



Call for papers: “Going Places” with the Spoken Word Community: Youth Education Between Spiritual & Poetic Justice

Conference, 2 - 3 December 2022

Deadline for Abstracts: 3 October 2022

How is the digital and live spoken word educating the young spirit? What does a reparative curriculum look like? How do youth imagine educational futures, or rather, how are youth poets already reimagining decolonial, abolitionist and just-peace pedagogies? Or, in the words of poet Bhanu Kapil: “Is a poet/ *an imperial dissident*, or just/ an outline/ of pale blue chalk?” What is spoken word’s resonance with hip hop, grime, oral traditions, young adult literature, and performance art towards healing post-pandemic trauma? Noted by scholar Bettina Love, is the education system turning into an “educational survival complex”, when schools feel like a roadmap to prison, not a place to thrive?

“Going Places” will be a 2-day hybrid conference (online and in-person), inspired by the poem *Going Places* and its verses: “I think I’ll paint roads/ on my front room walls/ to convince myself/ that I’m going places”, penned by acclaimed British author Lemn Sissay OBE, who will open the conference. The government requires English Schools to teach for young people’s spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development with British Values, known as SMSC, rife with historical prejudice. With Covid-19 poetry cuts on the GCSE, UK youth poet Kadish Morris warned “poetry saved me, don’t deny to next generation”. The conference will bring together young people, poets, educators, teachers, academics, scholars, creative and cultural organisers, activists and policy-makers, to harness community to “go places” spiritually, morally, socially, and culturally.

First, the conference will critically celebrate spoken word poetry as a pioneering art form, which has innovated the British and international poetic landscape. Second, we aim to centre young people’s voices, and imagination to mobilise creative communities as sites of political activism and widening access to education. Third, the conference will progress creative-critical, decolonial and intersectional research. We want to deepen conversations on countering state-sanctioned violence and social stigma reproduced in the elitist education system, and literary canon, which discredit the experiences and artistry of traditionally underserved young people and poets. The conference views ‘spoken word’ as an aesthetic-political tool, rejecting stereotypical uses of the term ‘spoken word artist’. The conference is held by ESRC-funded project, *Poetic Justice Values* that explored these questions, in collaboration with Manchester’s spoken word collective *Young Identity*, founded by renowned poet Shirley May. Young Identity’s award-winning poet Princess Arinola Adegbite aka P. A. Bitez captured the collective youth voice in her original poem *Oral to A4*, funded by the Cambridge Digital Humanities (CDH). A poetry video of *Oral to A4* will launch on “AndWhat TV”, a spoken word channel and education resource founded by Nicole May, Young Identity’s Executive Director.

We invite proposals for 20-minute presentations. In addition, we encourage submissions of imaginative, performance-based, and interdisciplinary format and collaborations. Please note the Faculty of Education and Homerton College have rooms suitable for performances, but places are limited. We aim to keep the conference registration fee for in-person delegates no higher than £50, and for online delegates £25. Fee waivers will be considered on a case-to-case basis for individuals who would not otherwise be able to attend. Fees will be waived for freelance artists selected to stage their work (e.g. spoken word shows). Schools and teachers are encouraged to submit responses to the topics and *Oral to A4* poem, for a roundtable discussion.

We welcome international submissions, and individuals from underrepresented groups in academia and the creative sector are especially encouraged to apply. **Please send 200-word abstract and 80-word bio to: PoeticJusticeValues@educ.cam.ac.uk.**

Follow us on Twitter (@PJV_project) for announcement of Keynote Speakers, workshops, and upcoming events.

Art by © Naomi Gennery

Conference Topics

Submissions are invited across Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities (e.g. Education, Digital Humanities, Sociology, Prison Research, Literary/Cultural/Creativity Studies, Performing Arts). Careful consideration will be given to proposals that meaningfully advance justice in spoken word and spiritual youth education, open to broad interpretation. The conference will result in a special issue. **Please indicate the preferred theme of your proposal out of the three below. Possible topics include:**

- Social, restorative, and transformative just-education and education policy
- The police state, hidden curriculum, and love as decolonial ethico-political practice
- Abolitionist theory in moral education and widening participation in higher education
- Live and digital homeplaces of spoken word, grime-poetry, spoken word theatre, hip hop culture
- Popular poetry, “popular postcolonialisms”? (Atia & Houlden, 2019)
- Counter-stories of heritage, migration, chronic belonging, un/conditional hospitality (Ahmed, 2012)
- Collective spiritual self-recovery, expansive compassion, and plurilingual pedagogy (hooks, 2003)
- Social turn in poetic movements, digital pedagogies, and post-pandemic healing rituals
- Trauma testimonies, poetry of witness and collective mourning
- The practice and research of moral imagination in peace education in school and prisons contexts
- Imaginaries of beloved futures with young adult literature and youth counterculture
- Post-spoken word poetry canon and the creative industry
- Creative-critical practice as research and transgenerational/intersectional justice
- Destigmatisation and care in youth justice, and school to prison pipeline

1) Transnational Creative-Digital Experiments & “Writing Back” – The theme invites careful engagement with spoken word, including its intersections with other art forms and creative rituals towards charting new artistic and educational terrains, whilst also recognising spoken word as more than pedagogy and protest. How is spoken word poetry acting more than protest and what are its intersections with contemporary hybrid art forms, and post-language writing? How to write what Bhanu Kapil called “Literature that is not made of literature” (2015), to deepen contemporary literary experiments that ‘write back’ to colonial, patriarchal, racist and capitalist history and legacy in the here and now. What does it mean to take up Lola Olufemi’s invite to “imagine otherwise” (2021), and stay with Bhanu Kapil’s poetic provocations from her collection “How to Wash a Heart” (2020): “the art of crisis/ is that you no longer/ think of home/ as a place for social respite”, and “How do you live when the link/ between creativity/ and survival /can’t easily be discerned?”. In her seminal book “We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom” (2020), Bettina Love states that at the heart of educational justice is abolitionist teaching which embraces art as “a homeplace”, and seeks out “art for resistance, for (re)membering, for joy, for love, for healing, and for humanity”. What happens when crisis and capitalist values threaten creative communities sustained by the arts like spoken word? What is the consequence of wiping out the genealogy of oral poetics and spoken word out of the map of the literary canon and what counts as a home place?

2) Spiritual Youth Pedagogies & Civil Disobedience – Subjects like poetry and the arts provide a platform for English schools to teach young people’s spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development with British Values, known as SMSC, mandated by the government. SMSC and poetry debates, central to young lives, often leave behind the varied experiences and voices of young people living in the UK. Young people, researchers, scholars, poets, teachers, cultural organisers, and artists are encouraged to explore youth-driven decolonial and abolitionist pedagogies, the place of the ethic of love and care in education and revising an inclusive SMSC education policy. Bettina Love’s warning of the individualist undertones of moral character education applies here. How can SMSC move closer to the call for civic education and just-peace teaching? Disadvantaged young people, are often defined by risk, not strength. At risk of doing poorly in school, at risk of poor mental health or chronic illness, at risk of offending. Disadvantaged young people are rarely defined by their excellence, power, and ability to create change despite adversity. This goes hand in hand with devaluing non-White cultures and multiple languages in schools that keep “the spirit enduring in constant survival mode” and “is violence by another name” (Love, 2020, p.33). Yet, feel-good stories of youth “beating the odds” may be harmful if they leave institutional barriers unchanged. The conference asks how young lives are already full of everyday creativity as a blueprint for education and living well; and how youth mobilise the spoken word community as a ‘beloved community’ in education, “formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation” (hooks, 1996).

3) Poetic Justice & the “Educational Survival Complex” – Contemporary young people’s wellbeing, and experience of education as well as the arts is being affected by multiple intersecting crises: the Covid-19 pandemic, policing of children, Black Lives Matter, precarity, war on drugs, neo-coloniality, and climate crisis. The conference views poetic justice less linked to punishment, and more to reparations and the power of poetry to inform justice symbolically both in education and youth justice (i.e. transformative justice). Alluding to the prison industrial complex, Bettina Love’s conception of the term “educational survival complex”, critique the American education system, historically shaped by White supremacy, which ignores the institutional barriers that Black and Brown students face at school. How are intersecting crises shaping the international landscape of education and what is UK’s SMSC policy doing to counter ‘spiritual death’ perpetuated through state violence? Reading the poetry of Phillip Khabo Koepsell, Sara Colvin concluded that poetic justice is an antidote to state oppression: “poetry and strategic use of humour, produces counter-pleasure [against glorifying the oppressed] which infiltrates dominant knowledge and stimulates change” (2021). Poetic justice can complement legal ideas of justice and reform epistemic injustices such as discarding the testimonials of marginalised groups. How can educational justice include youth’s intersecting experiences across categories of: 1) ethnic minority and race 2) class 3) gender, sexual and relationship diversity 4) first generation students 5) disability 6) neurodiversity 7) mental illness & adversities 8) migrant & refugee status in the UK 9) religion 10) criminal justice contact?

