

Research Showcase

*Just some of the research, past and present,
conducted by Lapidus members or by others
working/studying in the field of therapeutic
writing...*

Righting the self: an exploration of writing as life support: Virginia Woolf and Franz Kafka

Claire Williamson

Writing as a Way of Becoming

Claire Williamson



In 1996, I completed my Masters in Literary Studies from the University of the West of England; the title of my dissertation was "Righting the self: an exploration of writing as life support: Virginia Woolf and Franz Kafka".

Since this study, I have continued to explore this area of interest, bringing research and writing in the literary, psychological and philosophical worlds together. I now work as Programme Leader for Metanoia Institute's MSc in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes.

In this article, I will begin by setting out the ideas from my dissertation and will add some more recent theory to my argument. I will demonstrate how my initial exploration has developed into my own theory on the nature of the creative process and what might be helpful as personal development for writers as they engage in their writing and how this may bring more conscious meaning and emotional power into their writing.

This article is a partial exploration of this topic, based on the workshop that I delivered at the NAWE Conference 2014.

For my Masters dissertation, I used mainly psychoanalytic literary theory, as this was what was mostly available in 1996, to examine the writing experience of Woolf and Kafka (through their writing and journal entries on writing) to consider the life-supporting effects of writing. I came up with two main strands: Psychotherapeutic and Illusory effects; and Essential Factors.

Psychotherapeutic and Illusory effects

Subjective to Objective

Whether writing is freely classed as "personal" or "creative", the act of transferring inner thoughts onto paper turns subjective material that is ruminating in one's mind into objective material, which can be looked at with more analytical distance, as Burke quotes the Russian literary philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin in *The Death and Return of the Author*:

If I tell an event that I have just lived, in so far as I am telling this event, I find myself already outside of the time-space in which the event occurred. To identify oneself absolutely with oneself, to identify one's "I" with the "I" that I tell is as impossible as to lift oneself up by one's hair. (Burke 1992: 55)

Loosening and re-organizing of experience and Integration

Alice Miller (1990) suggests that the unconscious is an "inexhaustible source of creativity" and writing offers the opportunity to bring the past into the present, either through personal writing or through fictional work. Exploration in Narrative Therapy posits the idea that all experience is based in story and not lives themselves. Stories about lives are the models that we use to orientate ourselves and form the basis of our own fictions. (Heilbrun 1988: 37). By writing stories, creating poems or putting together autobiographical accounts, writers loosen and re-organize their own experience, reframing it and experiencing shifts in their personal narratives. Meridith Anne Skura describes in her book, *The Literary Use of the Psychoanalytic Process*, how the dynamic interaction between "free-ranging play" and an "organizing response" is something that psychotherapy and writing share (Skura 1981). This organizing is

Using Writing as Therapy (UWaT): a six session course exploring identity and self-esteem

Pilot study of health economic outcomes in an adult mental health setting



Background:

- Using Writing as Therapy (UWaT) is a six session writing course that explores issues of identity and self-esteem, and was developed from work undertaken in fulfilment of MA and DPhil studies looking at the use of writing in occupational therapy practice
- Initial findings were promising, and the trust's R&D Office suggested a pilot study be undertaken with a larger sample, with an emphasis being placed upon health economic outcomes.

Aims & Objectives:

- To establish the health economic outcomes associated with Using Writing as Therapy (UWaT)
- To develop a comprehensive manual for facilitators to use to deliver UWaT
- To compare the total number of health service contacts made by people receiving UWaT and those receiving Treatment As Usual (TAU) in the six months before and after UWaT was offered.

Method:

- Clinicians from the trust's Short Term Intervention, Day Treatment and Psychotherapy teams were given an initial introduction, and then chose clients from their caseloads to invite to receive UWaT. Clinicians were observed delivering the intervention to ensure fidelity to the model
- A second set, with new clients from the caseload, was delivered by those clinicians and observed to ensure fidelity
- A further two sets were then delivered independently with supervision
- A total of forty people received UWaT
- The number of service contacts made by UWaT participants in the six months before and after receiving the intervention were compared
- Service contact data from UWaT participants were then compared with:
 - a random sample ($n=40$) of people drawn from the same teams but not receiving the intervention
 - the entire population of people ($n=1594$) from the same teams but not receiving the intervention.

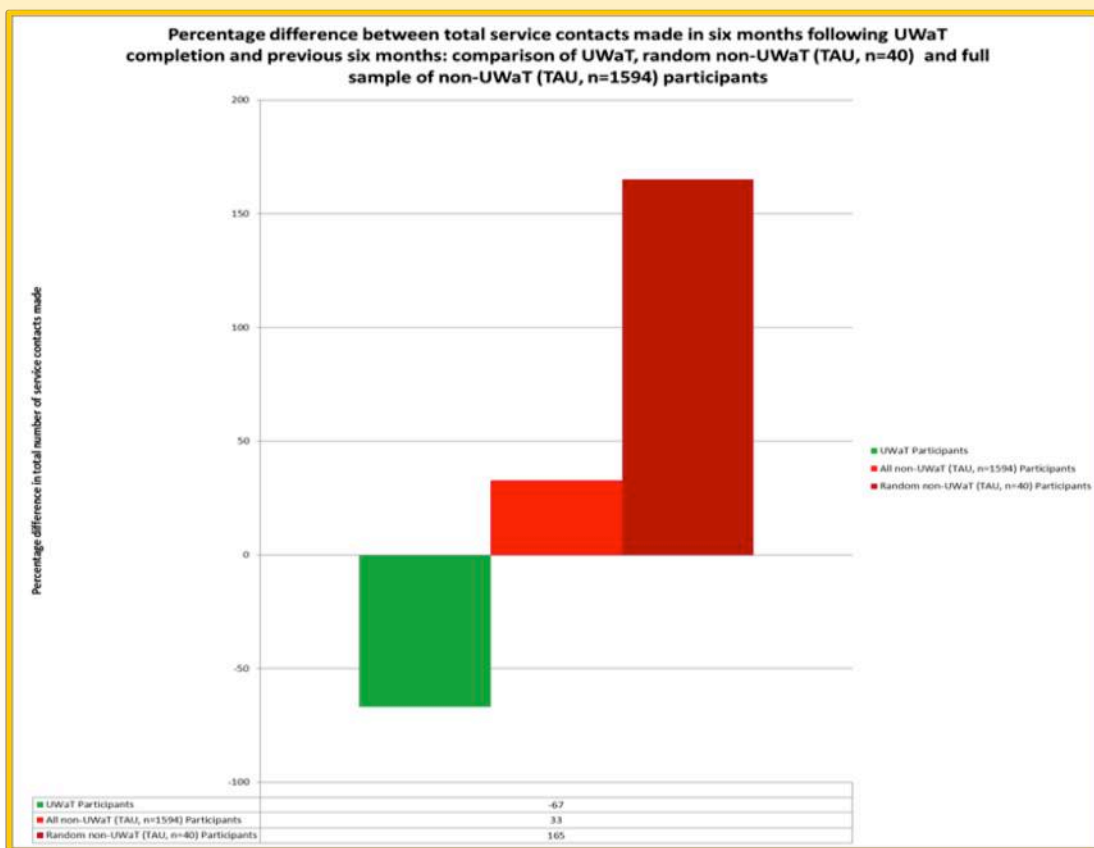
For further information contact:

Dr Pauline Cooper
Lead Oxleas Writing Therapy & OT Lead Research
 Stepping Stones, 38 Masons Hill, Bromley,
 Kent BR2 9JG
 0208 466 5200
pauline.cooper@oxleas.nhs.uk



Results:

- UWaT participants showed an overall **67% reduction** in service contacts in the 6 months following UWaT compared with the 6 months before
- Random sample ($n=40$) of non-UWaT (TAU) service users from involved teams showed an overall **165% increase** in service contacts in the same time period
- Total population ($n=1594$) of non-UWaT (TAU) service users from involved teams showed a **33% increase** in service contacts in the same time period



Conclusion and next steps:

- Findings indicate that UWaT may indeed offer health economic benefits beyond those associated with TAU alone, given the striking difference in the total number of service contacts made by those receiving UWaT and those receiving TAU
- Whilst the study was not a randomised controlled trial, the use of comparative data from the entire caseload (1594) of teams offered UWaT goes some way in limiting the effects of any systematic or non-systematic bias
- To further investigate and establish the efficacy of UWaT, a more robust research trial is required. An application will be made to a national research funding stream.

Eating disorders and poetry therapy

UWE Bristol: Christine Ramsey-Wade

Christine Ramsey-Wade, counselling psychologist and senior lecturer, will be interviewing past participants from a poetry therapy group on an inpatient eating disorder ward about their experiences of the group and what they found helpful or unhelpful. The data will be analysed discursively and phenomenologically, within a qualitative psychological research paradigm.

She is also developing a project which combines a psychological frame with a medical humanities perspective, with a view to applying for seed funding from The Wellcome Trust for further research into the applicability of group poetry therapy as an intervention with clients with experience of eating disorders.

Community therapeutic writing group experience

UWE Bristol: Brianna Malyn

Brianna Malyn, trainee counselling psychologist, under the supervision of Zoe Thomas and Christine Ramsey-Wade, will be examining the experience of participants in a community therapeutic writing group, through qualitative interviews. The data will be analysed thematically, again within a qualitative psychological research framework.

An investigation into what happens when I, as a facilitator of Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes, conduct a single research session entitled 'Exploring Play Through Creative Writing' with adults in Britain

Kate Pawsey

Synopsis

Research shows that play is a crucial developmental factor in childhood. Play therapy is now well-established for children. More recently the value of play throughout human life has been recognised but play therapy for adults is not widely offered in the UK, other than through the creative therapies. In CWTP play (social, imaginative, narrative and transformative) is present implicitly.

In this study I examine what happens when the theme of play is offered explicitly in a single CWTP session, to an established group.

The study is qualitative, small-scale and structured, employing reflection and reflexivity. As it is an initial study, without known precedent and with strong associations with childhood, I use Grounded Theory as my methodology, a 'let's see what happens when' approach, requiring that I examine potential pitfalls and consider possible strategies and interventions. I use themed poems, and reference to embodied and hand-and-object play as stimulus. Thematic analysis is used on resultant writing, and feedback including a scale of experience is evaluated.

The session provided an opportunity to connect with qualities associated with play – in most cases pleasurable. It gave insights about trust, inclusion and exclusion, and sadness at the lack of present opportunities for accessing the play state. In one case childhood abuse was uncovered, and the process, including additional support, was held apparently beneficially.

The study suggests the theme has therapeutic potential in CWTP settings, when approached with appropriate awareness and responsibility.

Keywords: Grounded theory, experiencing scale, thematic analysis, play state, emotional potency, childhood abuse, responsible use of boundaries, adult-appropriate exercises.

Finding the voice of the self: schizophrenia and poetic writing

Jack Pugh

Abstract

This study explores the juncture between poetic forms of writing and schizophrenia in order to illuminate the possibility of using creative writing as a form of therapy, discuss what form this therapy might take and what its key elements might be. In terms of creative therapies, writing therapy is amongst the most recent to have been given critical perspective. The Journal of Poetry Therapy was founded in 2003 and represents a step forward in writing therapy being given critical weight. As such, this study is an assertion of therapeutic writing in the context of schizophrenia.

This study will look at these ideas in a large part through the lens of the existential model of schizophrenia put forward in *The Divided Self* (1960) by psychiatrist R.D. Laing. This study also looks towards the theoretical work of Deleuze & Guattari, and Gregory Bateson. From Bateson, this study appropriates his idea of the double bind from *Steps To An Ecology of Mind* (1978). This study also looks to the theoretical work of Deleuze & Guattari, mainly from their collaborative works *Anti-Oedipus* (2013) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (2004), but also from Guattari's later work *The Machinic Unconscious* (2011), to explain a way out of this 'cutting off' from the world and for the way which they propose a deeper understanding of Laing, and posit a conception of 'escape' from the trapped inner self by creating 'lines of flight'. The study argues that one way of creating these 'lines of flight' and escaping from 'mere metaphors', as a way back 'into' the world, is through creative, and specifically poetic, writing.

This study also talks in terms of mapping over the 'schizophrenic body' to look at literature through a 'schizophrenic lens'. This idea comes from both Frederic Jameson in his survey of postmodern culture in *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) and Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the 'body without organs' and their conception of 'schizoanalysis'. While the focus of this study is on schizophrenic and 'schizoid' natures, I suggest these ideas are relevant and applicable for a wider form of mental health creative writing therapy.



The Main Aim:

The focus of 'Creativity for Confidence,' was on using the creative process to 'free-up' people who were feeling emotionally battered and to encourage them to share creative work and feelings in a safe environment.

Evaluation:

Evaluation of the sessions involved participants completing a MYCAW – Measure Yourself Concerns and Wellbeing form - pre and post course and a general follow-up questionnaire.

Objectives:

- Encourage participants to share writing with other people, to reduce feelings of isolation.
- Create a nurturing and 'active listening' environment to promote confidence.
- Offer new and sustainable ways to strengthen inner resources.
- Provide intellectual stimulation and focus through creative goals.
- Open up opportunities for individuals to integrate life events.

MYCAW - Results:

Every single concern raised diminished in severity on post-course questionnaires.

General feelings of well-being also improved in all participants.

It's Time We Talked: An Exploration of How Mind-Body Dialogue Writing Can Impact Stress Management

Kate McBarron

Synopsis

Stress is a significant issue in the UK today, costing the economy billions of pounds every year in lost work days and healthcare. This mixed-methods study examines the impact of a mind-body dialogue writing intervention on stress management, exploring 'how' the intervention can facilitate positive change, and 'what' this change might be. The research revolves around an autoethnographic exploration of the researcher's own experiences with dialogue writing and stress management over a twelve week period. The data was subject to thematic and narrative analysis, and the qualitative findings were supported by quantitative triangulation, using survey data relating to physical symptoms and perceived stress levels collected on a four-weekly basis.

In understanding 'how' the writing intervention could facilitate change, four key themes emerged: repairing and repositioning the mind-body relationship; providing motivation and accountability; offering a space for exploration and problem-solving; and reinforcing key concepts and priorities. In combination, these did indeed help to lay the foundation for positive change. The study brought about significant changes in the researcher's mind-set and habits. Physical symptoms did reduce over the course of the research. Perceived stress levels, however, had not improved by the end of the research period. There are a number of potential reasons for this, namely: the presence of external factors, the limited timeframe of the study, and the possible limitations of the writing intervention in its current form. Further investigation would be required in order to determine the exact cause.

The findings suggest that there is a role for mind-body dialogue writing within stress management. Further research would help to define the exact scope of that role over the longer-term.

Did you know...?

Over 300 studies have been conducted based on **James Pennebaker's** expressive writing protocol, covering a huge range of topics including: Cancer, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Bereavement, Asthma, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Immune Function, Depression, Physical & Sexual Abuse, Eating Disorders, Alexithymia, Relationships and Studying (both at school and university).

You can check them out here:

<http://homepage.psy.utexas.edu/HomePage/Faculty/Pennebaker/Reprints/writingrefs.htm>