

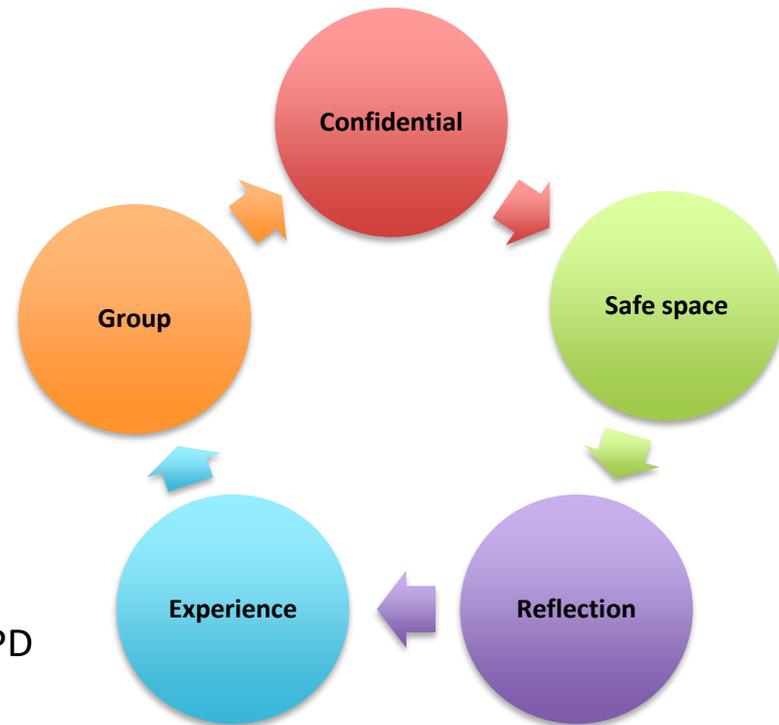
Creative writing and mental health: a summary of current evidence

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Art & Well-Being CPD
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NAWE: National Association of Writers in Education

NAWE's mission is to advocate for Creative Writing: enhancing knowledge and understanding of the subject, supporting writers and good practice in teaching and facilitation in all settings.

Online conference on Creative Writing:

- Friday-Sat. 14-15th March: What Next? Writing in Education and Communities
- **Wed 17 Feb 2021: Conference 50 events on teaching creative writing, wellbeing and practice research: available to watch until Friday 14th May**
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NAWE's new Journal of Creative Writing Research, *Writing in Practice*

- Peer-reviewed journal
- Explores creative writing processes and practice; history and pedagogy
- International outlook
- Encourages practice-led research

National Literacy Trust research report

Beyond Words: Writing for Wellbeing (2020)

A national creative writing project for all children: 'My 2020'

Created to mark World Mental Health Day, 2020 : partnership of the Bupa Foundation, Cheltenham Festivals, the National Literacy Trust and Mind

Impact

- 376 young people submitted writing;
- 40 young people completed the survey
- 50% said writing made them feel better
- 73% said it that writing helped them express their feelings and thoughts
- 58% said the project made them think how important it is to think about mental wellbeing

National Literacy Trust: Mental Wellbeing, Reading and Writing

Annual Literacy Survey, 2018: 49,047 children aged 8-18 in the UK.

Link between reading, writing and mental health

- 3,748 children took part
- 74.8% of children aged 5-8 enjoy writing in their free time
- More girls than boys say they read and write daily outside class
- Children were more likely to read and write on paper than on a screen

Results – Mental Wellbeing Index Scores

- Children most engaged with literacy are three times more likely to have higher levels of mental wellbeing than children who are least engaged (39.4% vs 11.8%)
- Children with above expected reading skills are three times more likely to have high levels of mental wellbeing than those with below expected reading skills (40.4% vs 13.1%).
- Boys who are the most engaged with literacy have higher levels of mental wellbeing than girls who are equally engaged (Mental Wellbeing Index scores of 8.1/10 vs 7.6/10).
- As children transition from primary to secondary school, levels of literacy engagement and mental wellbeing decline

The report also includes new analysis from University College London which shows an enduring relationship between mental health and verbal scores.

National Literacy Trust: children's creative writing during lockdown provides valuable support for wellbeing (June 2020)

First Story and NLT surveyed children aged 8-18 before and during lockdown

- Children said that lockdown provided them with the inspiration and conditions needed to write more creatively, e.g. having time and technology.
- More children are writing stories and non-fiction (40%); letters (39%), diaries or journals (27%) and poems (21%).
- 2 in 5 children said writing helped them cope with the anxiety around coronavirus
- Children who agreed that writing made them feel better were more likely to write poems (66.5% vs 13.4%) and 4 times more likely to write a diary or journal (61.6% vs 14.8%) or write a short story or fiction (61.1% vs 15.1% than their peers).

University of Rochester Medical Center: Health Encyclopedia

Journaling for Mental Health

“Keeping a journal helps you create order when your world feels like it’s in chaos. You get to know yourself by revealing your most private fears, thoughts and feelings. Look at your writing time as personal relaxation time ... and know that you’re doing something good for your mind and body.”

- Understand and manage your feelings
- Manage anxiety and depression
- Reduce stress
- Prioritise problems, fears and concerns
- Track symptoms day-to-day so you can recognise triggers
- Identify negative thoughts and provide positive self-talk

Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families: 'Writing things down'

Using a journal or diary can help you:

- Diffuse a situation that you have kept inside you;
- Share difficult feelings;
- Express things you would not be able to say out loud
- Track mental health so that you learn more about yourself

Paper journals, blogs and social media are all effective.

Positive Psychology

Journaling for Mindfulness

Journaling shares some characteristics of mindfulness

1. Sharpens your focus.
2. Turns your attention inward.
3. Decreases negative thoughts.
4. Easy and cheap to implement, it can be practiced at any age.

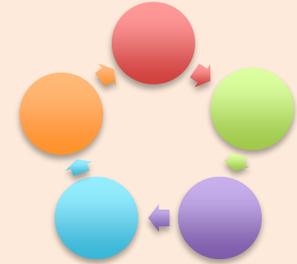
Types of journaling

(There is no empirical evidence that one type is better than another)

- Gratitude journaling
- Reappraisal journaling
- Counseling journaling
- Self-compassion journal
- Reflective journaling
- Expressive writing

Teacher Space

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Research compiled by Teacher Space

- **Teacher Space is an online forum offering teachers the opportunity to think together in groups.** It offers a space in which they can think about their experiences as teachers, their place in the profession and their understanding of how social events and attitudes affect their experiences. It supports wellbeing and promotes a deeper understanding of teachers' relationships with themselves and others.
- **It provides on-going support throughout the profession,** from beginning to end. Groups are fluid: people can stay for as long as it is helpful, but generally for at least a year.
- **Teacher Space is a group experience, offering the chance to understand relationships within the school context.** Indeed, how the individual feels and behaves in professional groups becomes manifest, sooner or later, in the Teacher Space Group. Unlike many other situations, the process of the Teacher Space Group itself can be analysed: *analysis of the group by the group*. Group dynamics might be explored and articulated, for example inclusion and exclusion, power and powerlessness and other ways in which groups construct identity.
- **Discussions are confidential. Groups offer kindness, a sense of belonging and mutual support.**