

“It feels good to unload on the page” Writing as a Portal into Wellbeing for Staff in Education Contexts

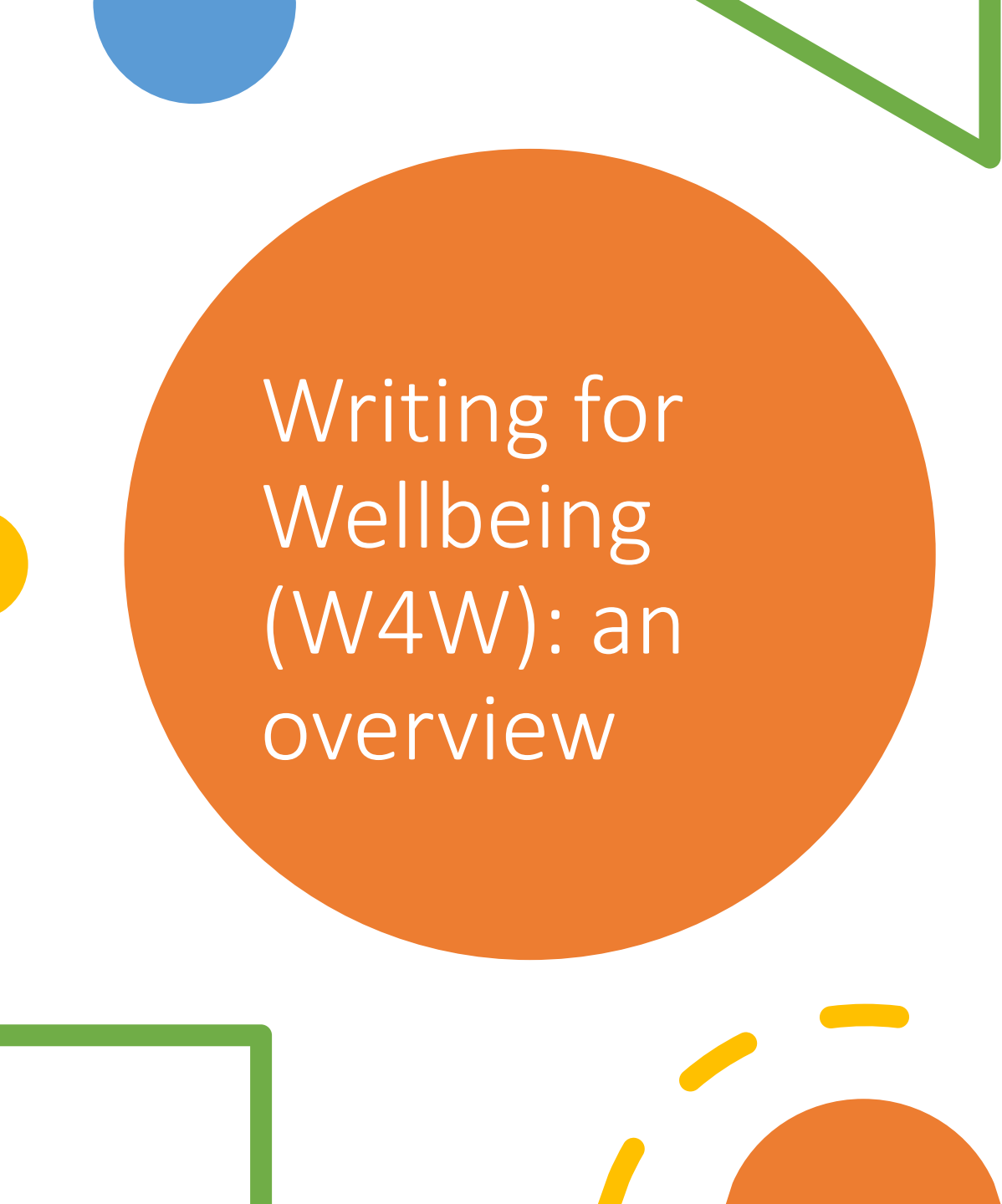
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Advance HE Symposium 16.09.20

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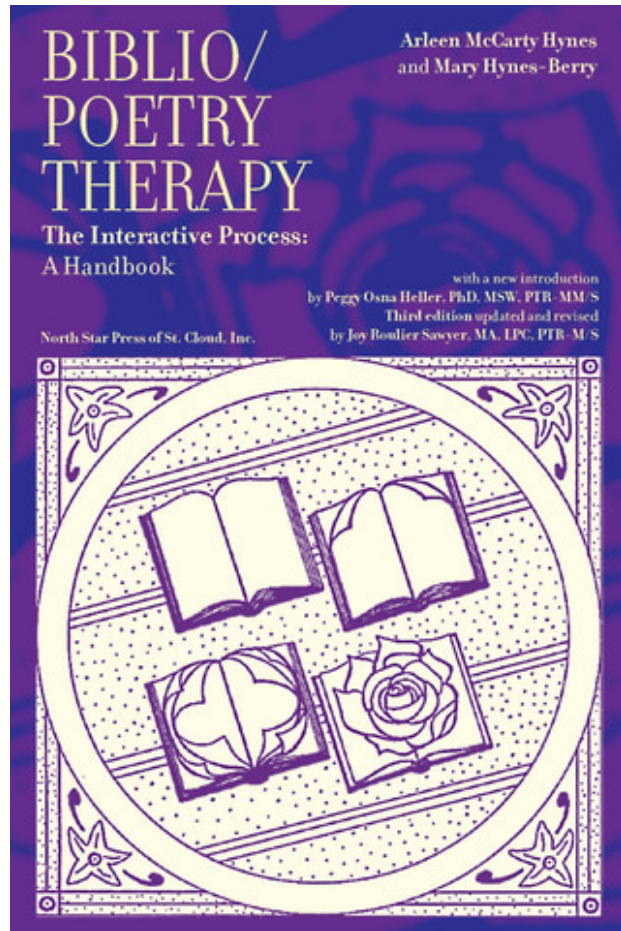
Writing for Wellbeing (W4W): an overview

- Context: the personal and the professional
- Staff wellbeing in education?
- W4W: Biblio/Poetry Therapy and key approaches
- W4W as CPD for educators in schools and in HE
- Incorporating W4W into daily practice – for you and for your students!
- Resources/Links

A Journey through writing...

“Therapeutic journal writing (...) is a practice that can help to develop greater understanding of self and the world and self-in-the-world, offering a way of looking at the self, relationships and context in writing” (Thompson 2011)





Poetry/Biblio Therapy

“...the interactive use of literature – poetry, prose, fiction and non-fiction – to stimulate writing and other creative responses with a view to promoting self-expression, self-awareness and wellbeing” (from iaPOETRY.org)

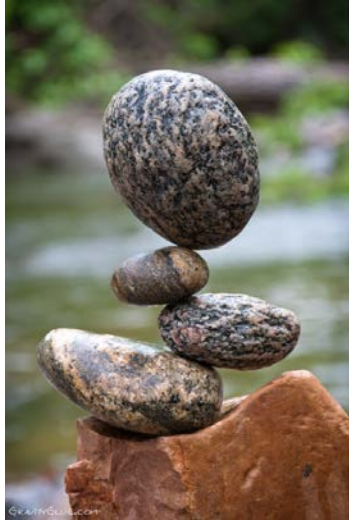
The process focuses on the interaction between the ‘triad’ of participant-literature-facilitator’ (Hynes & Hynes-Berry 2012: 6)



Key goals of Poetry Therapy

- o Improve capacity to respond
- o Increase self-understanding
- o Increase awareness of interpersonal relationships
- o Improve reality orientation

“the significance and value of the writing lies in its meaning for the creator, not in its technical merits” (Hynes & Hynes-Berry 2012, pp144-145)



Writing as catharsis and ‘meaning making’ (Chavis 2011)

Pennebaker (1997) advises to “really let go and write about your very deepest emotions.

What do you feel about it and *why* do you feel that way”.

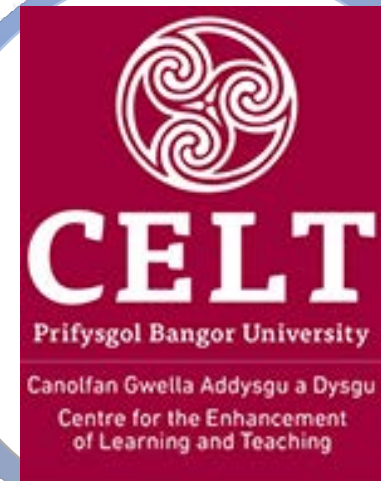
Education context: Who looks after the educators?

“Too many teachers feel overworked and undervalued - and growing numbers are leaving. Of the 21,400 teachers who started working in English state schools in 2010, over 6400 (30%) had quit by 2015.” (NUT 2017)

“If you are struggling mentally, say with anxiety, you feel like you are on your own unless you are lucky enough to have colleagues who care” [from O’Brien & Guiney 2018]

Writing for Wellbeing: University, School and Community

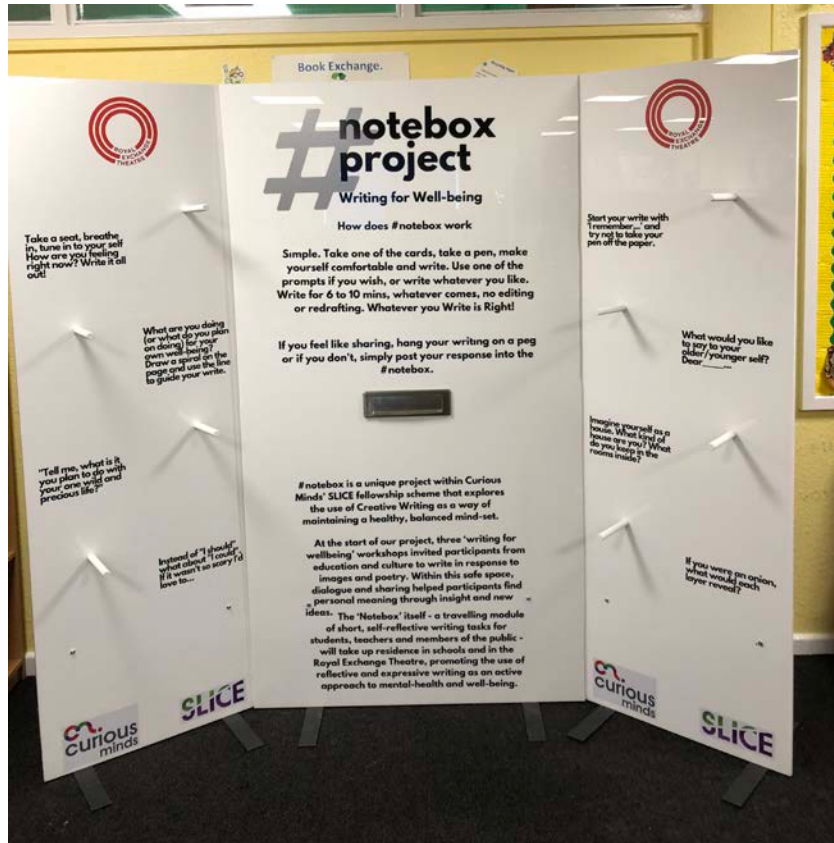
- Poetry Therapy Peer group
- University staff – CELT CPD programme
- University students – MSc Counselling
- Counselling Professionals
- School Teachers and pupils—
‘The Notebox project’



“In looking back upon that first workshop I realised that creative writing in this way was allowing myself and other professionals to do what the profession had always preached was vital but had seldom allowed time to facilitate: to reflect.

To assess the effectiveness of ourselves as human beings as well as professionals and to confront the obstacles that had caused so many of us to walk away from the job.”

'Whatever you Write is Right...'



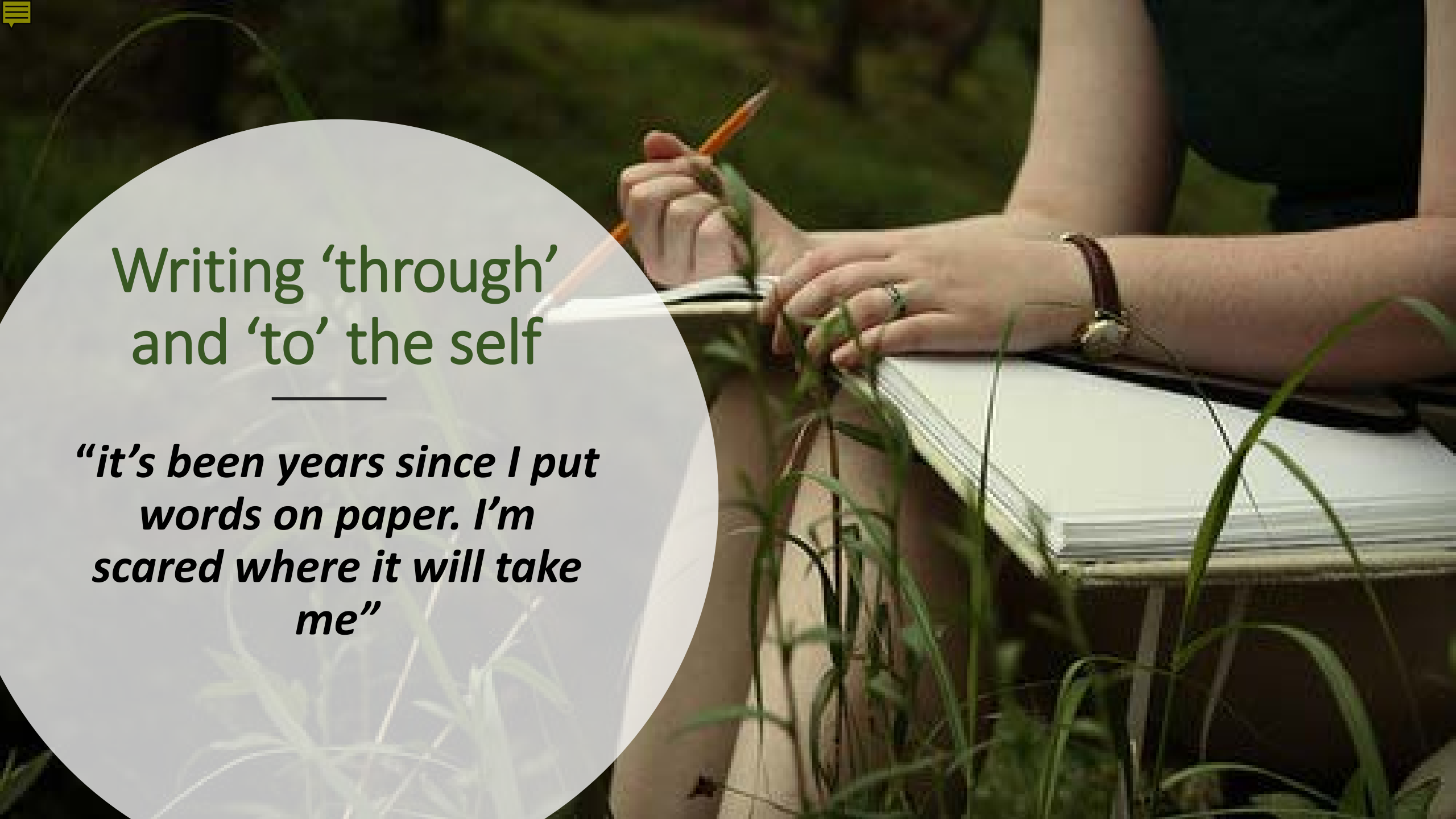
Reflections from workshops

“...you name it by putting it on the page – then it’s released”

“....it’s given me space just to be thankful”

“...freedom to write without constraints”

“I didn’t realise writing could be so thought-provoking and freeing”

A person is sitting at a wooden table outdoors, writing in a notebook. They are holding a pencil in their right hand and resting their left hand on the notebook. A watch is visible on their left wrist. The background is a blurred green field with tall grass. A large, semi-transparent white circle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text.

Writing 'through' and 'to' the self

*"it's been years since I put
words on paper. I'm
scared where it will take
me"*

Emergent themes
from workshops (1)



Expectations & the pressures of work

"I paint the fence green on the road side, but the inside part is rotten and broken. It's like me...I present a d.i.y.-ed version of myself"

"I chose this picture (a rock and a feather on a scale) but focused a lot on the rock, its like our burdens....the masks we wear to pretend we are 'fine thankyou'. We have built our lives on things we think we are supposed to do..."

"I am at the beck and call of others...no time for me"

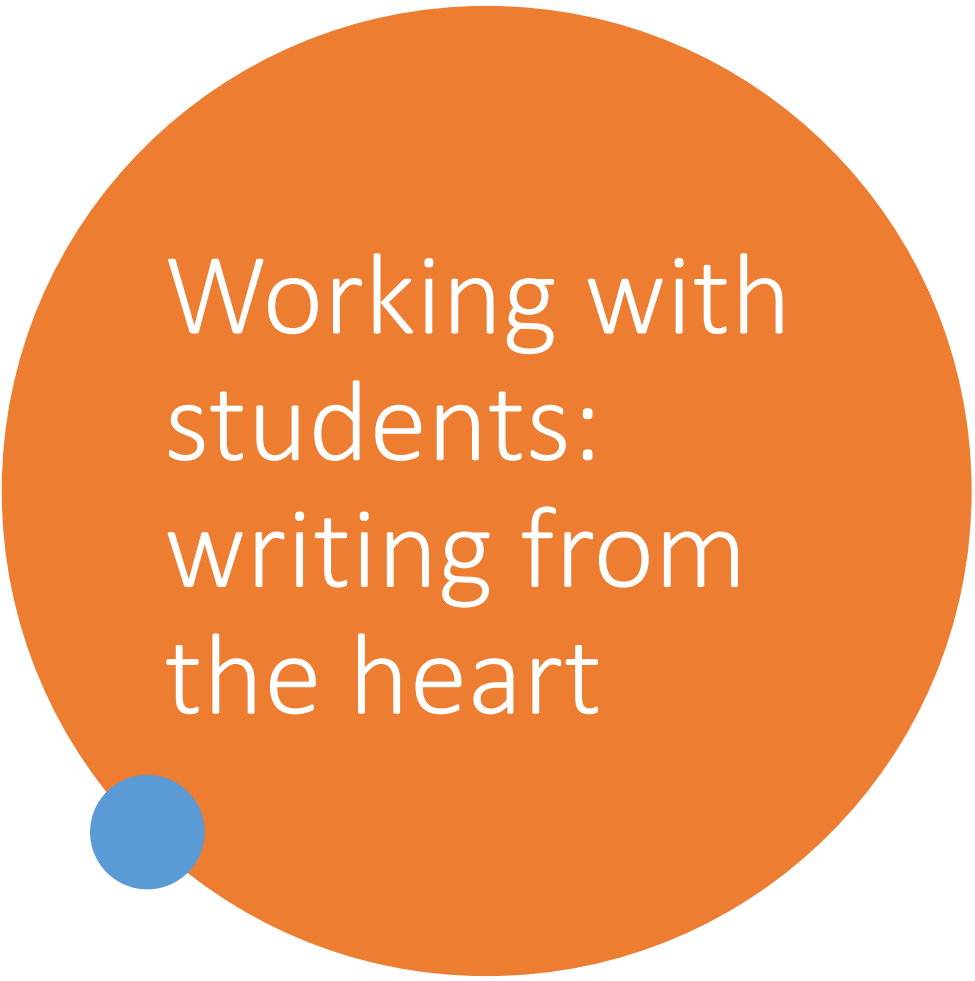
Emergent themes
from workshops (2)



A deep need for space to share and reflect

“you need to take the risk to share your pain or depression [‘not keeping it in mind’]...when we take the risk to share, to say what we really feel, the outcome may surprise us....”

“It feels good to unload on the page – but struggle to write freely, we are so used to writing to rule”



Working with students: writing from the heart

- Stepping away from structured writing to enable students to access ideas and belief systems
- Freewriting, e.g. 'the six-minute write' (Bolton 2014)

Writing for Wellbeing: practice

- It's about the process, not the product
- Nobody needs to read it or “check” it!!
- Just 6 or 10 minutes daily ‘freewriting’ can become a space for deep reflection and lead to change (see Bolton 2014)
- As an embedded practice this way of writing and reflecting can bring about deep insights, contributing to personal and professional development



If you would like to know more about CPD for staff or students in 'Writing for Wellbeing' please get in touch!

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Useful links

- Lapidus International: the Words for Wellbeing Association

<https://lapidus.org.uk/>

- iaPOETRY: International Academy for Poetry Therapy

<https://iapoetry.org/>

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