

Impact Study

Course: Write a Song in a Day

Tutor: James Uings

Venue: The ARC

Date: 05/10/2024

Well-being and Engagement in the Course

The well-being aspects of the course really started to come to the forefront later in the day, once the group felt more comfortable with each other. As it was a small, intimate group, some participants initially found it intimidating to share personal thoughts. However, what was interesting is how much their state of mind came through in their lyrics, even when they weren't aiming for deeply meaningful content, given the 'fast' goal of writing a song in a day.

The tutor generally encouraged a quick, throwaway approach to writing songs as an option because searching for a deeper subject is one of the primary causes of writing block and can quickly halt the exercise. However, the themes that emerged in the lyrics were deeply personal. For example, one learner wrote about his 95-year-old father. He expressed a deep longing to know more about his father's life—his father had travelled extensively but when asked about those experiences, he would often dismiss them, saying "nothing happened there." His lyrics explored this relationship, including his desire to know how his father's vast travelling had shaped the man he was.

Similarly, another Learner reflected on aging, with lyrics centered around how the walls around him seemed to hold memories of his past ('These walls have ears'). His song was a reflection on both growing older and the passage of time. Another Learner explored finding purpose and meaning after retirement, while another wrote about missing Spain after moving to England and how he'd become a different person, but also grappling with how returning might not be as straightforward as he'd made a good life here.

Performance

Before the performance, the tutor was initially unsure if anyone would feel comfortable sharing their work, given the personal nature of the lyrics and the intimate setup. Seven participants, including six men, decided to perform. The tutor decided not to film these performances because the group dynamic was already highly charged - mostly due to performance nerves. He felt that introducing a camera could add an extra layer of pressure.

The Learner who led the performances became overwhelmed with emotion while explaining the back story behind his song about his father, especially when expressing how his father might die before he got the chance to learn more about him. The tutor stepped in at this point to explain his story to the group and give him a chance to gather himself before he performed. The performance created a deeply emotional atmosphere, and the group discussion afterward was both inspiring and cathartic, as people empathized and shared their own experiences.

One of the most powerful moments came toward the end of the session when one Learner performed his song. Afterward, he openly discussed how he had a “horrible year” from a mental health perspective, and that participating in the course had been a source of relief for him. His admission prompted a meaningful conversation around mental health and isolation, which resonated with others in the group, many of whom shared similar struggles.

Overall, the sessions helped the male participants in particular express feelings of loneliness, aging, and mental health struggles in a safe, creative environment. The discussions that followed each performance brought these themes to the forefront and gave participants a sense of connection and understanding.