious sense of being there. The presentation demonstrates Rose's (2008) recognition of geography's use of photography to provide information about a place. The poem indicates the students' multisensory approach and reinforces Pink (2015) and Paiva's (2020) appreciation of the interconnection of our senses. The students' poem reflects Paiva's (2020) recognition of poetry's ability to express sensory and affective insights. The addition of their own photograph supports the students' message.

The students' fieldwork and poetry share Somerville's (2015) ontological view of coming to know a place from having a sensory embodied presence. Such a view Somerville (2015) argues could lead young people to make affective connections with their human and non-human surroundings. Indeed, Somerville (2015) feels such a relationship requires a different epistemology, one which supports representing affective connections. This research by equipping the students with cameras to take photographs of features they feel are representative of a sense of place encourages such connections. The outcomes of this research were unknown in advance.

The students' multimodal representations of their poems led me to explore multimodality as a pedagogic tool to communicate geographical fieldwork. Their overall representation reflects

Kress's (2010) understanding that language alone only provides partial meaning. Kress (2010) outlines the benefits of combining writing, color, and images to enhance messages. In using multimodality, Jewitt (2017) highlights the potential for meaning to arise from the interaction of different modes. In the process the students respond to Vannini's (2015) question of "[H]ow do we ensure space is made for multimodality?" (16) in relation to nonrepresentational research. Interestingly Vannini (2013) incorporates photographs when writing in magazines for a popular audience. The inclusion of photographs adds contextual information (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006) to the students' poem and ensures the reader can share their affective place connection.

The photographs in Figure 2 complement the student's conception of "calm broads" with views of tranquil water. The poem demonstrates the student's multisensory place engagement through reference to surrounding sights and sounds with boats that "dawdle past." The poem continues to share a perception of a living landscape with birds "flying" and "twittering." The use of gerunds suggests the birds will continue to fly and twitter. Interestingly the student was part of a group who made a recording of bird song while walking and exploring their fieldwork location. The poem captures the student's sense of place which is inclusive of the broad's iconic living and non-living features, the birds, waterscape, and boats.

The poem negotiates Massey's (2005) conundrum of ensuring a textual place message is not static. The student's use of the present tense shares a temporal view of the broad's slower pace of life. In the process it reinforces Andrews (2018) recognition that poetry can negotiate time.

The poem echoes Paiva's (2020) use of poetry to express sensory and bodily experiences of observing and walking around the Staines Reservoirs in West London. In linking poetry with sensory geography, Paiva (2020) demonstrates the potential of the genre to express bodily feelings and place understanding.

The student's haiku style poem in Figure 3 describes a living place with moving boats, trains and singing birds. The student's creative use of language enables the reader to share the image of a dynamic landscape. The student uses rhyme and rhythm to convey movement with "trains rattle over tracks" and "boats rumble over water." The alliteration of "rattle" and "rumble" demonstrate the student's ability to use poetry's tools to communicate a lively sense of place. The poem combines sounds of the inorganic and living environments through references to trains, boats and "birds cheeping loudly" which reflects her multisensory place experience. The use of verbal imagery enables the reader to share the student's place conception which concurs with Massey's (2005) view of a place being in a continual state of movement. The student surrounded her poem with her photographs of boats and cut out images of birds to add contextual information.

The broads' acrostic poem in Figure 4 reflects the student's interest in the natural environment. The poem communicates the student's perceptions from critically observing and listening to the surroundings. For example, "[D]amage to the banks creates erosion" suggests an awareness of local environmental issues. The student shares this knowledge about the effects of speeding boats. This information came from listening to the tour guide during the class's morning river cruise and seeing the effects of speeding boats on the river's banks. The student uses poetry to critically communicate the negative environmental impact of some river users' thoughtless behavior. In mounting the poem on a piece of green felt the student reinforces the poem's connection with nature.

The poem uses verbal imagery to communicate a sense of sound which Rose (2016) recognizes is not represented in photographs. Furthermore, the poem's mention of "[R]eeds

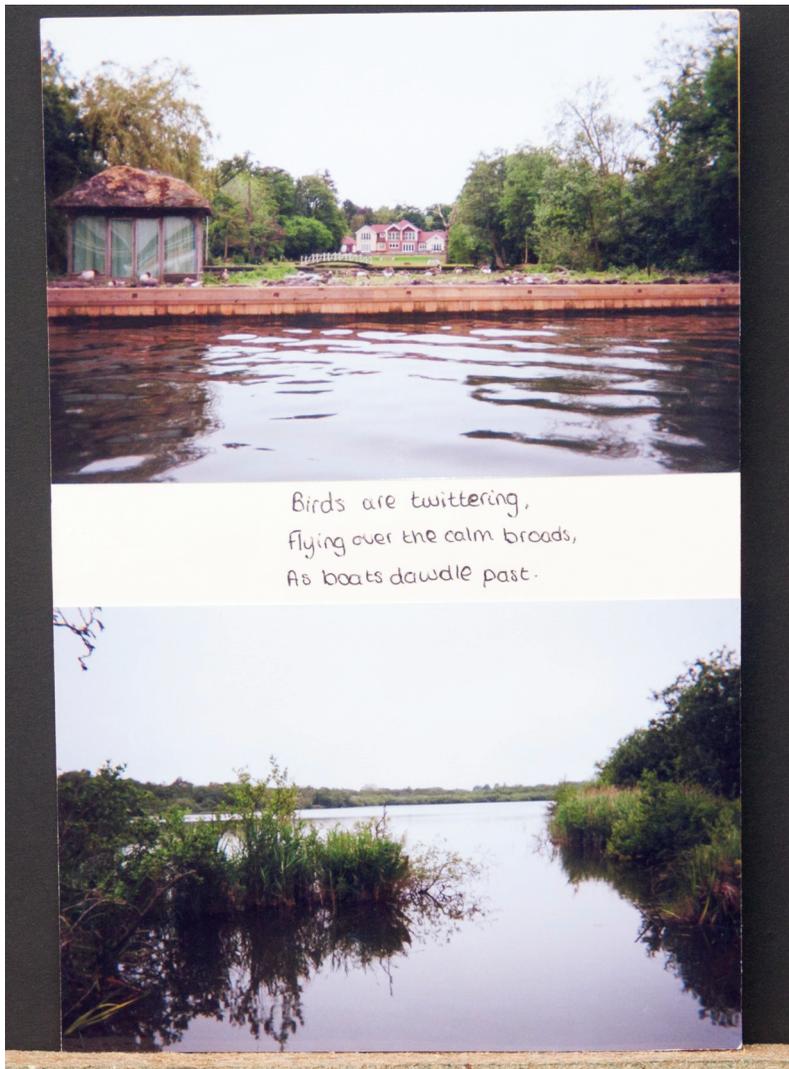
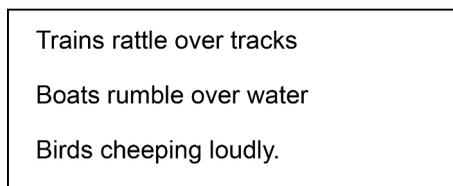


FIGURE 2 Photographs contextualize the student's poem.

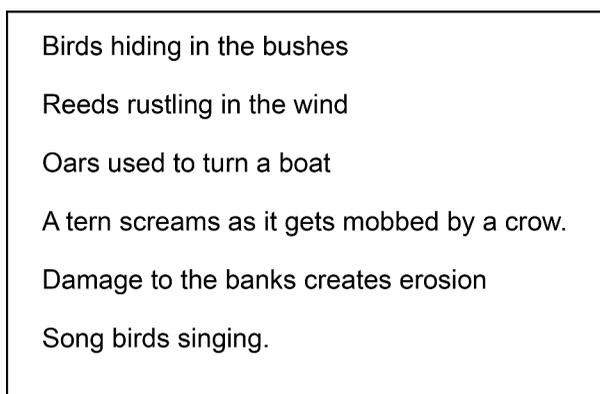
rustling in the wind,” and “[S]ong birds singing” signify the student’s interest in nature. Description of the tern’s “screams” adds detail about pitch which Kress (2010) identifies as an affordance of tonal language. The student’s use of the present tense captures Massey’s (2005) conception of the natural world that is never still. The student fulfills Boyd’s (2017) calls for geographers to use poetry to represent fieldwork’s affective insights. The poem captures the essence of the broads with its rich flora and fauna.

The acrostic poem in Figure 5 represents the group’s perception of their study location and has a clear environmental message. The focus on the issue of bank erosion implies an



Trains rattle over tracks  
Boats rumble over water  
Birds cheeping loudly.

FIGURE 3 Haiku style poem.



Birds hiding in the bushes  
Reeds rustling in the wind  
Oars used to turn a boat  
A tern screams as it gets mobbed by a crow.  
Damage to the banks creates erosion  
Song birds singing.

FIGURE 4 Broads acrostic poem.

awareness of measures being taken to tackle speeding boats through suggesting “simple mistakes” can be overcome. During their boat trip, the students observe speed limits along the river’s banks to discourage river traffic from going too fast. The group showed concern for the swans’ nests which are at risk from the backwash of passing river boats.

In [Figure 6](#) the student demonstrates the significance of the poems by positioning them in the center of a sense of place poster. The student endorses Kress’s (2010) recognition of multimodal techniques like framing with colored wavy lines to showcase the poems. The student uses color’s facility to convey meaning through its association with an object which Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002) appreciate varies according to its cultural context. In this scenario, the blue frame draws on blue’s association with water to communicate the significance of the River Bure and the broads. The second poem about Hoveton is written in two shades of green which reflects the color’s associations with nature. The student’s creative representation adds contextual insights to his place knowledge.

In the first acrostic poem in [Figure 7](#) the student shares the story of Wroxham’s growth adding a temporal dimension. In “[W]herries transformed through centuries” the student demonstrates a knowledge of the changing use of wherries from cargo vessels to carrying tourists. The student’s recognition of the changing use of an artifact indicates an appreciation of our evolving cultural needs. The second line “[R]eeds harvested for thatch” shares an understanding of the use of local reeds for thatching. The thatched houses are iconic local buildings.

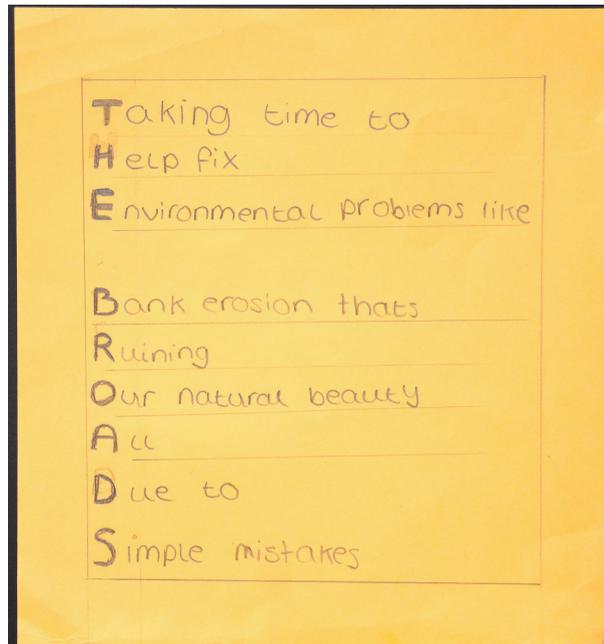


FIGURE 5 Group acrostic poem.

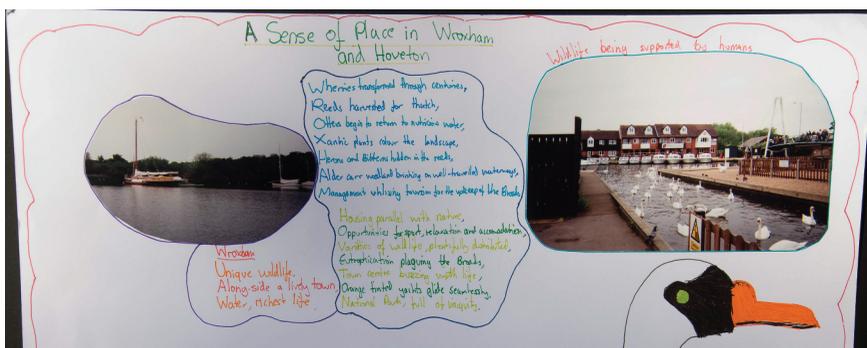


FIGURE 6 Multimodal poetry representation.

The acrostic poem includes contextual knowledge which bring the places alive. For example, noting the presence of alder carr woodland along the river's banks, a characteristic feature of the broads' landscape.

The student's acrostic poems share an appreciation of the on-going issue of managing water quality through "[O]tters begin to return to nutritious water" and displays connective thinking. The ability to practice relational thinking is a characteristic which Jackson (2006) associates with thinking geographically. The ability to think relationally is evident in the last

Wherries transformed through centuries,  
 Reeds harvested for thatch,  
 Otters begin to return to nutritious water,  
 Xantic plants colour the landscape,  
 Herons and bitterns hidden in the reeds,  
 Alder carr woodland brinking on well-travelled waterways,  
 Management utilising tourism for the upkeep of the Broads.

Housing parallel with nature,  
 Opportunity for sport, relaxation and accommodation,  
 Varieties of wildlife, plentifully distributed,  
 Eutrophication plaguing the Broads,  
 Town centre buzzing with life,  
 Orange tinted yachts glide seamlessly,  
 National Park, full of unquity.

FIGURE 7 Place acrostic poems.

line “[M]anagement utilizing tourism for the upkeep of the Broads” where the student recognizes the importance of income from tourism to ensure the broads has a sustainable future.

In the acrostic poem for Hoveton, a settlement which adjoins Wroxham, the student describes the place’s characteristics. The reader is left with an image of a linear settlement which has grown up along the banks of the river in “[H]ousing parallel with nature.” There is a clear recognition of the river’s role in the economic and social life of Hoveton in “[O]ppportunity” for sport, relaxation and accommodation.” The student shares his observation of the yellow flag iris found in the broads through a reference to “[X]antic plants color the landscape.” The student negotiates Massey’s (2005) conception of a place with on-going interweaving stories.

Poetry's need for synthesis supports the student to communicate his interpretation of the place's story drawing on its history and contextual geography. In his acrostic poem for Hoveton the student provides a realistic summary of negative environmental issues with: "[E]utrophication plaguing the Broads." The succinct communication leaves the reader in no doubt of the student's understanding of the concept and the severity of its impact which requires on-going management. The student uses metaphor to convey an impression of a thriving settlement through "[T]own center buzzing with life" conjuring up an image of an industrious bee colony. The statement implies a realization of the spatial differentiation of land uses within the settlement. The poems share Massey's (2005) integral view of the human and natural world and in the process overcome Massey's (2005) and Somerville's (2010) criticism of binary thinking.

At the same time the student uses poetry to convey a visual sense of wonder for the esthetics of the location with "[O]range tinted yachts glide seamlessly by." Indeed, Massey (2014) argues the ability to express a sense of wonderment is based on having the necessary knowledge and in this instance conceptual place understanding. In the final line the student includes his individual interpretation of the multifarious spatial differences in the broads through: "National Park full of unquity."

The poems reflect a holistic understanding of the locations' physical and human geography to create an insightful representation of a dynamic sense of place. The student negotiates Massey's conception of places as "*\_\_ spatio-temporal events*" (Massey 2005, 130) consisting of human and non-human components each following their own trajectories. The poems provide a snapshot of Hoveton and Wroxham at one point in time.

Collectively the poems suggest students who have taken time to connect with their surroundings. In giving students freedom to represent their poems in a variety of forms it stimulates them to creatively express their place understanding. Their multimodal presentations reinforce the students' esthetic place understanding. Photographs add locational knowledge which Rose (2016) appreciates can provide information about a place's atmosphere, color, and textures.

In writing acrostic poems it focuses the students to establish the place's characteristics. The process endorses the significance Cresswell (2019) gives to representation for establishing meaning. The use of multisensory fieldwork supports the students to connect with a place through gathering information about its features and sounds. The combination of multisensory fieldwork and using poetry to develop student knowledge contributes to Phillips' (2015) discussion about where such explorations can lead in school geography.

From a pedagogic viewpoint it could be argued that representing poetry using multimodal means, allows the students to fully communicate their place interpretations. This supportive relationship would address Lorimer's (2008) appreciation that not all geographers are eloquent linguists. Each of the poems are original representations of the students' interpretation of a sense of place. Their careful choice of words and multimodal representations allow the students to take ownership of their work.

From a geographical perspective Andrews' (2018) recognition of poetry's varying forms including the use of free verse supports geographers to engage with the genre. Indeed, Eshun and Madge (2016) appreciate the multiple formations of poetry across the world's different cultures. The students' poems include insights from their multisensory fieldwork which encouraged them to look to see and listen to hear which may otherwise have gone

unrecorded in a more objective form of representation. The poems reflect Boyd's (2017) own use of poetics to communicate affect and experiential insights from walking and exploring. The range of poems demonstrate the diverse ways in which the students connect with a place and cumulatively fulfil Boyd's (2017) recognition of the genre's ability to provide rich information. The students' poetry adds to Somerville's (2015) discussion about the pedagogical nature of place for a generation growing up in the twenty-first century by demonstrating the genre's facility to connect with their surroundings. The combination of multisensory fieldwork, writing poetry and representing it using multimodality offers a geographical means of delivering Somerville's (2010, 2015) conception of an onto-epistemology which could allow young people to know and care for places in a more sustainable way.

The poems confirm Rawling's (2011, 2018) appreciation of the potential of poetry for enlivening the study of place in school geography. Poetry supports students to rise to the challenge of negotiating the "throwntogetherness" (Massey 2005, 140) of evolving places in our interconnected world. Writing poetry and representing named places using multimodality enables the students to communicate their individual meanings. Poetry allows students to use their imaginations and geographical knowledge to share their understanding of a place's uniqueness.

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