

BEN MELLOR

Creative Writing: Practice, Pedagogy & Community

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I am a socially-engaged creative writing facilitator, spoken word artist and project manager with over twenty years of practice across community settings, schools, universities and arts organisations. I hold a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching Creative Writing from the University of Cambridge, awarded with Distinction in 2025, and am a regular Writer in Residence with national literacy charity First Story. My postgraduate research engaged in depth with the academic literature on creative writing pedagogy and I continue to work as a practitioner-researcher, testing ideas from the field in live workshop contexts and reflecting critically on what I find.

Flow theory has become central to my practice in recent years. I design creative writing tasks that balance challenge against skill, so that participants can experience absorption in their work and develop their intrinsic motivation to create – resisting the external locus of evaluation foregrounded within most education settings. I am also committed to decolonising the creative writing curriculum, have a serious interest in feedback literacy in developing writers, and bring an approach to facilitation shaped by twenty years of working with communities outside the academy: young people in exile, care-experienced young people, adult community groups, and participants in secure settings.

I am a published poet and award-winning spoken word performer, with seven touring productions and two poetry collections with accompanying spoken word and music albums within my body of work. The question of what it means to write for performance or for publication is one that runs throughout my creative work and teaching practice. I believe that the oral tradition is the older and more pre-eminent form of poetry and storytelling, and should be venerated as such. But I also maintain that both oracy and literacy hold equal importance within education. I am as interested in working with those who write for the page as I am with those who write for the stage, and particularly those who wish to bridge that often false divide.

I am available for guest sessions, module contributions, visiting practitioner roles, and CPD for postgraduate writing students. I am especially keen to work with departments where practice-as-research and working with communities beyond the campus are live concerns.

PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

My postgraduate work at Cambridge covered three areas of practice-based research, each engaging directly with the academic literature:

Flow, Environment & the Generative Workshop

Drawing on Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory and a systematic review of physical learning environments and creativity (Lee & Lee, 2023; Davies et al, 2013), I ran informal experiments during a sixteen-week school residency, using self-reporting to track participants' flow states across pedagogical and environmental interventions. Getting out of the school building was the biggest single factor, consistent with what the broader literature suggests about intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy in young writers (Myhill, Cremin & Oliver, 2023; Pajares & Valiante, 2006).

Decolonising the Stimulus Canon

Working within a critique of the 'Great Works Approach' (Blythe & Sweet, 2008) and drawing on Bakhtinian dialogism and Kristevan intertextuality, I developed a programme using a deliberately diverse stimulus canon: Gil Scott-Heron, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Self Esteem, Kae Tempest, Danez Smith, and others. Students wrote in conversation with source texts rather than in imitation of them. The programme, Ink Tank, has been delivered in school settings and continues to develop.

Feedback Literacy & the Adolescent Writer

Engaging with research on adolescent sensitivity to feedback (Towner et al, 2023; Heffer & Willoughby, 2020; van Duijvenvoorde et al, 2008), I evaluated the use of Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process and Betya Rubinstein's value-transparent pedagogy in a secondary school after-school project. I found the CRP productive but context-sensitive: it needs careful scaffolding with younger participants.

WHAT I OFFER

Guest Sessions & Module Contributions

I can contribute to undergraduate and postgraduate creative writing modules as a visiting practitioner-researcher. I move easily between practice and theory, and can pitch sessions at the level of craft, pedagogy, or both. Areas I have developed and delivered include:

- Composing on the tongue: spoken word and the performing voice
- Constraint as liberation: formal play and the generative power of restriction
- Writing from silence: experimental approaches to sound, listening and emotion
- Place, politics and lyric: socially engaged poetry and a decolonised stimulus canon
- Facilitation beyond the campus: building trust, managing dynamics, working in community settings

CPD for Postgraduate Writing Students

For MFA and MA students developing their own teaching practice, I offer practical workshops drawing on my research and twenty years of facilitation experience:

- Creating the conditions for flow: designing generative tasks for diverse groups
- Feedback literacy and the Critical Response Process in practice
- Facilitation in community and non-academic settings
- Decolonising the workshop stimulus canon

Residencies & Collaborative Projects

I have designed and delivered sustained creative writing projects in partnership with organisations outside the academy for many years. I am particularly interested in projects that connect university creative writing provision with communities in Greater Manchester and the North West.

Available for one-off sessions, short residencies and longer-term collaborations. Day rates and project fees on request.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

“Ben has now delivered two long-term creative writing programmes for us and has been excellent in every respect. He is as skilled and passionate a teacher as he is a writer.”

— Luke Richardson, English Department, Trinity Catholic High School, Manchester

“Ben delivered our project just how we wanted, while adding his own unique blend of talents. He’s really great with children and teachers, and very sensitive to their needs.”

— Elvie Thompson, Lead Learning Producer North, British Library

"All of us – the WoW staff, the school staff and the pupils enjoyed a friendly day of first-class creativity, and were inspired by how many young people went from workshop to performance in a matter of a couple of hours."

– Mike Morris, Co-Director, Writing On The Wall Festival

"Ben has been coming to us for over ten years, and over that time we've developed our work together from one-off workshops to a programme culminating in a performance each Spring. He creates a warm, humorous and welcoming creative space, responds flexibly to the students he has in front of him, and shows them the value of crafting a piece over time through redrafting. Every year I'm so proud to see what the students have done and watch their confidence develop. The school would be a less creatively rich place without him."

– Annabelle Lloyd-Hughes, English Teacher, Manchester Grammar School

PG Cert Teaching Creative Writing, Cambridge (Distinction, 2025) · Writer in Residence, First Story · CASE Fellow, Curious Minds · Published poet & performer

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