

MSc in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes

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.

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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. I illustrate how, in CWTP sessions, 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. I draw specific attention to the modes of play with physical, kinetic and sensory associations i.e. embodied play, and hand-and-object play.

This in-depth, descriptive case study is qualitative, phenomenological, small-scale and structured, employing reflection and reflexivity. As it is without known precedent and with strong associations with childhood, I use Grounded Theory as my methodology, requiring that I examine potential pitfalls and thoroughly consider safeguards, interventions and approach in advance. I use themed poems as stimulus to creative writing. Thematic analysis is used on resultant text, 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 and energised. 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. The process, including additional support, was held apparently beneficially.

My findings suggest the theme has therapeutic potential for CWTP, as a leading spearhead into this under-utilised field of adult, play-aware therapy. I see potential to build on the area of work by given credence by US play expert, Stuart Brown, as well as on existing creative therapies and knowledge of transactional analysis and the creative process. However, the results of this case study stress that, when incorporating the complex element of play into the realm of therapeutic creative, reflective and expressive writing, drawing on participants' lived experience, it is essential that the risks and responsibilities uncovered in this case study are

not under-estimated. Disregard of this factor could not only be unhelpful: it *could* compound childhood trauma and set a person's healing process back, warranting further exploration of the subject under research conditions.

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

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Author's declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the MSc in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work and in the list of references.

Abbreviations used throughout the text: Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes is abbreviated to CWTP , research session to RS , creative writing to CW and participants to their chosen name form.	
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Introduction

This dissertation is an account of research into the phenomenon of play in the context of CWTP. It grew out of an awareness that I enter an inner playground when I write, and from the pleasure I experience when playing music with others, particularly when improvising. I felt the lack of opportunities to express and inhabit this side of myself, and wondered if others did too. I saw parallels between Csikszentmihalyi's state of flow, as detailed in his 1990 book *Flow – the psychology of optimum experience*, in adults, and the play state in children.

My study was qualitative, small-scale and structured, making use of reflection and reflexivity where possible. As it was an initial study, without known precedent, I used Grounded Theory and phenomenology as my methodology – a 'let's see what happens when' approach. This required me to examine potential pitfalls and consider possible strategies and interventions in advance.

I gathered data from: a learning journal; notes from supervision and e-mail exchanges with professionals consulted; a transcript of the recording of part of the RS; creative and reflective writing produced in the RS; using an evaluative questionnaire incorporating an experience scale for participants; a written correspondence with one of the participants who chose to make use of this offered facility; writing reflectively on my experience throughout.

Thematic analysis was used on creative writing to identify emerging themes, and feedback was evaluated.

PART A The literature review

In this literature review I place my research in the context of the existing understanding of play, making a case for its value and importance into adulthood. I highlight the relevance this knowledge has for creative therapies and for CWTP specifically.

I examine what defines play, what are its broadly agreed characteristics, how it has been categorised, and how it already manifests in CWTP.

I review child-orientated history, and recent research on the value of play pertaining to whole human lifespan. I examine the concept of play-deprivation on both the individual and the collective, cultural level.

I follow arguments which advocate continuing access to play states in adulthood, notwithstanding a climate where play is seen as a childhood domain. I look at provision for adult play provided by the arts and creative therapies, and at gaps in provision for UK adult play therapy. I show how CWTP provides suitable conditions for exploring play.

A1 Definition and categorisation

The online course Exploring Play (Sheffield University, 2014) recognises play as a 'slippery' subject, having a number of characteristics. Play is identified as:

"free (not compulsory);

separate;

uncertain (can't be predicted);

unproductive;

rule-bound;

make-believe."

A summary I find more accessible is: "For me play is a spirit, as much as a thing that we do. It is a spirit which encourages us to explore, to experiment, to follow our curiosity." (Phillips, 2014).

Stuart Brown, founder of the US National Institute for Play, when lecturing to Hewlett-Packard engineers, realised that his usual strategy for avoiding a definition of play would not satisfy. Usually he would call play primal, pre-conscious and pre-verbal, stemming from 'ancient biological structures that existed before our consciousness or our ability to speak' (Brown, 2009: 15). This audience required succinct definition. Brown therefore proposed the following list of properties of play, even while acknowledging reluctance to capture them:

"Apparently purposeless (done for its own sake)

Voluntary

Inherent attraction

Freedom from time

Diminished consciousness of self

Improvisational potential

Continuation desire”.

Brown's overlap with the Sheffield University's list, but I find them easier to use in the context of CWTP.

There are divergent thoughts about categorising play, dependent on how it is seen and defined. Brown gives a taxonomy of seven play modes. Five of these (body-play, object-play, social-play, imaginative-play and narrative-play) correlate almost directly with Whitebread's five fundamental types of human play, gathered from psychological research. These are physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, pretence or socio-dramatic play, and games with rules. Games with rules do not feature in Brown's taxonomy, having an explicit purpose, to win.

Brown adds two categories of play mode, vitally significant for this study. The first is attunement which 'establishes a connection, such as between newborn and mother.'

<https://www.google.co.uk/#q=national+institute+for+play+stuart+brown>

The other is transformative or integrative play, 'by which one plays with imagination to transcend what is known in the current state, to create a higher state.'

<https://www.google.co.uk/#q=national+institute+for+play+stuart+brown>

I find the 'EPR' categorisation of Sue Jennings (1998,1999, 2002, 2003) applicable to CWTP. She distinguishes embodied play (E), projected play (P) and rôle play (R). While embodied play is self-explanatory, projected play is predominantly the domain of adult play - where the world is turned into symbols, usually words. These can then be manipulated, such as in story-making, ie it is happening 'out there' rather than inside an individual. Rôle play is where one can embody an imagined rôle, within which one experiments with one's behaviour and choices. Rare in the domain of play therapy, Jennings has been developing a play therapy approach with adults (2005, 2008). Using play, drama and puppetry, her work is branching out from the more narrative and story-based therapy she first offered to adults (2005).

I felt engaged by Brian Sutton-Smith (2001) who describes seven *rhetorics* that acknowledge the complexity of play: play as progress, as fate, as power, identity, imaginary, the self, and play as frivolous. In contrast to Brown, Sutton-Smith voices a mis-trust of play, identifying destructive aspects such as addiction to online gaming, or play situations without limits. He also argues for play as a factor in our species' evolutionary advantages (1997).

A2 History

For the purposes of my study I am interested in how preceding views on play have informed current attitudes of those like Brown (2009), and Sutton-Smith (2001), who recognise the value of play throughout our lives, including adulthood, old age and end of life. I cite evidence that play is important beyond a developmental sense, providing cultural sustenance and enhanced quality of life in all areas (Kane, 2004) and stages (Coppard, 2014).

Although Plato approved of play, this was within bounds, as unconstrained play would have dire consequences, social and political. 'Bounds' interest me. I recognise irregular oscillation between advocating more or less direction, or boundaries, in play.

Condensing copious studies, Freud (1920) speculated that 'play was a way of expressing socially unacceptable behaviours. It was therapeutic as it allowed one to vent undesirable feelings and actions in a more acceptable manner' (Torres-Lopez, 2013: 2). Jung's ideas on play built on the work of Schiller (Schiller, 1794 [1967]: 161, 189). Schiller recognised that the two fundamental oppositions (form/ matter, thinking/feeling, spirituality/sensuality) could only be united by what he called the play instinct, making possible a communion between opposing instincts. An equilibrium, but not a perfect, static equilibrium. Jung called the third instinct 'fantasy activity, which is creative and receptive at once' (Jung, 1921 [1971]: 106-7) anticipating Winnicott's ideas on play. Miller claimed that 'Winnicott's play and Jung's fantasy are analogous territories where liminal experiences can happen.' (Miller, 2004: 87)

Winnicott (1974, 1976, 1977, 1987) wrote extensively about the importance of play for social, physical, emotional, psychological and intellectual development and learning in *childhood*. He

was also one of the first to recognise its importance for *adults* as crucial to the development of the authentic selfhood, as when people play they feel real, spontaneous, alive and engaged.

Winnicott viewed therapy, figuratively, as play in the presence of the mother, seeing the holding connection between parent and child reproduced in the therapeutic relationship. He was also interested in the 'transition space' (1971) between the outer and inner worlds, as a domain in itself, a virtual world ideal for play and creativity. I believe that CWTP can offer conditions for accessing this domain. We can move between the outer and inner worlds: outer, being in a room with others, held by the structure, presence and skill of a facilitator; inner, where we mine our own imagination, memories and experience through creative writing.

Others emphasise different aspects of child development. Karl Groos and Maria Montessori are pragmatic about the 'work' of play. For Groos (1901) play is a child's preparation for survival in the adult world, echoing modern views of the function of play for animals. He links this to evolutionary advantage. Montessori (1964) proposes that children benefit more if play is oriented to learning or imagining useful things. Conversely, Klein (1932) and Neill (1964) each believe adults should not channel children's spontaneous, natural play into a specified learning experience. This viewpoint has been sustained into the 21st century by child psychologist Elkind (1981 [2001]). He holds that children play for personal, experiential reasons, fun being the central and intrinsic motivation. Any developmental value is incidental.

For Vygotsky (1962 [1986]) play gives children opportunity to use language. It is a leading activity, in that children playing give clues to adults about their readiness to learn new skills,

with assistance. He views imagination as internalised play. He argues that if adults continue to be playful this can lead to artistic and scientific creativity, a strikingly modern idea – he died in 1934. Brown's ideas on harnessed playfulness in the corporate world, well received in the US at least, amplify this.

Piaget (1951 [1999]) considers play externalised imagination, suggesting that 'human intellect develops in stages through assimilation (transforming the environment to meet the requirements of the self) or play, (transforming self to meet the requirements of the environment), or work.' www.faqs.org/childhood/Th-W/Theories-of-Play.html.

A3 Consequences of play deprivation

Play throughout life has been studied by several American writers – Elkind, Sutton-Smith, Brown, Eberle. Brown (1998) interviewed around 6,000 people about their play histories, developing important theories on play deprivation. He demonstrates how play shapes the brain, contributes to innovation in the world of work, and makes and keeps individuals creative, happy, and psychologically healthy. Bruner (1984), investigating the rôle of play in language-acquisition and problem-solving, argues that electronic media, especially television, destroy childhood. Erik Erikson (1998) contributed the idea that 'as childhood vanishes, so does adulthood, as the pressures of a commercialised popular culture infantilise adults.'

(<http://www.faqs.org/childhood/Th-W/Theories-of-Play.html>)

Students at Swanson School in Auckland, New Zealand, are free to play however they wish in the playground, even if it means they might get hurt. As part of a risk study in 2012 by Auckland University, the children were allowed to build their vision of a playground and intervention by adults decreased drastically, save some basic ground rules. This reintroduced risk and helped encourage physical activity in children. Results showed that after being so busy and physically active at recess students returned to the classroom relaxed and ready to learn. They came back vibrant and motivated, not agitated or annoyed. When one boy broke his arm, his parents specifically asked the principal Bruce McLachlan not to let this alter his approach, as the overall benefits to the boy's wellbeing were so evident.

In Britain links are being made between inter-connected elements of society, in terms of play. Extending Sutton-Smith's (1997) appreciation of the cultural significance of play for both

adults and children, Gleave and Cole-Hamilton (2012) examine the consequences of providing good quality play opportunities for children, their families and their communities, highlighting the effects of losing outdoor playgrounds. In the US Elkind (2007) blames 'our fast-paced, screen-laden and safety-obsessed way of life ... destroying spontaneous, creative, child-led play, with unhappy consequences.' The Sheffield University study (2014), on the other hand, looked at the benefits of digital and on-line games, finding positive consequences for play translated to screen-based media.

Whitebread (2012: 28) asserts that 'given the abundant nature of the research evidence that play in humans is adaptive and is fundamental in supporting a whole range of intellectual, emotional and social abilities, it seems self-evident that *children* who, for whatever reason, play very little or not at all will be disadvantaged in their development.' (My italics).

Brown's work on play deprivation throughout life derives from a range of academic disciplines. In the West play deprivation is recognisable throughout life. It affects children pressured to adhere to adult-led agendas of stimulation; adolescents conscious of how much a resumé may affect future life; young adults in college and first employment, where performance competition is high. In maturity, married life and parenthood, adults can lose connection to simple experiences of joy, spontaneity and pleasure (Brown, 2009: 98-99). Both Brown and Kane quote Sutton-Smith: 'the opposite of play is not work; it is depression'.

Absence of play for adults can also result from injury, disability or illness. A stroke may result in loss of physical or verbal ability, and attendant isolation. The work of people such as Rose

Flint (2004), poet in residence at spinal injuries and burns units, as well as CWTP facilitators working in hospices and cancer clinics, showed me the benefits of CWTP in life-limiting circumstances. Do these life-limiting circumstances have to be necessarily play-limiting? Is it inappropriate to engender a playful perspective in the face of such serious circumstances? Or could it possibly be welcome and even life-enhancing, if initiated with sensitivity? Approaches which invite an adult quality of play are vital, as to be treated childishly would indeed add insult to injury.

Brown is aware that play, or 'goofing around', without boundaries could remove the security of the role of a responsible adult. For children, the loss of a sense of safety can be detrimental to play as a positive activity. William Golding's oft-cited *Lord of the Flies* explores such a scenario. Versions of it could be imagined in adult contexts where the benign parent figure is absent.

Links are currently being made between different elements of society in terms of play. The UK review by Gleave and Cole-Hamilton (2012) draws heavily on studies by specialist stakeholder organisations such as Play England, Play Scotland and the Children's Play Information Service. The review examines the importance of play on individual children's overall health and looks at the benefits of play provision to local communities. It shows the impact of absence of both play-time and play-spaces, and of hostile attitudes to children's outdoor play, highlighting the potential consequences of a world where play is at the bottom of agendas and its value in children's lives not fully acknowledged. The conclusion is that when adults do not recognise the value of child-led play, it is marginalised. This deprives not just

children, but their communities, through the consequences.

One specific, detailed and short-term study (Coppard, 2014) was of the positive inter-generational social impact of introducing for one day large, urban-friendly toys into a socially derelict London square where the usual dominant daytime culture is drinking. Her study demonstrated shifts in the way people related: parents to children; parents to other parents; children to children (as the play objects needed two to move them, inviting cooperation); young children to skate-boarding older children; non-parent adults to the presence of play in a space normally dominated by their alcohol use and consequent disengagement. It is an account of a single day, but viewed closely, gives an account of transformation, on an individual and a communal level. It makes moving reading.

A3a) Evidence

Ethics prevents research on play deprivation through depriving children and then monitoring their behaviour and development. Whitebread however cites

'a recent study of one-to-two year-old children in so-called maltreating families (Valentino et al 2011) that found that these children displayed less child-initiated play and less socially competent behaviour than children of the same age in non-maltreating families.' (Whitebread, 2012: 28)

He also cites numerous studies of play-deprived Romanian orphans who displayed a range of severe cognitive and emotional deficits, recovering once adopted into loving family environments. (I see parallels here to a cohesive CWTP group session as the CWTP training is to engender a culture of respect, safety, trust and openness.)

Such examples provide evidence, circumstantial perhaps, but compelling enough

'to suggest that the provision of rich playful opportunities, across the five types indicated [physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, pretence/sociodramatic play and games with rules], would be a wise policy position for any society wishing to fully benefit from its human potential.' (Whitebread, 2012: 28)

Brown (1998) first recognised the importance of play by discerning its absence in a most extreme case, that of Charles Whitman in Texas in 1966. This architectural-engineering student, ex-Marine and apparently loving husband and son shot 46 people, beginning with a pregnant woman, killing fifteen. The governor commissioned an immediate in-depth

investigation, employing experts in toxicology, neurology, graphology, psychology, psychiatry and law enforcement. The investigation of Whitman's whole life, led by Brown, revealed that 'the lifelong lack of play had itself been an important factor in his psychopathology.' (Brown, 2009: 96) Whitman grew up in a home where play was absent, and where 'useful' activity was enforced through a regime of control and fear. The outcome was that 'nothing Charlie did came from within himself.' Interviews with nursery-school teachers showed that even there Whitman did not consider himself free to play, and so would imitate the play behaviours of other children. The parish priest revealed that, in confession, Whitman 'could only talk about what he thought he was expected to feel bad about.' (Brown, 2009: 97) Whitman became a master of conformity, responding to experiences only as far as his ever-watchful father had deemed permissible. 'His final (and only) really autonomous action, narrow in scope but devastating in effect, was an attempt to to gain some inner relief by acts of murder-suicide, well described in his diaries.' (Brown, 2009: 97) This investigation introduced Brown's careful and thorough study of a group of homicidal young males and his further large-scale study, including play histories.

Russell Meares (1992) has illustrated the importance of mental activity in adults, similar to the play of a pre-school child:

'Personality disorder can be conceived as the result of a disruption on the development of self....(Meares) examines how those who have suffered such disruption can be treated by understanding their sense of self and the fragility of their sense of existence. Based on the Conversational Model, this book demonstrates that the play of a pre-school child, and a mental activity similar to it in the adult, is necessary to the growth of a healthy self.' (Amazon review available at:

<http://www.amazon.com/Metaphor-Play-Russell-Meares/dp/1583919678>)

Another review states that: 'He (Meares) posits that early interferences in the play of the child lead to the kinds of primary disturbances in the self-experience that are suffered by those with borderline personality organizations.' (Levy-Warren, 1994: 409)

Brown tells us that these days a *play state* can now be mapped and measured neurologically in the brain:

'A state of play has been established by advisors such as the FMRI specialists and hard scientists such as neuroendocrinologists....nothing lights up the brain like play. Three-dimensional play fires up the cerebellum, puts lots of impulses into the frontal lobe, - the executive portion – helps contextual memory be developed (and much more)'

(http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital)

In a way that is relevant to CWTP, which nurtures imagined and remembered experiences through creative writing, Brown refers to observed 'three-dimensional play' in the story of Kevin Carroll, author of *Red Rubber Ball*. Carroll had had a very deprived childhood - alcoholic mother, absent father, and play-limiting factors like living in a city tower block, but he noticed that even *looking* out of his window at a scene of children *playing* in a playground made him *feel differently*. He eventually transformed his life by following through on this observation and he gives play as the transformative element in his life. This is particularly useful to a CWTP facilitator inviting their participants to connect to the benefits of the play

state, informing the exercises, prompts and choice of suggestive, scene-setting material such as poems.

Gleave and Cole-Hamilton (2012: 21) urge policy-makers to safe-guard spaces for play, especially outdoor play. They cite Dunn on disability:

'if social barriers, such as fear, embarrassment or discriminatory attitudes, as well as physical barriers, are addressed, then accessible play spaces can be created for both disabled and non-disabled children (Dunn, 2004).'

They see play as a fundamental human right for children,

'regardless of age, gender, culture, social class or disability....to be reflected in provision of a range of play environments, including free staffed provision which gives parents the confidence to know that their children are safe and enjoying themselves.'

Alongside encouraging a more positive attitude to children's play, they also warn against well-intended over-involvement. Viewing play as an activity with practical rewards, as a tool for achieving developmental has its limitations. By doing so

'we are in danger of losing sight of the essence of play itself..... something that is self-directed, enjoyable and instinctive. It is only by following their own rules, in their own time, can children fully reap the benefits of playing.' (2012: 22)

They quote Lester and Russell:

'Adults should be aware of the importance of play and take action to promote and protect the conditions that support it. The guiding principle is that any intervention to promote play acknowledges its characteristics and allows sufficient flexibility, unpredictability and security for children to play freely.' (2010: 46)

They conclude: 'A world that understands and supports children's play is a world that is likely to be healthier, more vital, more alive and happier than a world without play.' (2012: 22)

A4 Play in adulthood, including during CWTP sessions

'We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.' George Bernard Shaw.

Doing this work I have developed antennae for play, glimpsing it in many contexts. In the worlds of entertainment and advertising adults and play are conceived as incongruously juxtaposed, the standard recipe for a joke. Creativity and therapy appear to me the most visible arena for adult play, as serious playfulness, or playful seriousness. This is aside from the most common meaning of 'adult play' – sex.

Kane (2004) agrees with Sutton-Smith and Gordan that despite all the research, play in adult lives is generally not taken seriously, often demeaned or trivialised, spawning such words as 'kidult'.

Kane however proclaims that 'Play will be to the 21st century what work was to the industrial age – our dominant way of knowing, doing and creating value.'

<http://www.theplayethic.com/what-is-the-play-ethic.html> He argues for understanding play as something pro-active, central and valuable, engendering confidence, agility, spontaneity and empathy in all aspects of life and work. Modern exponents of play – Brown, Robinson, Sutton-Smith, Gwen Gordan, Sergio Pellis (behavioural neuroscientist), Barry Sanders (Pulitzer Prize nominated author) and others, support this view of play as a robust energy, a force.

Whitebread's report for the toy industries of Europe confirms that play is viewed as something children grow out of as they mature. This is generally held to be beneficial, but for Whitebread

this view is mistaken:

'Play in all its rich variety is one of the highest achievements of the human species, alongside language, culture and technology. Indeed, without play, none of these other achievements would be possible. The value of play is increasingly recognised, by researchers and within the policy arena, for adults as well as children, as the evidence mounts of its relationship with intellectual achievement and emotional well-being.' (Whitebread, 2012: 3)

Brown views play at its best not as superior to work, but integral and enhancing to it; including play within work can be transformative (Brown, 2009: 154). In the corporate world, Brown sees play as the mother of invention, that many US corporations now view play as their most precious commodity.

Gwen Gordan tells us that the Japanese recognise the syndrome of *karoshi*, people literally dropping dead from work. <http://www.nowplayingworldwide.com/> Its sinister cousin, suicide from overwork, is *karo jisatsu*.

Brown advocates symbiosis of work and play, believing that absence of play can make an adult feel inflexible and moderately depressed, and in the extreme lead to expression of violence. 'The quality that work and play have in common is creativity....At their best, play and work, when integrated, make sense of our world and ourselves....In the long run, work does not work without play.' (Brown, 2009: 127)

Crossovers and fusions are increasingly common in the arts and now in the world of therapy.

Examples of play in therapeutic application of the arts for adults include drama, music, dance and movement, clowning, puppetry, couple work, and art. Each of these have equivalent possibilities for CWTP. Moreover, early CWTP research (Pennebaker, 1990: 100) shows the benefit of alleviating traumas expressed through other art forms, in this case dance, with ten minutes of writing: "the mere expression of a trauma is not sufficient. Health gains appear to require translating experience into language."

Ken Robinson (2001) endorses in training and education the benefits of playful, immersed creativity in adults:

'Creativity is not a purely intellectual process. It is enriched by other capacities and in particular feelings, intuition and a playful imagination.....We need languages of feeling to express these perceptions, and this is one of the functions of the arts – of music, dance, poetry, drama and the rest – and one of the reasons for needing a new balance in the way we educate and train people.' (Robinson, K., 2001:10-11)

John Cleese, whose work spans drama, writing and psychotherapy, refers to open and closed modes, the open being the creative state where anything is perceived as possible, and nothing as wrong, and the closed is where focus is kept in a certain place, and pursued in a disciplined way. When watching a Monty Python sketch, it is easy to imagine the 'open mode' creative process at work in the early stages of genesis. 'Humour gets us from the closed mode to the open mode faster than anything else.'

<http://www.presentationzen.com/presentationzen/2012/07/tips-on-how-to-be-more-creative-by-john-cleese.html>

Colleagues who work in hospices and cancer clinics report the same thing – that humour is vital in opening perspective, and relieving tension, around even the

most serious of subjects.

The social aspect in an adult session is somewhat modified from that described in Brown's taxonomy, but I witness twinkly as well as soft eye-contact, playful communication and laughter in sessions, as well as more serious ways of communicating and sharing. As to the deeper therapeutic aspects, feedback shows that group members have also engaged in transformational play through their creative, expressive and reflective writing. This has powerful outcomes, including re-framing or re-scripting experiences creatively and therapeutically.

What other aspects of CWTP sessions enable this shift into open mode? I made the following observations in a learning journal:

"I see play as present in CWTP in the form of:

Warm-ups – how we can introduce ourselves playfully to the group, both who we are: as e.g. a piece of furniture, or how we feel: as e.g. some version of the weather;

Playing out stuff in writing and make believe;

Creating 'something out of nothing' - powerful alchemy through imagination;

Rôle play – speaking as something or someone else – transmogrification or anthropomorphisation, having imagined conversation between things which represent different aspects of ourselves, or people in our lives;

Word play, letting the sub-conscious rise through simply messing about with words;

Playful voices – speak as if in a given situation, as exaggerated figures.”

I provide opportunities for imagined dialogue between symbolic representations of parts of ourselves, or imagined players in the drama which is our own life, giving the writer the power and opportunity to reframe a scenario which is troublesome for them. Drama and puppetry do this, employing a transitional object. I have led an exercise in which we employ five shells, choosing a shell each to represent ourself, ourself as fluid writer, blocked writer, enthusiastic writer and reluctant writer. We then select two shells to 'converse with each other' through an imagined dialogue. Shells are versatile representatives, and I always lay a varied selection out on a table and allow participants to take their time in the selection process. This contemplative stage proves an important and pleasurable part of the process. A metaphor, as a thing representative or symbolic of something else, could also be viewed as a transitional object. Gillie Bolton says metaphor is a fundamentally natural way for our minds to make sense of the world (Bolton, 2001 [2012]: 221). Poetry, used either as stimulus, or created in a CWTP exercise, is the natural home of metaphor.

Rose Flint (2004), whose work spans art therapy, poetry and CWTP, highlights the therapeutic presence of vulnerability and openness, of not knowing. She values trusting the creative and therapeutic process itself as a third player, along with the facilitator and the facilitated.

Poetry therapy is growing in the UK with the work of Victoria Field and others. It is a standard element in my CWTP sessions, giving access to the play arenas of poets' minds, and thereby

to material whose suggestive possibilities are infinite. I invite participants to enter Cleese's 'open mode' in their creative writing responses. Poems can transport us, transcending the limitations of reason, or provide us with a compass, a lode star, a balm. Poets' responses to similar challenges to our own can lend insight and encouragement. Sharing this in a group, as in CWTP sessions, again amplifies the experience. The writing of poetry is an opportunity, recognised by Celia Hunt, 'as revelation of the self, to the self'. (Hunt, 2000)

Play therapy for adults is more visible in the US than the UK. At the time of writing I am unable to find a registered UK play therapist offering a service to adults. UK play therapy training is tailored solely to work with children. This is despite evidence that play through life has the potential to be life-enhancing, useful, pleasurable and therapeutic, engendering neonotous, flexible, adaptable, happy behaviour. An adult who plays, Kane tells us, 'immediately widens their concept of who (they) are and what (they) may be capable of.' (www.theplayethic.com/what-is-the-play-ethic.html)

In Britain sex therapy is offered by Relate, the couples' counseling service. Terms such as 'sexual dysfunction' appear on its website. Anand (1989) offers an alternative approach along the lines of tantra, like a giant adult play therapy manual. After establishing safety, trust and connection between partners, relaxation, stimulation and arousal are encouraged, as is playful exploration and experimentation. In this respect it satisfies Phillips' 'spirit of play', Brown's properties and Kane's transformational vision. Relationship counselor Barbara Bloomfield employs CWTP and play in her work with couples and sexuality (Bloomfield 2006 (2013): *Couple Therapy: Dramas of Love and Sex*). She uses, for example, image, clay and the six-part story to lend insight into relationship dynamics, tapping through these into the

resource of play.

Two most important cautionary elements relating to play and CWTP adult sessions are: boundaries and adult-appropriate pitch.

Brown notes that Charles Whitman's case was an 'extreme example of parental over-control. In most cases, kids left to their own devices will play naturally, and there is some level of parental supervision necessary to make kids feel safe and protected.' (Brown, 2009: 97).

The provision of boundaries by a facilitator is the important framework, but empowering participants to feel that they are holding themselves as adults through the choices they make is also essential. It is important that they be reminded that they alone choose material to write about in response to exercises and prompts, and that self-care should motivate whether they choose to share creative writing. How much and with whom is also a personal choice.

Participants may wish to talk *about* the writing, its context, and the experience of dealing with sensitive material. Sharing in more private pairs may be preferable. I encourage people to vary their partners for pair work as the series continues, and as trust builds up.

As suggested in the Lapidus code of ethics, the very first thing a CWTP facilitator does is to establish the ground rules for *safe enough* creative exploration, starting with boundaries. My boundaries begin with putting in place the professional support *I* need to facilitate within a safely held structure. This ensures that a) I have an opportunity to explore and ask for help if some personal issue of my own becomes awoken; b) reflexive qualities are added to the already reflective habits I have in place. I write reflectively before and after every session and before and after each supervision session. I decided to ask for additional supervision for the

preparation, delivery and follow-through of my research session (RS). My supervisor helped me set time boundaries, such as to give a set time, in this case four weeks, after the RS for any follow-up correspondence from participants. I issued reminders of the impending end to the period, reminding anyone who had not already contacted me. The single participant who took up this offer used it responsibly and effectively. Being an email correspondence, each of us was able to take time and care over the exchange. It felt spacious and generous, but finite, and therefore, for me, sustainable.

The next boundary I attend to is enrollment, using a booking procedure, a taster session and information on my website which prepare a participant for the holding structure I adhere to. I clearly spell out my rôle – that I am a facilitator of CWTP, not a therapist, psychotherapist or counselor. In the session I work at creating a certain culture, encapsulated by Nigel Gibbons' 'Writing Well' acrostic ([APPENDIX ONE](#)). I introduce this at the beginning of a series and flag up aspects as we develop and as seems appropriate. Such grounding aims to establish norms of confidentiality, respectful listening, and the avoiding of criticism or prurient curiosity. For my RS I had compiled a contingency list of relevant support organisations including, for example, SupportLine which helps survivors of abuse.

Structure distinguishes the various functional parts – welcome, business, opening round, warm-up etc. and the time frame supports a holding boundary (Flint, Hamilton and Williamson, 2004). We create opportunities for creative writing through themed exercises and prompts and these become expected at a certain point in the session. We provide opportunities for reflection, sharing and feedback on what we have written and experienced through the creative writing exercises. I strive to listen attentively and reflect back peoples'

own words, not my interpretation of them. I offer good attention and eye contact, and utter genuine and audible responses when moved to do so.

The relationship (Clarkson, 2003) present in therapeutic dynamics between a facilitator and their participants is cited as probably the most important element of a therapeutic experience. This is due to the key quality of 'attunement, which establishes a connection' – Brown's first, and base-line, mode of play .

We have a closing round which allows participants to voice how a session has impacted on them, and prepares them for leaving the session. I flag up forthcoming events, such as the approach of the end of the series, in good time.

Versions of social, imaginative and narrative play are evident in CWTP sessions. I, and others, see play as intrinsic to CWTP. Claire Williamson wrote:

'By setting the critical voice aside, including encouraging participants not to apologise for their work before reading it, permission to play within a safe environment is established early on within a CWTP session. The idea of 'play' immediately implicates the natural Child with access to the four basic feelings of 'sorrow, fear, anger and joy' (Lapworth, Sills and Fish, 1993). Within CWTP practice, the conditions for play to take place are emphasised. This means the suspension of expectations on the outcome of participating in CWTP. if the outcome is more of the focus than the activity, it probably isn't play.' (2014: 2)

I wondered if there was greater scope for accessing Brown's second and third categories, of body and object play, in a CWTP session. Memory and imagination can connect people emotionally to embodied, rough-and-tumble play, or play which involves an object. This is the area of specific exploration of my current MSc research. I see potential for people who, through injury, illness or simply aging, no longer have direct access to body-play or object-play.

Here it feels most important to use approaches which invite an adult quality of play, avoiding the trap of patronising or infantilising participants. It became clear to me in preparing my research session that this was vital for all adult participants, whether able or not in body or mind. Avoiding patronising or infantilising became the second key ingredient in my approach to my RS, after the holding dynamic.

PART B The research session (RS)

B1 Preparation of research session.

In September 2014 I launched my private CWTP practice. It is called *Writing Time with Kate Pawsey - Writing Time* for short. It became the biggest component of preparation for my RS. I had completed my diploma in CWTP in July 2014, vocational training delivered by Metanoia Institute. This prepared me to facilitate CWTP group sessions. That autumn I set up group sessions for members of the public on a privately paid, not publicly funded, basis. More about *Writing Time* can be found in [APPENDIX THREE](#). Building on this professional training, facilitating *Writing Time* sessions was deep experiential learning in its own right, and contributed directly to the conduct of my third year, MSc research.

I originally conceived of the research being delivered by three experienced CWTP professionals, aiming to benefit from their experience and specialist knowledge of an established client group and setting. Personal experience had shown that connecting to childhood events through creative writing with an inexperienced facilitator can be traumatic. Play is largely the domain of childhood. Using creative writing exercises and prompts which invite connection to experiences rooted in childhood, i.e. play, carry a risk. Exercises that specifically target physical (embodied) or hand- and-object play, as in my RS, carry additional risk.

My original research proposal therefore was to induct established CWTP practitioners into the theoretical underpinning of the research, discuss the specialist awareness and needs of their

setting and client group, co-design creative writing exercises appropriate to these, and monitor the delivery of their session. This would accommodate the type of adjustment needed between, say, an RS offered to male, long-term prison inmates and to women attending a breast cancer clinic.

Five practitioners responded to my invitations, extended through the CWTP network. It soon became clear how challenging it would be for practitioners to meet my criteria and work within my time frame. Even in the early stages I was frustrated by the difficulty of exchanging information with my would-be co-researchers. The level of sensitivity and accuracy required would not be met within this original design. I described this despondently to my peer supervision group when we met in early January. By this stage though, I had successfully delivered a series of eight CWTP sessions to a group of nine participants. I had received appreciative and constructive feedback and witnessed impressive responses to my facilitation. This boosted my confidence. Furthermore, when I advertised the next series, seven of the original nine signed up. I decided to keep the group closed and re-submit my research proposal, aiming now to deliver a single three-hour RS myself, scheduled a week after the last session of my second series.

This fitted my criteria of working with a trained and experienced facilitator and with an established group. I built in further ethical safeguards, such as recording and transcribing the RS, and inviting a professional witness to attend to ensure neutrality in my dual rôle as facilitator *and* researcher. This side-stepped another ambiguous issue – ownership of the research if others conducted it in their sessions.

My new proposal was quickly approved and I proceeded to introduce my participants to the

RS. I gave them warning about consent forms ([APPENDIX FOUR](#) - preparatory information and forms for participants), presence of a professional witness, recording, anonymity, aftercare, my access to their creative writing, and secured their agreement to complete evaluation forms. Six participants volunteered. The RS was set for Saturday 28th March and Christine Hollywood, then chair of Lapidus, agreed to attend as professional witness.

I had used material linked to play and playfulness in two training sessions I delivered to fellow students and tutors during my own training. I was already aware of its power as a stimulus, and the need to use it sparingly. Feedback indicated great joy at being connected to personal experience of play and sadness about any current lack. 'I mourn the loss of play' said one. This directed me to use a very lightly pitched set of stimuli, and to allude to *recently* experienced or observed examples of play (see paragraph two of this section).

For some people sex is a loaded or damaged area of their life. I therefore gave especial consideration to the intimate connotations that physical play might have. At this stage, I had no specific knowledge about my volunteers' sexual histories through any previous disclosures. There was a possibility of previous sexual abuse emerging given the statistic that one in twenty UK children have been sexually abused. <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-sexual-abuse/sexual-abuse-facts-statistics/>

I did not want to patronise adult participants and needed to bear in mind the culture of my particular group. All are white, middle class, British, well-educated, highly literate, aged between forty-five and sixty-five. One is male. Three are professionals in the social humanities. This made me want to find some sophisticated angles on play.

My sessions have now predictable elements. Exercises and material offered relate closely to the session theme. Poems are sent out in advance for private perusal. Participants arrive to a hot drink before our official start. I then address housekeeping, relevant news, revisiting our safety alliance, before an opening round and a guided relaxation. Then a warm up is shared verbally, in a Quaker style call-out. Then follows part one of the writing exercises, a poetry-therapy styled exercise, reading and discussing the selected poems, and writing in response to them. Participants then share in pairs, write into an aspect of their first writing and have a plenary share. The RS followed this pattern.

The poems chosen for the RS were: *The Railway Children* by Seamus Heaney, *No Ball Games* by Sophie Hannah and *Skipping Without Ropes* by Jack Mapanje. (APPENDIX FOUR)

As my research was specifically looking at embodied- and hand-and-object-play, I had considered a poem that evoked the physicality of running from an adult perspective, but rejected it, not wishing to be too directive or literal. *Skipping Without Ropes* invoked physical embodied play, but in sombre context. Mapanje was imprisoned without trial for three years in Malawi. Prisoners had to demonstrate need for a weekly shower, so he would skip without ropes, and wrote this poignant, rhythmical, layered piece as a result. It addressed very adult themes, but contains the essence of skipping, poetically.

I had considered *The Land of Counterpane* by Robert Louis Stevenson, where childish imagination had transformed the covers of his sickbed to a fantasy battlefield.

'I was the giant great and still, That sits upon the pillow-hill, And sees before him dale and plain, the pleasant land of counterpane.' (Warwick, 2000:109) Using a poem featuring a bed,

even if in 'pleasant' context, felt potentially loaded. I opted for the Heaney poem, which interpreted ordinary sights, in this case telegraph wires, through childhood imagination afforded: 'We were small and thought we knew nothing worth knowing. We thought words traveled the wires in the shiny pouches of raindrops.' (Heaney, 1990: 159)

No Ball Games ostensibly offered an inverted view on play: 'No tents, space-hoppers, orgies, Brussel sprout enthusiasts', but with an exaggeration that suggests such things being championed, leaving room for the adult to be fully present. Orgies in this context felt too incongruous to be taken seriously. The poem has poignant moments: 'No weeping for the joy you think you're owed', playful, evocative lists: 'No sand, no shark impressions, no culottes', Chagall-esque magic realism: 'No weightless floating with an auctioneer in the small pond', and finishes emphatically with 'No ponds. Hope that's now clear.'

My selection was filtered through who I am, my life experience, my experience of CWTP, and of this particular group. I had no sure-fire way of knowing where the poems might land with them. I knew that I was not aiming for them to revert to child ego states but rather to invite them to connect with the qualities and spirit of play as adults. My supervisor encouraged me to keep the level of stimulus simple and safe. I voiced a concern that my exercises might be *too* tame or unstimulating. She pointed out that my participants would be fresh to the subject, whereas I was already well immersed and thereby acclimatised. This was helpful in finding the right balance between adventure and safety. I resisted suggestions from my play-therapy consultant to introduce a sand-tray, water-tub, ball, or clay, *at this stage*. I would keep the emphasis on an *imagined* and/or *remembered* connection to play, based on a central principle of CWTP, that writers can conjure things, events and feelings, apparently out of thin air.

In the spirit of simplicity, I would offer a very basic exercise before we read the poems. I would ask them to jot down firstly what they understand by the verb 'to play', and then by the word 'playfulness'.

For part two, I chose an exercise I had offered other CWTP groups but never in such a long session, nor to so well established a group, allowing us to enter the process deeply. I had offered it first in a forty-five minute training session, and again in a fifteen-minute workshop slot of a one-hour presentation at a CWTP conference. Both were preceded by reference to Gibbons' 'Writing Well' acrostic. The exercise involved inviting participants to recall a recent example of embodied or hand-and-object-play witnessed or experienced by them. They would then write about it, particularly noting the qualities of this example of play, being warned of an ensuing plenary share. They would then be invited to write about how the writing and sharing to this prompt had made them feel, and share again in plenary, before a closing round.

The RS handout is [APPENDIX SIX](#). Transcript of the recording of the second half of the RS is [APPENDIX SEVEN](#).

B2 Methodology

My approach was to explore what happened when I set up a particular set of circumstances under research conditions, never, to my knowledge, set up before. I was of course building on hunches I had around my experience of adult play, or a lack of opportunity for adult play in my social interactions with other adults – that is while remaining clothed and sober. I had once delivered a talk entitled *CWTP – permission for adults to play while remaining clothed and sober*. My own associations with childhood play are, on the whole, energising and wholesome, but experience had provided insight into the damaging associations of play. Knowing the power of stimulation of themed prompts let me understand that individuals discover what they are uncovering about themselves while they are *in the act of* doing it. Neither they, nor I, will be able to predict precisely what will emerge.

Phenomenology, as the study of the development of consciousness and self-awareness, provided the methodological backdrop. I would provide my account of the experience of those who participated in the RS. The effect of my holding, and creative stimulus, and the stimulus which the group members provide through each of their utterances cannot be predicted. I must accept a) the subjective, qualitative nature of each individual's responses, and b) that the quality of my holding, and the sharing and feedback of others impacts on the nature and quality of their experience. This requires that I approach the evaluation with the appropriate methodological considerations. By coding the creative responses of participants, I would lift out themes grounded in the material they choose to disclose, as per Glaser, Strauss and Corbin's Grounded Theory.

“Grounded theory is a methodology that seeks to construct theory about issues

of importance in peoples' lives (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It does this through a process of data collection that is often described as inductive in nature (Morse, 2001), in that the researcher has no preconceived ideas to prove or disprove. Rather, issues of importance to participants emerge from the stories that they tell about an area of interest that they have in common with the researcher." (Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006: 2)

Grounded theory is a research tool that enables researchers to develop a theory within a substantive area (in this case CWTP), offering explanation on a concern, and on how that concern is resolved or processed. Data is gathered in qualitative and quantitative form, as in my study, and strict procedures for data analysis are adhered to, leading to a theory grounded in the the data. According to an un-named speaker on the www.groundedtheoryonline.com website grounded theory 'is the study of a concept ... and the concept names a pattern ... in that pattern you're going to see if it's a core category – if it happens all around you.'

Thematic analysis ([APPENDICES 9 and 10](#)) would be conducted on the captured words, i.e. the texts generated by my participants in the creative and reflective writing produced in the session ([APPENDIX 7](#)). Participants' spoken reflection, sharing and feedback during the RS (found in the transcript of the recording of the RS [APPENDIX 6](#)), and the 'marks' in the post RS evaluation, which incorporated an experiencing scale ([APPENDIX 8](#)) would all be considered as to whether they supported the evidence of emergent themes.

Such consideration would perforce be filtered through my own choices, and my experience during the session. The methodical structure of the thematic analysis process however, applied to the creative writing, provided a strong degree of objectivity. On completion of the

thematic analysis, I was struck by how starkly words and details pointed to emergent themes, in ways I would not have been able to articulate so comprehensively if I had been relying on my own impressions. This reminded me of magic painting books, where painting water over a black and white image revealed colours present in the paper but invisible until released, in all the appropriate places.

The experiencing scale which participants gave me in their evaluation feedback ([APPENDIX 8](#)) was useful for evaluating degrees of intensity of experience for each individual and for showing the ratio of, for example, pleasure to discomfort, within the group. The small sample means that conclusions drawn are specific to this setting. Through my participants' written responses to proffered prompts, interpretation would emerge of their relationship to the theme. Grounded Theory offered translation and understanding of their responses and behaviour in the RS. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)

B3 Delivery of research session

The RS was delivered in our normal venue, followed by a lunch hour and then an optional debriefing hour. Several participants had let me know they would not be staying for the debrief. One was unable to attend on the day. Christine, my volunteer professional witness, was introduced and seated out of the sight line of most participants. I gave her the poems and the handout. I advised her that if she did choose to write in response to the material she would not be included in our sharing and reflection and I would not be able to include her in my facilitating rôle. She was very clear about her self-responsibility and the rôle she had agreed to play in the RS. I had wondered if I, as a relative novice, would feel uncomfortably scrutinised by her, but she was a model of discretion. I introduced Christine and stressed that she was governed by the same conditions of confidentiality as participants. I noticed how we all seemed to settle into our trusting dynamic, even with the recording device and a witness present.

I introduced the theme and alluded to our now well-known 'Writing Well' acrostic (Gibbons, 2013), constituting our safety guide. I encouraged participants experiencing emotional discomfort to stay in the room and allow the group to hold them, unless they needed more privacy. I was aware of trying to guide self-care, and balance this with avoiding pre-empting emotional reactions to the theme.

Participants were forthcoming in the opening round. JW voiced a slight unease about the RS theme of play, which I noted. Ruby told us of her experience of going to the city to watch her daughter in a play, and how struck she had been by something she had witnessed. The presence of AC, who had not been with us for the second series, felt natural and appreciated

by all. We did a physical relaxation exercise, three Qi Gong moves. Inspired by Fiona Hamilton, we wrote a word we liked very physically in the air a few times, making it bigger each time. This was received with smiles and laughter. I found it relaxing and fun, and it set a tone.

The creative writing generated is in [APPENDIX SEVEN](#), arranged person by person under the sub-headings:

Jotting exercise (brief personal response to the verb 'to play' and to the word 'playfulness')

Writing in response to three poems

Writing *into* the writing in response to the poems

Writing in response to the prompt to describe a recently witnessed example of play

(focusing on embodied and hand-and-object play)

Writing in response to the question 'what did it feel like to write about play, here, today?'

Immediately after the RS, I was already noticing some emerging themes that became clearer to me on reflection, and in correspondence with Ruby, who took up my offer of after-care. Two themes emerged clearly from the creative material and the written and verbal reflection: appreciation of the joy of play, and sadness at its absence in adult life. More explicitly, the sessions elicited in Ruby strong feelings around not having played freely as a child, due to her mother's mental illness. She realised how the pleasure and appreciation with which she observes her own daughters was absent in her mother's relation to her. A third theme was an appreciation of play as both an indicator and a tool for bonding. This was with an adopted daughter and also with a once-feral cat who had lost trust of his owner after acute illness

required many visits to the vet.

A fourth theme was one for which I was heartily glad to have made provision and preparation in advance. Ruby connected with the fact that she had been sexually abused by a family member in childhood. This manifested in her writing about watching a girl, a stranger, continuously and strenuously washing her hands, for far too long, before going on stage and performing apparently confidently alongside Ruby's elder daughter. Ruby had been fairly reticent throughout the session, voicing tentatively that she felt she had not been able to write 'correctly' in response to the creative writing exercises offered, so chose not to read out her writing, just describe it. Towards the close of the session however, she came forward a little, and was encouraged to share what had been going on for her. She did read out all her pieces, and shared tentatively what she had been experiencing.

In the closing round, four out of five participants expressed appreciation of the experience, and enthusiasm for exploring opportunities for more play, as adults. JM and JW both used the word 'saturated' to describe how they felt. Ruby voiced that she knew that she had to process her experience, and didn't really know what to say. She was very smiley in a nervous way. It became clear that she was holding in a lot of strong emotions, which we debriefed a little, privately, in the kitchen. We arranged to stay in touch, as I had initially offered. I was glad to have built in safeguards, including offering the price of a counseling or therapy session if required as a result of the RS experience.

B4 My reflection

In the days immediately following the RS, I was tired but engaged with the process. I listened to the recordings, wrote up the transcript, received supervision, collated evaluation forms (APPENDIX EIGHT) and creative writing generated in the RS, and gently entered the rôle of holding Ruby as she processed her experience of the RS.

In my Research Journal I wrote:

'While working on the transcript of the recording, and listening to the depth of sharing and reflection of peoples' words, I got a strong, deep sense of how beautiful the group (dynamic), and this session with the group, had been. It was allowing people to have revelations (HP and Ruby) and to share them, and to notice things both in hindsight *and* in the moment, stimulated by the material and held by the built trust among us.'

I was struck by how sketchy real spoken dialogue is, and, by extension, how much we add when we write something out coherently and effectively. It made me realise how active a process listening to and comprehending others is, and how much we fill in the gaps.

I was led and guided by Ruby in how much contact she wanted. Contact was by e-mail. From the outset she gave me permission to use her writing in my research. I have repeatedly given her the option to reconsider this. Section Six addresses Ruby's after-care.

In hindsight I wonder if it might have been better practice to have asked a neutral third party

to conduct the thematic analysis of Ruby's creative writing. This would ensure that the analysis could be viewed as purely evidence-based. Having been party to Ruby's post-session reflection and contextualisation of her RS creative writing, I could be seen to be influenced by additional information. No advance consent for such a contingency had been arranged however, so I analysed it myself. Bearing this in mind, I paid particular attention to sticking to the *actual* words of Ruby's creative writing. I had done so unselfconsciously for AC's thematic analysis, but my awareness of the importance of doing so became heightened when working on Ruby's, for the above reason.

B5 Thematic analysis of creative writing

I have selected the creative writing of AC and Ruby to investigate in detail, through thematic analysis, supported by their verbal feedback and evaluation forms. They are contrasting examples of the writing generated in the RS. AC's represents the appreciation and energy gained from connecting with the qualities of play, evident also in the writing of JM, HP and JW. Ruby's writing is more complex.

B5a) Thematic analysis of AC's creative writing. ([Background workings in APPENDIX SEVEN.](#))

The report

The main themes identified were movement and energy; freedom; restriction; happiness and excitement. More understated themes were adulthood; childhood; sadness; belonging; resilience; reflection. Out of the former category, although these themes were inter-related, I decided to focus on the theme of freedom. The themes of movement and energy were expressions of freedom, and happiness and excitement were expressions of movement, energy *and* freedom.

The theme of freedom was expressed by the words: *fearless, imagining all sorts of everything, breaking barriers, not caring, free, shouting, being cheeky, letting go of inhibitions, being open, noisy, experiment.*

The following inferences about freedom were drawn from the text:

fearlessness equals unlimited imagined possibilities;

freedom breaks conditioned restrictions (manners, consideration for others, fear, embarrassment);

freedom is not being limited by peoples' judgment, or consequences of one's own behaviour.

Some repetitions (being cheeky, being noisy/shouting, not caring, being open, experiment) infer admonishments such as 'be careful', 'be quiet', 'don't be rude', with their inferences of 'draw yourself in', 'keep yourself to yourself', 'don't expose your ignorance or ridiculousness', 'be aware and influenced by what others think of you and your behaviour' i.e. social control and social conditioning.

Some expressions of freedom are:

states of being e.g. being cheeky, being open, free, fearless, not caring;

others are action states e.g. breaking barriers, shouting, letting go of inhibitions, imagining all sorts or everything, experiment;

i) In the two exercises in response to poems, AC reacts to parental limitations because she *'didn't understand'* them, and *'didn't think these things were worth knowing'*. She was *'literally flying from the restrictions of my parents' fear'*. She says she *'would be fearless – not afraid to experiment, get things wrong, look silly'*.

The way she reacts to these *'don't talk to strangers, don't go far'* was to experience something she thought 'worth knowing':

'But flying was worth knowing

Sailing on my bike in Mayow Park.

Excitement fizzing in my chest like a shaken can of lemonade.

Little bugs hitting my face, sacrificing their lives for my pleasure.

The smell of grass almost suffocating me at speed.

My legs powering the wheels so that I could take off.

Getting a grazed knee, crying and getting up again.

Trying again – not caring to keep the other knee safe.

Fearless and free.'

ii) In the exercise recalling observation or experience of recent play, the adult experience is different from that of the observed children:

'The Castle is a pub.

A place for adults to enjoy grownup drinks.

It has a garden – no climbing frames or other toys.

Just grass and a tree.

This was enough for a kid's gang of three.

First came the running and calling, the chasing and tag.

Then came the huddle to divvy up roles and who was 'it'.

Nods of agreement and smiles all round.

Scattering and shouting with excitement of the Chaser's 'nearly' touch.

Making their own fun – happy and noisy.

Then a breakaway agent goes up the tree.

King of the castle, he teases the others,

Who look at the traitor bemused.

As they run to him in fits of laughter,

We look on from our seats with our crisps and our lager.'

AC, as adult, was affected by the children playing. Initially alluded to as the '*gang of three*', the children appear a slightly threatening, unwelcome intrusion. Gradual positive words are introduced, agreement, smiles, excitement, fun, happy, laughter, and the adults benignly '*look on from our seats with our crisps and our lager*'. I feel that pejorative language would have been used to describe the children's activities, if AC had not been positively affected by them, despite initial ambiguity about the children taking over '*a place for adults*'.

iii) In the reflective writing AC identifies her feelings around play, as an adult:

'My memory of the kids playing in the pub garden came to me quickly and I couldn't think of a time recently when I had played. I felt sad about that. Don't I play anymore? But describing the children in their playful world of running and chasing took me back to my childhood and the playground – feeling part of the gang, running nosily and letting go. It reminded me that I was like them once. Can I be like that again?'

She feels happy as well as sad, recognising the qualities of play she experienced in

childhood, and experienced vicariously again observing the children playing. She could identify with them, from her childhood experiences. Having connected to this particular flavour of happiness, she is sad to realise that, in adulthood, she no longer has access to these specific qualities of freedom in play.

AC's reflective conclusion is acknowledging absence or presence of freedom in adult life. She realises how distant she is from the particular freedom from parental fear she experienced as a child. She also acknowledges her liberty to reinstate certain freedoms (buying herself a bike) to redress this absence of play, and her sadness around it.

All of the above led me to the following points:

1. Freedom in the context of this CW is illustrated by fast physical movement and noisy communication; it is expressed in words which convey positive emotions and high energy. A sense of energised expansion is tangible when AC is describing play.

2. Through creative writing in response to play-positive exercises AC has connected powerfully to emotions associated with freedom in childhood. Her experience of freedom as a child enables her to identify with the same qualities when observed, as an adult, in children.

3. AC realises quite starkly that this freedom does not manifest in her adult life; she seems surprised at this absence, and saddened by the realisation, now valuing it as something precious, currently lost; it seems to be the first time she has stopped to notice and acknowledge the absence.

4. AC noticed the children's collective power, without an adult's intervention, to claim play space in an ostensibly adult area. At first slightly resentful of children playing in her adult space, she then appreciates their lack of obligation to be quiet and sit still.

In the completed evaluation forms ([APPENDIX SIX](#)), only AC and Ruby expanded on yes/no questions. To the question **Did you experience any unexpected pleasure in relation to the creative exercises given?** AC wrote: *'Recalling my memories of play gave me more pleasure than I expected – it re-awakened something in me.'*

In the scale of experience section she consistently circled the answers that expressed either *very* (4 out of 5) or *extremely* (5) *comfortable, safe* or *stimulated*. She circled 'No' to experiencing any discomfort in the RS, and 'Yes' to experiencing pleasure. She circled 'Yes' to sharing her writing, rather than just talking about her writing, both in the pair share, and the plenary share.

I experienced her participation as relaxed, energised, fully present, engaged, appreciative and pleasantly surprised. She announced in the closing round that she was going to buy herself a bicycle.

B5b) Thematic analysis of Ruby's creative writing. ([Background workings in APPENDIX EIGHT](#))

I feel strongly that Ruby's creative writing represents powerful and transformative self-revelation and so should be considered in full. I include it here, as prelude to its thematic analysis report.

As Ruby did not choose to proffer her reflection from the exercise **Writing in response to the question 'what did it feel like to write about play, here, today?'** I shall use comments given in her evaluation form relating specifically to the writing produced in the RS, to serve as her reflection.

1. 'Hands (part one)

*She stood at the sink
and washed her hands
and washed them again
and again.*

*What invisible stain was she trying to
scrub away?*

*I saw her next
under the spotlight.
The contrast struck
and moved me.*

*She stood
alone,
in front of the crowd,
speaking her words
with head held high.*

*Her bravery
and courage
lit up the dark.*

2. Hands (part two)

*In my mind,
I carefully
fill a sink
with warm,
lavender-scented bubbles.*

*I take her hands
gently in mine
and wash them
with my own.*

*I smooth them dry
with a soft,*

sweet smelling

towel.

I hold her hands

for a while

in my own.

3. The Swing

She has put on the layers of her uniform,

tweaking them as she goes,

(skirt definitely not the recommended 'knee-length'!)

Her books are sorted and packed away, along

with the stationery-stuffed pencil case,

water bottle, lunch money, lip salve,

hair brush, headphones (to drown out

the 'annoying boy' on the bus.)

She is an almost-teenage school girl

who spots the swing swaying from a

branch of our old apple tree

and in the blink of an eye

the years and the layers are stripped back

as she drops her bag

*and leaps in one swift movement
onto the swing.*

*She flies through the chilled Spring air,
her shrieks of joy filling the early hush.
Her body propels the swing higher and higher.
She's among the branches,
reaching for the rooftops.*

Free

Soaring

*I squint into the early morning sun
and feel my heart squeeze
around the perfect moment.*

4. Reflection

The theme of 'play' brought up a lot of very powerful emotions for me, as it took me back to my childhood. This was a time when I felt very confused, alone, abused and angry. I think I felt some of those same emotions during the session. I certainly found it harder than normal to engage with the poems we were given and with my fellow writers.

The theme of childhood is also painful as I have two daughters who I love very much but who I have hurt, through my own unresolved issues. The last poem I

wrote was about my youngest daughter and her growing up and away. I feel a strong sense of urgency that I need to heal and make things better before the girls leave home.

During the session, I had a very powerful visual image in my mind. At the time, I felt frustrated with myself that I couldn't 'do the exercise properly' and write from the poems. The image seemed vaguely linked but I couldn't articulate how.

Towards the end of the session, I think I saw that the girl in my image represented me.'

The Report

Themes I identified were: cleaning; body parts; movement / speed / noise; light; dark; contrast; gentleness / care – carefully.

I decided to concentrate on the theme of contrast as it had a lot of energy and material.

It was expressed by the following words, juxtaposed phrases and paraphrasing: *she stood at the sink; she stood in front of the crowd; bravery; courage; contrast; qualities of the first and then the second wash; layering up; years of layers stripped away; warm; chill; light; dark; shrieks of joy; early hush.*

The following inferences about the theme of contrast were drawn from the text:

contrast can be surprising and illuminating;

recognition of an uncomfortable state highlights appreciation of its opposite, when seen;

appreciating the positivity of one state can draw attention to sadness or discomfort about its opposite;

balance or redress is something naturally sought.

In piece one (Hands, part one) Ruby notices the girl washing her hands at the sink because it is for an inordinate length of time, and with an intense quality. The sight engages Ruby's attention. She feels curious, concerned, a bit disturbed, intrigued.

In piece two (Hands, part two) Ruby expresses how she wants to look after the girl's hands gently and indulgently, to soothe and hold them and make them feel loved and cared for. This is because she has been disturbed by the aggressive way the girl is treating her hands, trying to get rid of something '*invisible*', and feels a strong desire to counter it with care, gentleness, acceptance and love.

In piece three (The Swing) Ruby is struck by the powerful contrast in her twelve year old daughter's behaviour, on the one hand shoe-horning herself into the appearance and behaviour of a sophisticated teenager as she gets ready to go to school, and then shedding it all and leaping back into childhood, embodying its energy, freedom and joy.

In witnessing this Ruby notices huge pleasure and love at the sight of her daughter's sudden reversion to physical freedom and lack of self-consciousness. She notes without comment that her daughter is growing out of this child phase. Juxtaposing it with the way she is dressing herself in preparation for school infers some sadness about the end of the child

phase of her daughter's life.

In piece four (reflection) Ruby owns that writing to the theme of play brought up powerful emotions for her; she found it harder than normal to engage with the poems given, and with the group. This was because the theme took her back to her childhood - a time when she felt very confused, alone, abused and angry. The writing put her in touch with these feelings.

Because of the powerful image she had in her mind from something witnessed the night before, Ruby at first felt frustrated with herself that I couldn't '*do the exercise properly*' and write from the poems. She felt that the image seemed vaguely linked but couldn't articulate how. Ruby realised later in the session that the girl washing her hands represented her, and what she had witnessed in the toilets had relevance for her, and her associations with her childhood.

Ruby also felt a sense of urgency at the amount of time she had left to resolve her own issues, and the impact these had had, through behaviour caused by her issues, on her daughters, fast growing out of their own childhoods.

Ruby overtly states in her reflection that the girl washing her hands represents Ruby herself, that she identifies with the girl. I think the overall point in the CW is the highlighting of Ruby's preferred state, repeatedly, but in different forms: the gentle washing of hands as compared to the obsessive one; the brave, proud and confident performer, speaking out and being heard and seen, as compared to the ashamed, notionally dirty, obsessive young woman; the free, joyful, uninhibited daughter, happy and comfortable in her body and happy with who she is as compared to the school girl she who has become highly aware of what she looks like; the

mother whose issues impacted adversely on her daughter (Ruby) and the mother (Ruby) whose issues are not impacting adversely on her children.

I believe that Ruby is recognising and identifying her preferred states, and noticing sadness or discomfort at their contrasting states.

All of the above led me to the following principal points:

1. The theme of contrast is expressed using contrasting language. In piece one there is a rather oppressive tone to describe the washing '*again and again*', but then Ruby says that she is '*struck and moved*' to see the same girl on stage. A shift is elicited, in Ruby, not just the girl Ruby is witnessing. And when Ruby imagines washing the girl's hands, her tone is gentle and nurturing. Similarly, in piece three, Ruby's language shifts from using an onerous sounding litany of all the things her daughter prepares herself with for school, to an irrepressible expression of love and heart-burst.

2. The very stark image of the girl made a vivid impression on Ruby. It was unresolved and somehow taking her attention, despite her good intentions to take part in the poem prompts I had offered. Having mentioned this impression in the opening round, Ruby refreshed the memory again, so wrote it down. It seemed to present a situation asking for attention. Her reflection on this experience gave her a resolution, a contrasting answer.

3. In each case where Ruby writes about two contrasting states, she clearly identifies which of the contrasted states impress her positively: the actress performing on stage, '*under the spotlight....speaking her words....head held high...her bravery and courage lit up the dark*'; the

caring, gentle, tender way Ruby imagines taking care of the girl's hands; the joyful free uninhibited child, 'reaching for the rooftops, free, *soaring*.'

B6 Participants' evaluation

I had set a deadline a week ahead for receiving completed evaluation forms to give some space for people to mull over their experience.

Evaluation sheet scores from four out of five participants consistently reflected middle to high levels of comfort, stimulation, feelings of safety and pleasure. Words and phrases used in their reflection included *'pleasure'*, *'it re-awakened something in me'*, *'fun times'*, *'delight'*, *'I established a strong link between play and being in a trusting relationship'*.

Ruby – the fifth participant – gave scores that reflected *low comfort* (1) with the theme of the RS; *extreme stimulation* (5) with the discussion leading up to the creative writing exercise. She was *very stimulated* (4) by the creative exercises given; she felt *safe enough* (3) with the creative exercises given. She was the only participant to answer 'Yes' to experiencing unexpected discomfort in relation to creative exercises given, commenting:

'The theme of play' brought up a lot of very powerful emotions for me, as it took me back to my childhood. This was a time when I felt very confused, alone, abused and angry. I think I felt some of those same emotions during the session. I certainly found it harder than normal to engage with the poems we were given and with my fellow writers.

The theme of childhood is also painful as I have two daughters who I love very much but who I have hurt, through my own unresolved issues. The last poem I wrote was about my youngest daughter and her growing up and away. I feel a strong sense of urgency that I need to heal and make things better before the girls

leave home.

During the session, I had a very powerful visual image in my mind. At the time, I felt frustrated with myself that I couldn't 'do the exercise properly' and write from the poems. The image seemed vaguely linked but I couldn't articulate how. Towards the end of the session, I think I saw that the girl in my image represented me.

Since the session, I have been in contact with Kate and we have discussed this at length. I am happy for you to use these emails in your research, if they are helpful. I have thought a great deal about the session and I think, although it was difficult and painful, it was very useful. I also have great trust and faith in Kate and our writing group, which made it just about bearable. If we hadn't got to this point in our journeys together, I think it would have been much harder.'

Ruby answered 'Yes', as did all the others, to experiencing unexpected pleasure in relation to the creative exercises given, commenting:

'I experienced further proof that writing can help me unlock difficult emotions and then help me formulate my own response and point the way forward. If the first part of the writing experience is a question, then the second is the answer (in very simple terms.) This is the antithesis of my experience of the mental health system in the NHS, when I have felt largely unheard and made to feel that I don't know myself or what would help me.

I have also found that sharing words with a supportive group of people has been a very positive experience. Sometimes it is very challenging, as in the past I would only present those parts of me that I thought were 'nice and acceptable.' Being present with other people and being 'real', is new for me.

I also enjoyed hearing other people's writing and their experiences around 'play'. It felt good when AC resolved to buy a bike and JW described 'Letting Go'. It made me long to do those things too.

Since the session, I have been in contact with Kate and this has helped with the ongoing emotional 'digging', the healing and self-care.'

B7 Aftercare of Ruby

In the weeks preceding the RS, I had created a time slot following the end of our regular group sessions. This was to lay out information for potential volunteers for the RS, to give opportunity to have queries answered, and to receive hard copies of booking and consent forms.

I had set up an optional debriefing session after the lunch break which followed the RS. I also stated that I would be available for the month following the RS if people wished to discuss anything, and that, if need be, would sign-post them to further relevant professional support.

Such provision had been greeted by a little laughter by one or two people, and I did wonder a) if it was overkill and b) if it perhaps created a leading suggestion that a session exploring play could warrant such interventions. In the event, however, I was extremely glad I had put these measures in place, as part of the ethical consideration and preparation.

During the RS all five participants demonstrated feeling connected, at some point, directly or vicariously, to happy, vibrant experiences of play through their writing and reflection. Some regret and sadness was expressed around their current lack of access to the play state, as adults. This seemed to act as a spur to create, or to be more open to opportunities for play and playfulness, with children, animals or other adults. In the closing round, these words and phrases were voiced - *'energised'*, *'rich'*, *'play is a powerful element on its own'*, *'importance of play'*, *'shift'*, *'the feeling of abandon in play'* (in a positive sense).

Ruby was also expressing something very contrasting and vulnerable, and was visibly

unsettled.

Most of the group wanted only to stay for lunch, not the debriefing. Ruby had previously said that she could only stay briefly. It transpired that a hug and a cry was all she wanted for the time being, but she made really constructive use of the e-mail correspondence we shared over the next few weeks, paced by her.

In this she was able to share how challenging the session had been for her, and that yet it had given her insight. I shall quote it in full here, with her permission, as Ruby evidently applied herself to a significant process. This is also bearing in mind that she had previously attended two series' of Writing Time, so had been actively engaging in creative and therapeutic writing for the seven months leading up to the RS. Two big revelations, to me, were the impact of Ruby's mother's mental health and childhood abuse from a family member. These had not been explicitly disclosed before the RS.

'1. I noticed that I was quite agitated from the beginning of the session. This meant I found it difficult to focus and concentrate.

I wanted to be present and engaged but found it almost impossible to listen properly to other people's words.

It felt like there was a lot of 'background noise' in my head and just the image of the girl washing her hands.

I don't know if this was because of the subject matter (i.e. 'play') or how I was on that day or a combination of the two (I think it was a combination.)

2. My words wouldn't flow in response to the poems. The girl at the sink wouldn't

go away.

I think the link between play and this image is that I identified with her as a young girl. I too have been trying metaphorically to 'scrub away an invisible stain' all my adult life. I don't know her story but I can imagine that things in her childhood have added a burden to her and tried to take away something precious (I think by this, I mean the 'essence' of her, her spontaneity, her trust in herself, her self belief.)

3. When I think of my childhood, I don't have a sense of freedom, space, growing, exploring, excitement. I feel constrained, controlled, dark, isolated, less than.

4. The session was hard because it brought me face to face with those feelings. Listening to other people's happy memories made me feel the loss even deeper.

5. I feel a very deep sense of loss and anger that my childhood and my innocence was taken. This happened because of my mother's mental health issues and ongoing childhood abuse from a family member.

6. I think the themes of complex choices and juxtaposition ran through a lot of my words. They are things that make humans so beautiful and their ability to keep hopeful, to keep breathing and to choose to make acts of bravery every day, gives me hope. It felt as if two different worlds were being brought right next to each other, making the differences more vivid.

Childhood/Adulthood; City/Country; Night/Day; Holding on/Letting go; Keeping quiet/Speaking out; Being a victim/Taking control; Being afraid/Taking a risk; Pain, suffering/Love, compassion; Quiet country living, conservative, safe/Inner city,

after dark, buzz, life, danger; Feeling insecure, obsessive, anxious/Pushing ourselves out into the world, taking a risk; Keeping quiet, being a 'good girl', keeping secrets/Holding our head high, speaking out in our own words; Childhood, spontaneous, real/Growing up, self conscious, constructing an 'image' for the outside world; Holding, parenting, loving/Letting go, parenting, loving; Being a victim, pain, suffering/Loving (ourselves and others), compassion, growing, sharing, strength.

I think the encouraging thing is that, although during the session I felt confused and overwhelmed, with some time and space, I could make some sense of the images, thoughts and words that were whizzing around in half-formed states.

The other lovely thing is that where my first piece of writing posed a question 'what invisible stain is she trying to scrub away?' my second piece held the answer. The 'stain' arose from misguided, selfish, self-seeking 'love' and from an abuse of power - the opposite of this is kindness, gentleness, caring, loving, nurturing; the feelings I had when I wrote the second poem.

It felt like I'd answered my own question and therefore I wasn't a victim but someone who has everything they need inside, in order to live a healthy life. This feels very empowering.'

We had several more exchanges, including the sharing of poems Ruby has written about her healing journey in the previous seven months, when significant issues became clarified for her. Ruby expressed much appreciation for the arena provided by CWTP, of which the RS was a significant part, and for the opportunity to continue to process through writing via our e-

mail exchange. She was explicit about the value of feeling held through this process and the space that writing provides for her, allowing her to *'process painful and difficult events and emotions, at my (sic) own pace and in a safe, manageable way.'* She said that it had been more effective for her than many previous years' of talking therapies.

I was very struck by her clearly emerging self-awareness, the shift in perspective and attitude to herself, and the deep commitment to her healing process that I was witnessing. I reflected this back to her in our exchanges.

On completion of the final draft on the dissertation I checked with AC and Ruby, whose creative writing I had show-cased, that their consent covered this; they each assented willingly. Once submitted I made the dissertation available to all participants and group members. I received detailed feedback from Ruby ([APPENDIX ELEVEN](#)).

B8 Reflexive exchange with professional witness

When Christine agreed to act as professional witness to the RS session, she agreed to share her reflections on witnessing the session. These, and my written response, contributed some reflexivity to the account.

Considered written feedback from Christine reflected her sense of a group of people open to and comfortable with my approach (*'happy'* and *'eager'*). She enjoyed the small physical relaxation at the beginning, which ended up with some exaggerated 'air writing', creating a link to the physical aspect of play. The sensitivity of the facilitation was noted, as was the balanced amount of time given to each participant, *'allowing the most reticent participant to share her creative writing eventually'*. She thought the workshop felt unhurried and relaxed, and that a very comfortable atmosphere was created.

Christine wrote in response to the prompts and enjoyed doing so. She noticed the potential for the topic leading to the subject of sex and asked me how prepared I was for a participant to write about this. I was glad that she flagged this up as it confirmed my own hunches, and was further validation for my consideration and preparation for such an eventuality. I laid out my thinking around this to her. I also remembered an intervention offered by our training tutor Claire Williamson who suggested the following wording: *'I wonder if by raising that topic you are partly asking if it is okay to bring it here; it is, but it may be worth providing a small 'health warning' in advance, as not everyone is immediately comfortable with the topic.'*

Christine said:

'A couple of participants looked emotional at the end. It seemed that writing about play had brought up memories of past times and situations that provoked emotion even though the topic is essentially light-hearted and positive. This links with the idea that we write what we need to write, whatever the topic.'

This last sentence furnished me with a concept I had struggled to verbalise. During the first half of the session, Ruby felt that she wasn't writing in response to the poems I offered as writing prompts, so did not want to read them out. The subject of her two initial pieces was something she had mentioned during the opening round, focusing on the most striking aspects of this. Several of the other participants had taken leads from the poem prompts to refer to *childhood* memories of play, even though I had made sure there was a lot of scope for choice. Ruby said that she didn't have a lot of memories of childhood play and that hearing others refer to theirs had highlighted this lack. After writing her subsequent pieces though, about seeing a glimpse of her thirteen year old daughter revert from a threshold teenager, to a joyful, free, liberated play state ('The Swing'), she was encouraged to read and talk about her earlier pieces. Christine referred to her as *'the most reticent participant'* .

Ruby's initial pieces *seemed* unrelated to the poems I had offered, but were insisting to be written. 'Hands, 1' was about noticing the young performer washing her hands in a prolonged and harsh way, before performing to an audience, and 'Hands 2' provided an alternative scenario.

In the weeks that followed, Ruby carefully unpacked the RS experience, her creative writing from that session, and her own history. She also referred to her experience of the CWTP sessions leading up to the RS as an important context, as discussed in section B7, above.

Part C

Conclusion

My experience of researching for this dissertation expanded my contextual knowledge of the benefits of play and playfulness throughout human life, and the consequences of its deprivation, in both childhood and adulthood.

Using grounded theory as my methodology provided a structure for coding and analysis. It also necessitated identifying potential risks to participants and considering adequate contingencies, safety nets and interventions in advance, as well as weighing risks against possible benefits of participating. The risks identified - of uncovering childhood sexual trauma - were founded; I had not anticipated other factors that informed Ruby's play history – her mother's mental health. Feedback from Ruby assured me that the contingencies I provided were adequate and the process as a whole was of therapeutic benefit to her, in this case.

This is very specific to this particular setting and group, and cannot be extrapolated further at this stage. Ruby was prepared and informed in advance of the experience, had gained an inherent trust in CWTP and this group specifically, and had volunteered freely. It was not an activity imposed as a 'cure' on a 'captive' group, which had little experience of CWTP, each other or my facilitation. This factor of informed choice seems to me key to the outcome. I wonder how well informed other participants might be, in settings which provide for other demographics, where participants might be less well equipped to perceive apparent risks for themselves and anticipate possible outcomes, or have the skills, experience and trust to work through the issues presented in response to the stimulus offered. Each setting would require

very considered preparation and research, and there may be settings where the approach adopted in my RS would be far too direct and potent.

Facilitating the CWTP session entitled *Exploring play through creative writing* under research conditions deepened my trust in the process of CWTP; the additional layers of preparation, reflection, analysis and evaluation endorsed my appreciation of the value of creative, expressive and reflective writing as a therapeutic tool. Evidence gained from my observation of the RS, creative writing and reflections shared in the RS, participants' feedback and evaluation all showed that CWTP is a powerful medium for exploring the phenomenon of play. In the case of Ruby the RS proved a transformative experience, and for all participants was deemed to be deeply effecting.

The experience helped me to identify the specific attributes of play inherently present in a CWTP session – social, narrative, imaginative and transformative – and how they manifest during a session; it showed me how CWTP can be used to get us into Cleese's 'open mode', where anything is possible and nothing is wrong (in the context of our imagined, creative writing).

Through witnessing the absorption and reconnection of participants to states of energised pleasure associated with the play state, whether freely accessed by the participant, or observed by them in other living beings, I noted parallels between the benefit of the play state in childhood and the state of creative flow in adulthood; I heard of the desire to overcome blocks to this state of being, or to have greater access to it, and of the joy and excitement gained from accessing it in the research session. I witnessed confident assertion in AC's case, of the right to have such access as an adult, which emerged directly from the RS

experience.

Even this case study with its very small sample confirmed for me that, given the right conditions, there is potential to develop the research further. The caveat being that, considering the importance of the revelation to and by Ruby during the session, the level of care, preparation and responsibility required by the facilitator in relation to each specific setting cannot be underestimated. Having said this though I believe that there is scope for developing a collaboration with play therapists and other creative therapists as a medium for extending play therapy into adulthood without patronising mature clients. I also see potential rewards in developing this CWTP-based research in partnership with Transactional Analysis, particularly in relation to accessing qualities of the free child (natural child) and the nurturing adult ego states, using exercises which employ creative writing, imagination and memory, as in this RS.

I am confirmed in the belief that this research poses a small question with big ramifications, Implications and potential for CWTP.

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APPENDICES

Appendix One

Writing Well Acrostic (Nigel Gibbons, 2012: 2) used as our writing alliance.

Write without self-criticism

Respond to our words from your feeling

Ignore grammar, spelling, punctuation and doing it right

Take the words gently in your hands and do not crush them with criticism

Invoke the words to nourish and refresh you

No need to read or share if you do not wish to

Go wherever your words lead but only as far as you wish to go

Wise words are not necessarily complicated or difficult, they are often simple and straightforward

Excellence is not required; there is always someone who writes better, but they do not write your words

Listen with your ears and from your heart

Let the words remain confidential to us and do not scatter them thoughtlessly.

Appendix Two

Background information to my private CWTP practice - *Writing Time with Kate Pawsey* (*Writing Time* for short). This extract is taken from my website writingtimewithkatepawsey.weebly.com

WRITING TIME WITH KATE PAWSEY : creative, expressive and reflective writing for well being, self-development and pleasure.

1. What is Writing Time? *Writing Time* is a service that I, as a trained and experienced facilitator in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes, offer to groups and individuals.

I facilitate the sort of writing which lets us temporarily suspend notions of 'good' or 'poor' writing. The framework is created by a clear, guided structure of creative writing time, alternated with reflecting and sharing time. In a *Writing Time* session I set themes to explore, and I offer a wide range of prompts, exercises and stimuli. I create a culture of gentle invitation and respectful listening. No-one is forced to write or to share their writing. The process I adhere to encourages the writer to choose the pace and depth at which they explore their own revelations, discoveries and creations. Groups are usually no larger than ten, and group sessions last for three hours.

Group work

Individuals can apply to participate in a three hour long, group *Writing Time* taster session. This is a prerequisite to applying to join an eight week series of weekly, three hour long, group *Writing Time* sessions.

Individual work

An individual can apply to work with me on a one-to-one basis in a series of hour long sessions. Such tailor-made sessions can give an opportunity to explore and make sense of such transitions in life as retirement, leaving school or college, or other life events and upheavals. An initial conversation by email will establish a few parameters such as the number of sessions set, and the themes to be explored. The client-led process, once entered, tends to evolve and develop organically, but it is useful to identify the prime area which is to be given attention and hold it in mind throughout the work. The framework, structure and principles echo those in group *Writing Time* sessions.

Other work

An organisation can invite me to deliver *Writing Time* sessions on their behalf.

2. When and where?

The dates of forthcoming taster sessions and series' are advertised in the 'events' section of this website. The venue is usually in or near ***** (redacted to protect participants' identity.)

3. How much?

A three-hour taster session costs a concessionary **£18**.

A series of eight, weekly, three-hour sessions costs **£220**.

Individual one to one sessions cost **£40** per hour-long session.

4. Who am I?

I am a writer, intermittent musician and mother of two grown-up children, with training and experience as a Forest School practitioner. I have worked, using music and singing, with adults with learning difficulties and children with a range of disabilities.

Writing was one of the many means I unwittingly used to recover from a breakdown following my father's suicide in 1995, my subsequent divorce, and gradual life-metamorphosis.

5. Professional qualifications and experience.

Having gained a post-graduate, vocational training certificate and diploma in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes (CWTP), with Metanoia Institute, I completed my MSc dissertation research in June 2015. It can be found in the 'more' section of this website under 'A serious study of play' long with other essays and articles on the subject. My tutors were inspirational, leading exponents in the field of CWTP - Claire Williamson, Rose Flint, Fiona Hamilton, Graham Hartill, and Nigel Gibbons; guest tutors included Victoria Field, Becky Midwinter, Sofie Bager-Charleson and Sue Porter.

As well as using writing as a tool in times of transition, upheaval and challenge, I have completed two novels and continue to write essays, prose, poetry, songs and journal articles.

I am a member of Lapidus - The writing for well-being association, and am insured through NAWA - National Association of Writers in Education. I receive specialist supervision, and take part in a regular peer supervision group.

6. Continuing Professional Development

Recent events:

March 2015 - Workshop led by Barbara Bloomfield called 'Playdough, drawing and the six part story' as part of the Lapidus Day annual conference.

November 2014 - Workshop led by Charmaine Pollard on *The Inner Critic*, at The Poetry Society, organised by the London branch of Lapidus.

July 2014 - John Fox. Evening talk with workshop element: *Poetry Therapy, Mindfulness and Creativity* (Lapidus) held in Engineers House, Bristol.

January 2014 - Marie Larkin. One day workshop: *Playing with Words*. Brighton.

October 2013 - *Lapidus Conference*. Engineers House, Bristol.

'*Pack Your Bag with Words: Literary Resources for the Journey*' with leading expert in the field, poet, editor and grief educator Ted Bowman from the US; Nana-Essi Casely-Hayford: *Choreoscribing the Pulse*; Hayley Singlehurst: *Using Autobiography for Healthcare Research*.

July 2013 - Graham Hartill. Morning workshop: *Boundaries and Self-care in the Practice of CWTP* (Lapidus) held in the Asda Community Rooms, Bedminster, Bristol.

Appendix Three

Preparatory forms and information for RS participants

Contents:

- i. Introduction to the research session p. 86**
- ii. Information for volunteer participants of the research session p. 88**
- iii. Consent form p. 90**
- iv. Booking form p. 92**

**App. 3 - i) Introduction for possible participants in Kate Pawsey's CWTP Msc Research Session.
(CWTP = Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes)**

I am Kate Pawsey, a 3rd year MSc student in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes at Metanoia Institute and Middlesex University.

I am conducting research for my Msc dissertation, around the general subject of play and creative writing. This involves a Research Session.

For the purposes of improving and developing the practice of CWTP I wish to both facilitate and study a single three-hour session, in which I introduce a specific creative element into the session, linked to the research subject – play.

The Research Session will take place on Saturday 28th March 2015, from 10am to 1pm, at Priory Barn, Newtown, Bradford-on-Avon BA15 1NQ.

In the Research Session, I will adhere to the structure and ethical code of practice you are familiar with, having experienced previous Writing Time sessions with me. Accompanying thorough discussion with my professional supervisor, and a professional play therapist, I will devise exercises appropriate to this group and the research subject - play.

An objective professional witness will be present in the room and will observe the session, but will not participate in any way. Their presence and behaviour in the research session is governed by the Lapidus code of ethics, as is mine. The session will be recorded for me to make a transcript of and to refer to in my analysis. It will then be destroyed.

Breakdown of what participating in my research involves:

Making an informed decision on whether you wish to participate. I will supply written accounts, such as this one, of the scope of the research participation, and be available in person, at the end of our Writing Time sessions, to answer any questions you might have. I can also answer questions sent by email, or in person, by phone.

Applying for a (free) place on the Research Session. The deadline for returning completed booking forms is Monday 23rd February 2015. Receiving a consent form*; reading and being satisfied about any queries you may have concerning the consent form; signing the consent form, returning the consent form. An appropriate deadline will be set for this, nearer the time of the research Session.

The three hour long Research Session on March 28th (10am to 1pm), followed by a lunch break, followed by a group de-briefing session (2m to 3pm). De-briefing will not be recorded.

Completion and return of an evaluating questionnaire, relating to your experience of the Research Session, which should take no more than 30 minutes to complete. A clear deadline of a week will be issued with the evaluation form.

I will be available for the month following the Research Session to talk through any issues

arising from participation in the Research Session, and if necessary will signpost relevant additional professional support.

You will be asked to sign a consent form* which includes the following questions:

Are you willing to take part in such a CWTP (Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes) research session on Saturday 28th March, between 10am and 1pm, at the Priory Barn, Newtown, Bradford-on-Avon, led by me Kate Pawsey?

Given that your identity will remain anonymous to anyone outside of the research session, are you willing for me to record the session, transcribe part of it, and write observationally and reflectively on my experience of the session?

Are you willing for an objective professional witness to observe the session, who will not participate in any way, and whose presence and behaviour in the research session is also governed by the Lapidus code of ethics?

4. Again, retaining your anonymity, are you willing for me to read and hold a copy of your creative writing, generated in the research session?

5. Once more, retaining your anonymity, would you consider giving your consent for me to quote from your creative writing, generated in the research session, in my research dissertation, for illustrative purposes?

I would very much appreciate you considering to take part in the Research Session described above, and if you do choose to sign up, would ask you to sign a consent form, retaining a copy for yourself, to attend the Research Session, and fill in and return to me a questionnaire about your experience of the Research Session.

Booking forms are available for the Research Session. Please return completed booking forms to me by Monday 16th February 2015.

Thank you very much.

Academic Institute supporting research study: Metanoia Institute and Middlesex University
c/o Mandy Kersey, Metanoia Institute, 13, North Common Road, Ealing, London W5 2QB.

Research to be undertaken by Kate Pawsey, Third year MSc student in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes, at the above institution, and founder of Writing Time.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Study Title: An investigation into what happens when I, as a facilitator of Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes, offer play-positive creative writing exercises in a one-off, three hour long, CWTP group session.

Focus of study: I will facilitate a single three-hour long research session, in the form of a CWTP session. I will introduce participating volunteers to some background to the research, aiming to give enough information to inform you about the likely parameters of the experience and the structure of the session, based on your previous experience of sessions with me. Informed by my knowledge of this client group and setting, I will devise appropriate play-positive exercises, in conjunction with support, guidance and advice from my usual professional supervisor; these exercises will be offered in the single Research Session. By 'play-positive' I mean exercises designed to actively stimulate associative memory of, or imagined, physical play.

Things to think about before signing the consent forms: I will monitor the whole process closely, and will of course be present in the Research Session.

Christine Hollywood, a trusted CWTP professional, will be present in the research session, without participating, to ensure objectivity.

The session will be recorded for the purposes of verifying my methods and approach (if they need to be checked) and for me to write transcripts from; parts of the session will be transcribed for the purposes of thematic analysis.

No participant, other than myself and the professional witness, will be identified by name outside of the research session; I will use initials or code names when writing up the research. I will ask your permission for me to have sight of and to consider creative writing you produce during the session, and quote it in my dissertation in the light of my research.

I will ask if I may photocopy your creative writing and return the original to you OR ask you to transcribe and email me clean copies of your creative writing produced on the research session, along with your evaluation forms.

All recordings, transcriptions and creative writing studied will be kept locked up in a cabinet, or password protected on my laptop, if stored there, and destroyed on completion of the MSc.

Location of the study: The over-arching preparation and writing up of the research will take place at the above address (my home), but the Research Session will take place at the usual setting of the client group, in this case Priory Barn, Newtown, Bradford-on-Avon, BA15 1NQ.

The **purpose** of the study is to explore whether there are grounds to show that CWTP has the potential to extend its awareness, and adapt and develop its practice, in order to provide a safe place for adults to address and compensate for gaps in their play histories, in an overt or covert way. I have not found anyone on the UK directory of Play Therapists who currently works with adults, and the Play Therapist I am consulting tells me that there was no provision in his training for working with adults. And yet Stuart Brown, founder of the US National Institute for Play, has made extensive studies on the destructive outcomes of severe play deprivation in individuals. I wonder where pure or free adult play is being subverted to in our society, and if there is value of bringing it out of the shadows, and giving it a safe, held, legitimate and shared place to be expressed, explored and developed, in CWTP settings, as there seems to be a place for in the other creative therapies. My consulting Play Therapist also told me that the play state is the natural state of the child, and that the work of Play Therapists is to assist when a child's access to the play state is recognised as blocked, frozen, or shut down. Might this have implications for working with play and CWTP, when similar states are recognised in an adult?

Timing of the study: The clinical part of my research will be for a single Research Session, held by me. It will involve in-depth preparation, discussion and devising of writing exercises appropriate for my client group (with my professional supervisor) during January, February and March 2015.

The single research session will take place on Saturday 28th March 2015, from 10am to 1pm. And a de-briefing hour will be offered from 2 to 3pm of the same day.

You will be asked to fill in a questionnaire in your own time and return it to me, within a week of the Research Session. This should take no more than 30 minutes to complete.

I will be available for the month following the Research Session to talk through any issues arising from participation in the Research Session, and if necessary will signpost relevant additional professional support.

My written reflection on the process, analysis of the Research Session experience and creative writing generated in the research session will take place in April 2015, and I intend to write up my findings in May and June 2015.

You have been contacted because you expressed an interest in volunteering to participate in my Research Session.

THANK YOU

App. 3 - iii) **CONSENT FORM for MSc Research Session**

Participant Identification Number:

Title of Project: An investigation into what happens when I, as a facilitator of Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes, offer play-positive creative writing exercises in a one-off, three hour long, CWTP group session.

Name of Researcher: Kate Pawsey

Please initial box

1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated10/3/15.....for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. If I choose to withdraw, I can decide what happens to any data I have provided.	
3	I understand that my interview will be recorded and subsequently transcribed.	
4	I agree to take part in the above study on Saturday 28 th March 2015, between 9.45am and 1pm, at the Priory Barn, Newtown, Bradford-on-Avon.	
5	I agree to complete and return a questionnaire about my experience of the research session.	
6	I agree that this form that bears my name and signature may be seen by a designated auditor.	
7	Given that I will remain anonymous to me, and to the public, I am willing for you to record the session, transcribe part of the recording, and write observationally and reflectively on your experience of the session.	
8	I am willing for an objective professional witness to observe the research.session, who will not participate in any way, and whose presence and behaviour in the research session is also governed by the Lapidus code of ethics?	
9	Again, retaining my anonymity, I am willing for you to read and hold a copy of my creative writing, generated in the research session.	
10	Once more, retaining my anonymity, I consent to you quoting from my creative writing, generated in the research session, in your research dissertation, for illustrative purposes.	

Name of participant

Date

Signature

KATE PAWSEY

Researcher

Date

Signature

Please indicate here how you would like to be referred to in my writing e.g. a code name you supply here_____

1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher.

Thank you very much.

App. 3 - iv) Exploring Play Through Creative Writing
– a Research Session.

www.writingtimewithkatepawsey.weebly.com

BOOKING FORM FOR:-

Research Session on Saturday 28th March 2015 from 10am to 1pm
at Priory Barn, Newtown, Bradford-on-Avon, Wilts. BA15 1NQ.

Please complete and return this to me by Monday 23rd February 2015. I will then take you through the consent process.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....
.....
.....

TELEPHONE NUMBER.....

MOBILE PHONE NUMBER*.....

EMAIL.....

*Your mobile phone number (if you have one) will only be used by me in the event of an emergency or cancellation.

If you have any additional needs or access requirements please contact me to discuss these in advance of the workshop, to give the best chance of accommodation.

katepawsey@yahoo.co.uk Tel. 01225 862030. Mobile 07866684265

Your place will be confirmed upon receipt of the completed booking form.

Please note that there is no charge for this Research Session but I will acknowledge receipt of your booking form, and confirm your place.

Appendix Four

Poetry prompts for the Research Session: –

Exploring Play through Creative Writing.

Please print and bring to session.

The Railway Children by Seamus Heaney

When we climbed the slopes of the cutting
We were eye-level with the white cups
Of the telegraph poles and the sizzling wires.

Like lovely freehand they curved for miles
East and miles west beyond us, sagging
Under their burden of swallows.

We were small and thought we knew nothing
Worth knowing. We thought words traveled the wires
In the shiny pouches of raindrops,

Each one seeded full with the light
Of the sky, the gleam of the lines, and ourselves
So infinitesimally scaled

We could stream through the eye of a needle.

“No Ball Games etc” by Sophie Hannah.

sign outside a London block of flats

Honestly, do we have to spell it out?
No tents, space-hoppers, orgies, Brussel sprout
enthusiasts, no sponsored squirrel fights.
no Ayurvedic quacks no woolly tights,

no weeping for the joy you think you're owed,
no winking at the house across the road,
dividing rainbows into seven strands
of single colour, no quick show of hands,

no pastry cutting, origami, chess,
no taking pleasure in your own success,
no sand, no shark impressions, no culottes,

no Christmas pantomimes, no liver spots,

no lurking in the shadows by the shed,
no improvised salutes, no olive bread,
no weightless floating with an auctioneer
in the small pond. No ponds. Hope that's now clear.

Skipping without Ropes. By Jack Mapanje

I will.

I will skip without your rope, since you say I should not.

I cannot borrow your son's skipping rope to exercise my limbs.

Watch. Watch me skip without your rope.

Watch me skip with my hope.

I will. A seven. I do - will skip - a ten;

eleven. I'll skip without, skip within,

And skip I do, without your rope,

But with my hope.

I'll fight your rope, your rules, your hope,

As your sparrow does under your supervision.

Guards, take us for a shower!

Appendix Five

Handout / session plan for the Research Session: Exploring Play through Creative Writing.

Aims:

to explore some memories and associations around the subject of play;
to consider what we think and feel about play and playfulness, as writers;
to write creatively in response to a memory of embodied or object play;
to reflect on the quality of this, and what feelings it may evoke for us.

Objectives:

to write creatively in response to poems chosen to the theme of the session;
to explore a recent experience of embodied or object play, remembered or observed, through creative writing;
to explore how this feels both for ourselves and for other members of the group, and how it feeds into the culture of the group;
to share with each other and give feedback on this experience.

9.45 arrival and hot drinks.

10.00 Start session – welcome, with reference to the distinctive element of this research session, reiterate guidance to staying in the room, housekeeping, ask Christine to introduce herself, add that she is bound by the same considerations as participants in terms of confidentiality. Working alliance – writing well acrostic, opening round, small, physical mindfulness meditation, introduction of today's theme – **Exploring Play Through Creative Writing**.

10.30 Exercise one - A jotting ex. before we read the poems, to the brief of what do the words 'to play' and then 'playfulness' mean to you, with a quaker-style call-out share.

10.35 Exercise two – writing in response to the chosen poems.
Heaney, Hannah and Mapanje. Pair share, write into your writing, plenary share.

11.30 – 11.45 Break

11.45 Exercise three.

Part one - I invite you to think of a recent example of some play you were engaged in, or observed in a child, in an animal, or in your own experience, be that quite public, or more personal and intimate. I invite you to focus specifically on embodied play or hand and object play. Describe this in as much detail as you can remember. Notice the *qualities* of the play experience. Plenary share.

Part two - I invite you to now write about what effect remembering and conjuring this has had on you – how did you experience recalling and recounting this memory? Plenary share.

Closing round, allowing for a moment's silence before I ring the bell.

13.00 Close.

Lunch, from 1pm to 2pm, then de-briefing opportunity (2pm to 3pm) - that this could also be

used to write evaluation, or if you prefer you could go away and ponder on the experience and return my evaluation, within a week please **(by April 3rd 2015)**.

Thank you very much for participating.

Appendix Six

Transcript of the recording of the Research Session,

In compliance with the consent asked for and granted by participants, in order to render the research session confidential, I obtained permission to make use of the recording for the my analysis and for consideration by the assessors of the dissertation only. A transcription does exit but is not included here.

Appendix Seven

Creative Writing from the Research Session.

The creative writing is organised one person at a time in the order: AC, Ruby, HP, JW, JM.

1. Jotting exercise
2. Writing in response to the poems
3. Writing into the writing in response to the poems
4. Writing in response to the prompt to describe a recently witnessed example of play
5. Writing in response to the question 'what did it feel like to write about play, here, today?'

1. Jotting Exercise: 'Captured' words from the first jotting exercise in response to the words 'to play' and then 'playfulness', shared as a quaker-style call out and written down by me.

To Play:

flying experiment sounds fun breaking barriers jingle laughing and shouting
sounds natural imagine giggling spontaneous games running light
to savour unscripted absorbing fluid build joining in tutting fun
dressing up sport leading the gang escapism to make believe music free
ballgames board games to be left out sticks Imagination

(HP) Giggling Fun and free and happy and absorbing and imagining all sorts of everything.

Building and running and cycling and flying

Playfulness

Escapism

Games – ball games, board games

Joining in

Dressing up

Breaking barriers

Playfulness:

banter not me and yes me unsaid carefree non-judgemental generous
querky a lightness spacious having fun making myself and people smile
inviting open non-competitive catch laughing together being cheeky
letting go of inhibitions being open and funny in a kind way.

AC

2. Writing in response to the poems

Flying

Growing up in London,
'Don't talk to strangers, don't go far'.
Limitations which I didn't understand.
I didn't think these things were worth knowing.

But flying was worth knowing,
Sailing on my bike in Mayow Park.
Excitement fizzing in my chest like a shaken can of lemonade.
Little bugs hitting my face, sacrificing their lives for my pleasure.

The smell of grass almost suffocating me at speed.
My legs powering the wheels so that I could take off.
Literally flying from the restrictions of my parents fear.
I was fearless in my flight.
The runway was in Mayow Park.

3. Writing *into* the writing in response to the poems

Fearless

Imagine you can be whatever, whoever, wherever you want.
What, who, where would you be?
I would be fearless - not afraid to experiment, get things wrong, look silly.
When did I forget how to do all of these things?

Playing and laughing and attempting and seeking fun – fun in everything.
Getting a grazed knee, crying and getting up again.
Trying again – not caring to keep the other knee safe.
Fearless and free.

4. Writing in response to the prompt to describe a recently witnessed example of play.

The Castle

The Castle is a pub.
A place for adults to enjoy grownup drinks.
It has a garden – no climbing frames or other toys.
Just grass and a tree.
This was enough for a kid's gang of three.

First came the running and calling, the chasing and tag.

Then came the huddle to divvy up roles and who was 'it'.
Nods of agreement and smiles all round.
Scattering and shouting with excitement of the Chaser's 'nearly' touch.
Making their own fun – happy and noisy.

Then a breakaway agent goes up the tree.
King of the castle, he teases the others,
Who look at the traitor bemused.
As they run to him in fits of laughter,
We look on from our seats with our crisps and our lager.

5. Writing in response to the question, what did it feel like to write about play, here today?

My memory of the kids playing in the pub garden came to me quickly and I couldn't think of a time recently when I had played. I felt sad about that. Don't I play anymore? But describing the children in their playful world of running and chasing took me back to my childhood and the playground – feeling part of the gang, running nosily and letting go. It reminded me that I was like them once. Can I be like that again?

Ruby

2. Writing in response to the poems

Hands (part one)

She stood at the sink
and washed her hands
and washed them again
and again.
What invisible stain was she trying to
scrub away?

I saw her next
under the spotlight.
The contrast struck
and moved me.

She stood
alone,
in front of the crowd,
speaking her words
with head held high.

Her bravery
and courage
lit up the dark.

3. Writing *into* the writing in response to the poems

Hands (part two)

In my mind,
I carefully
fill a sink
with warm,
lavender-scented bubbles.
I take her hands
gently in mine
and wash them
with my own.
I smooth them dry
with a soft,
sweet smelling
towel.

I hold her hands
for a while
in my own.

4. Writing in response to the prompt to describe a recently witnessed example of play.

The swing

She has put on the layers of her uniform,
tweaking them as she goes,
(skirt definitely not the recommended 'knee-length'!)
Her books are sorted and packed away, along
with the stationery-stuffed pencil case,
water bottle, lunch money, lip salve,
hair brush, headphones (to drown out
the 'annoying boy' on the bus.)

She is an almost-teenage school girl
who spots the swing swaying from a
branch of our old apple tree
and in the blink of an eye

the years and the layers are stripped back
as she drops her bag
and leaps in one swift movement
onto the swing.

She flies through the chilled Spring air,
her shrieks of joy filling the early hush.
Her body propels the swing higher and higher.
She's among the branches,
reaching for the rooftops.
Free
Soaring

I squint into the early morning sun
and feel my heart squeeze
around the perfect moment.

HP

2. Writing in response to the poems

Bucket and Spade

How unprepared I was after the Preparation course

For our first family holiday I bought the bucket and spade
You didn't enjoy your first encounter
with sand;
didn't understand what was expected of you

All children like the seaside
Don't they?

3. Writing *into* the writing in response to the poems

Now look how far we've come

You gave me a conspiratorial smile when we packed
the bucket and spade
the frisby, the bat and ball
Our joys met

Nothing prepared me for you being you

I am still preparing,
still learning
not to make you wear culottes or woolly tights
but to watch your bare legs run free on the sands

4. Writing in response to the prompt to describe a recently witnessed example of play.

Playing with Theo

My annoyance dissipates quickly
How can I be cross when he's so eager?
Theo loves his morning routine –
breakfast first, then grooming, then playtime
(although he's no kitten, now)

Sometimes we play with the ping pong ball
I gently let it drop across the table
Tap tap tap tap with each light bounce
He leaps
The ball ricochets from his paw, scuttles under the sofa
and he launches into the kill
The ball rolls against a sofa leg, changes direction,
He pounces

The string game is however, Theo's favourite
It has to be more of a thick cord rather than string
He ate a string once,
the consequences were unmentionable.....

5. Writing in response to the question, what did it feel like to write about play, here today?

I felt a deep fondness in recalling the games that Theo and I play in the morning
He had an illness last year that lasted perhaps three months.
During the course of his trips to the vet to be poked and examined, the treatments I attempted
to administer, he lost his trust in me.
He stopped asking to play with me in the mornings.
He lost his purr!
So it is with renewed pleasure that we have re-bonded. His body language once again shows
his delight in my company, the grooming and the games we play.

JW

2. Writing in response to the poems

As the sparrow does

Under your dark gaze
As he hops and sings
Not mindful of your ways
As he flies and cries
And soars into the skies
My heart too beats to its own beat
While you look on
Continuing in your belief
That I am wrong

3. Writing *into* the writing in response to the poems

Under your dark gaze,
The sun is eclipsed
Birds hurry to their roost
The water freezes
Flowers close
And all that lives
Is shriveled and lost.

4. Writing in response to the prompt to describe a recently witnessed example of play.

Beautifully crazy and crazily beautiful,
You brought your granddaughter's voice into the room,
Recorded on your phone. Her joyful freedom
And unselfconscious singing of her favourite song
"Let it go, Let it go".

We all sat and listened with smiles and laughter bubbling out with this little girl. And then you, large mother to us all, jumped up, arms raised to the heavens and began running around the

room in crazy zig zags shouting “Let it go, let it go”. You too were abandoned, free and unselfconscious and I grabbed my courage and the moment to join you. And others too in their own time, until all 14 of us were racing around the room, arms held out and letting it go, yelling “let it go” at each other. With the child’s freedom and permission and our own courage, we did truly let it go.

5. Writing in response to the question, what did it feel like to write about play, here today?

Remembering and writing this was a mirror to the experience itself in that I felt enlivened and smiled to myself. I started my writing with some effort toward form but this got lost as the energy took over and I wrote faster in reflection of the energy and chaos I was describing. I am pleased that it captured something of our different experiences as/of children and adults. There was a moment of shock in the experience as Barbara leapt from her chair in full childlike abandon.

JM

2. Writing in response to the poems

I looked out of the bedroom window and saw them. I could just make them out through the branches of their apple tree – its arms thrown wide and sturdy to hold the best apples I'd ever tasted. I could see them darting about, their voices high and sing song. I could hear them laughing and calling to each other.

I called: 'Can I come?'

'No!' came the reply, 'Mum doesn't want any more.'

My heart fell: I watched them from the window.

3. Writing *into* the writing in response to the poems

I watched them from the window over many years, from the kitchen window I saw them tip the vast mountain of duplo onto the flagstones. The crashing noise as the pieces fall from the red, plastic box.

I watched them from the back bedroom window as they took up their positions in the climbing

frame. Their fort to be guarded, no security to be breached.

I watched from my little bedroom window as they ran down the side of the field towards the woods, camo-streaked faces, with flasks of orange squash, peanut butter sandwiches and crisps bouncing in their backpacks.

4. Writing in response to the prompt to describe a recently witnessed example of play.

Heads up, ears up, tails up wagging like banners

wriggling with pleasure

moist open mouths

pink black and salivating

heavy breath vibrating their jowls

an arm raises

a hand releases

a ball followed by hopeful leaps with air as it sails over furry heads, followed by flashing eyes.

Dust rises as six, seven, eight quartets of legs scabble into action after the prize.

it was very useful. I also have great trust and faith in Kate and our writing group, which made it just about bearable. If we hadn't got to this point in our journeys together, I think it would have been much harder.

Did you experience any unexpected pleasure in relation to the creative exercise given?

Yes No

JW J Mc AC Ru HP(inferred by answer)

If your answer to the last question is Yes, please give details.

Ru: I experienced further proof that writing can help me unlock difficult emotions and then help me formulate my own response and point the way forward. If the first part of the writing experience is a question, then the second is the answer (in very simple terms.) This is the antithesis of my experience of the mental health system in the NHS, when I have felt largely unheard and made to feel that I don't know myself or what would help me.

I have also found that sharing words with a supportive group of people has been a very positive experience. Sometimes it is very challenging, as in the past I would only present those parts of me that I thought were 'nice and acceptable.' Being present with other people and being 'real', is new for me.

I also enjoyed hearing other people's writing and their experiences around 'play'. It felt good when AC resolved to buy a bike and JW described 'Letting Go'. It made me long to do those things too.

Since the session, I have been in contact with Kate and this has helped with the ongoing emotional 'digging', the healing and self-care.

JW – It was energising to reflect on experiences of play and great to hear others read their writing and share.

J Mc – Remembering fun times 'playing' with friends (bowls and croquet). Also remembering the delight of swimming in the sea.

AC Recalling my memories of play gave me more pleasure than I expected – it re-awakened something in me.

HP – I felt pleasure in hearing the writing of group members. For my own creative writing, I established a strong link between play and being in a trusting relationship.

How comfortable did you feel with other participants' responses and sharing of their writing?
Uncomfortable quite comfortable comfortable enough very comfortable extremely comfortable

Ru AC JW J Mc HP

Did you choose to share your writing with a) a partner b) the group?

a) Yes No b) Yes No

JW J Mc AC Ru HP

Ru AC JW J Mc HP

Would you be willing to share a copy of your creative writing from today's group with me (Kate Pawsey) for the purposes of informing my research.

Yes No

JW J Mc AC Ru HP

If so, your authorial identity will remain anonymous to anyone outside of the Research Session. I may seek your permission to include it in my research dissertation, tagging it only with the form of your name (initials or code name) you gave consent for on your consent form. These will not go into the final dissertation.

Yes

No

JW J Mc AC Ru HP

Print name.....Date.....

Signature.....

Thank you very much for for completing this form and for your contribution to my research.

Please turn this to me by Friday 4th April -

I will make a copy and return this form to you for your records.

Appendix Nine

Thematic Analysis of AC's creative writing (found in Appendix Seven)

One – familiarisation with the text

Two – Identify repeated words

Three – list of repeated words

don't / didn't / couldn't x 4
fun / funny x 4
free x 2
happy x 2
flying x 5
fearless x 3
running x 5
excitement x 2
laughing / laughter x 2
children / childhood / kids x 4 castle x 3
pub x 2
play / played / playground x 4
tree x 2
chasing / chaser x 2

Four – identify repeated concepts / ideas

Five - list of repeated concepts / ideas

- a) Movement and energy:- running, climbing, cycling, flying, sailing, speed, powering, take off, flight, running, chasing, scattering.
- b) Restriction: - don't, didn't, couldn't, limitations, restrictions.
- c) Freedom:- fearless, imagining all sorts of everything, breaking barriers, not caring, free, shouting, being cheeky, letting go of inhibitions, being open, noisy, experiment.
- d) Happiness / excitement:- playing, laughing, fizzing, pleasure, smiles, happy, noisy, excitement, fun, shouting.
- e) Belonging:- feeling part of the gang, divvy up roles, joining in, calling, huddle, agreement.
- f) Sadness:- sad, couldn't, anymore, when did I forget to do all these things.
- g) Adulthood:- strangers, pub, grownup, adults, lager, we look on from our seats, when did I forget to do all these things, my parents' fear.
- h) Childhood:- kiids, children, childhoodtheir playful world, playground, toys, climbing frame, not afraid to experiment, get things wrong, look silly, trying again, grazed knee, not caring to keep the other knee safe, attempting.
- i) Resilience:- trying again, experimenting, getting up again.
- j) Reflection:- memory, describing, took me back, reminded, we look on from our seats.

Six - choose one theme

I chose Freedom as my main theme. This is not the theme with the biggest list of components; Movement has this accolade, which was a theme I was also drawn to. I was also attracted to Happiness / Excitement, and see them as related. Perhaps Movement and Happiness / Excitement might be sub-themes of Freedom. I focus here on Freedom.

Seven - Consider how repetitions of chosen theme relate to one another. Compare and contrast how they relate to one another.

Freedom:- fearless, imagining all sorts of everything, breaking barriers, not caring, free, shouting, being cheeky, letting go of inhibitions, being open, noisy, experiment.

How being without fear means that all unlimited imagined possibilities;
Conditioned restrictions based on manners and consideration for others, or fear and embarrassment are broken out of;
Not being limited by having to consider other peoples' judgment, or the consequences of our behaviour;
some repetitions, such as being cheeky, being noisy / shouting, not caring, being open, experiment infer warnings, admonishments, lessons or advice such as be careful, be quiet, don't be rude, with their further inferences of 'draw yourself in', 'keep yourself to yourself', 'don't expose your ignorance or ridiculousness', be aware and influenced by what others think of you and your behaviour' ie social control and social conditioning.

Some are:

being states eg. being cheeky, being open, not caring;
and others are action states eg breaking barriers, shouting, letting go of inhibitions, imagining all sorts or everything;
others are simply states eg experiment, noisy, free, fearless.

Eight - Address some why and how questions in relation to chosen theme. Organise this in relation to the different CW exercises.

The two CW exercises writing in response to poems:
How does the participant react to parental limitations?
Why does the participant react to parental limitations?

The CW exercise recalling observation or experience of recent play:
How is the adult pub experience different from the observed children's experience?
How does being in the presence of the children effect the adults?

Reflective writing exercise:
How does the participant identify her feelings around play now, as an adult?
Why does she feel sad, as well as happy in this knowledge?

(Answers in section eleven)

Nine - Consider chosen theme in relation to the ending of the CW – the reflection.

Freedom – absence and presence of feelings around freedom. Pointers towards action / compensation for this realisation.

Theme of freedom in relation to the ending (reflection):

absence and presence of freedom as an adult, and distance from that freedom *experienced* as a child, as reminded of in observing the children in the pub garden. Pointer towards action / how to compensate or redress the realisation of this absence and the feelings around it.

Ten - What do I think is the overall point of the CW? How does my chosen theme relate to that point?

identifying what play felt like, how it had manifested for her as a child, the feelings she had experienced as a child when playing, observing its qualities in children in the pub garden and identifying with them, recognising its absence, feeling sad about its absence, wanting to redress this absence. This totaled up as a real experiential valuing of the emotional charge and the energy of play, and appreciating the point of playing, and identifying a real desire to manifest this in her adult life in a targetted area – buying herself a bike and reclaiming that freedom of movement and the happiness and excitement that it gave her. Identifying how to give her adult self the positive experience of play that her childhood self had had - for her this was remembered in the freedom and power of physical movement, experienced on a bike.

Eleven – the thematic analysis

Address how and why questions; consider how my theme relates to the conclusion and the main point of the CW; organise my ideas so that each paragraph addresses one point only; make a list of important points about my theme, choose three or four of the most interesting points then write a paragraph about each of these points.

How and why questions.

i) The two CW exercises writing in response to poems:

Why does the participant react to parental limitations?

Growing up in London,

'Don't talk to strangers, don't go far'.

Limitations which I didn't understand.

I didn't think these things were worth knowing.....

Literally flying from the restrictions of my parents fear.....

I would be fearless - not afraid to experiment, get things wrong, look silly

How does the participant react to parental limitations?

But flying was worth knowing,

Sailing on my bike in Mayow Park.

Excitement fizzing in my chest like a shaken can of lemonade.

Little bugs hitting my face, sacrificing their lives for my pleasure.

The smell of grass almost suffocating me at speed.

My legs powering the wheels so that I could take off.

Getting a grazed knee, crying and getting up again.

*Trying again – not caring to keep the other knee safe.
Fearless and free.*

ii) The CW exercise recalling observation or experience of recent play:

How is the adult pub experience different from the observed children's experience?

*The Castle is a pub.
A place for adults to enjoy grownup drinks.
It has a garden – no climbing frames or other toys.
Just grass and a tree.
This was enough for a kid's gang of three.*

*First came the running and calling, the chasing and tag.
Then came the huddle to divvy up roles and who was 'it'.
Nods of agreement and smiles all round.
Scattering and shouting with excitement of the Chaser's 'nearly' touch.
Making their own fun – happy and noisy.*

*Then a breakaway agent goes up the tree.
King of the castle, he teases the others,
Who look at the traitor bemused.
As they run to him in fits of laughter,
We look on from our seats with our crisps and our lager.*

How does being in the presence of the children effect the adults?

Initial allusion to the 'gang of three', hinting at the children's slightly threatening and unwelcome intrusion. This is followed by the gradual introduction of words conveying positive emotions – agreement, smiles, excitement, fun, happy, laughter, noted by the adults who 'look on from our seats with our crisps and our lager'. I feel the participant would have used more pejorative language to describe the children's presence and activities, if she had not been positively affected by them, after expressing some initial ambiguity about the children energetically inhabiting and taking over 'a place for adults'.

iii) Reflective writing exercise:

How does the participant identify her feelings around play now, as an adult?

My memory of the kids playing in the pub garden came to me quickly and I couldn't think of a time recently when I had played. I felt sad about that. Don't I play anymore? But describing the children in their playful world of running and chasing took me back to my childhood and the playground – feeling part of the gang, running nosily and letting go. It reminded me that I was like them once. Can I be like that again?

Why does she feel sad, as well as happy in this knowledge?

She has identified that play is missing in her life as an adult, and realises that this is a loss, and that she misses it. She recognises the qualities it once had, for her, and still has for current, recently observed children, with whom she could identify, from her own experiences in childhood. She is connected to the happiness she once experienced, and is also connected to her sadness in no longer having access to this particular quality of happiness.

Consider how my theme, freedom, relates to the conclusion and the main point of the CW

Describing what she observed - *the children in their playful world of running and chasing* - something she has already identified as being more free than she feels as an adult – she no longer does these things, she no longer plays in this way, running and chasing, moving fast.

This took her back to her own experiences of the freedom of play in the playground - *feeling part of the gang, running nosily and letting go*.

Organise my ideas so that each paragraph addresses one point only; make a list of important points about my theme, choose three or four of the most interesting points then write a paragraph about each of these points.

1. Freedom in the context of this CW is illustrated by fast physical movement and noisy communication; it is expressed in words which convey positive emotions and high energy. A sense of energised expansion is tangible in AC's writing when expressing and describing play.
2. Through creative writing in response to play-positive exercises AC has connected powerfully to the awakened emotions associated with freedom in childhood. Her experiences of the quality of freedom as a child enabled her to identify with and appreciate the same qualities when observed recently, as an adult, in children.
3. AC realises quite starkly that this particular expression of freedom does not manifest in her adult life; she seems surprised at how this absence came about, and is saddened by the realisation, now valuing it as something precious, and currently lost to her; it seems to be the first time she has had an opportunity to notice and acknowledge its absence as a negative experience.
4. AC noticed that the children had the collective power - apparently without an adult's intervention – to claim a playground space in an ostensibly adult space. As an adult she at first seemed to slightly resent the children their playtime in her adult space but then illustrated and appreciated their apparent lack of any obligation to be quiet and sit still, through her ability to identify with and appreciate the positive effects of this freedom in play.

The report

The more visibly expressed themes I identified were movement and energy; freedom; restriction; happiness and excitement. Other more understated themes present were adulthood; childhood; sadness; belonging; resilience; reflection. Out of the former category, although these themes were inter-related, I decided to focus on the theme of freedom. The themes of movement and energy were expressions of freedom, and happiness and excitement were expressions of movement, energy *and* freedom.

The theme of freedom was expressed in the text by the words: *fearless, imagining all sorts of everything, breaking barriers, not caring, free, shouting, being cheeky, letting go of inhibitions, being open, noisy, experiment.*

The following inferences about freedom were drawn from the text:

how a state of fearlessness equals unlimited imagined possibilities;

conditioned restrictions based on manners and consideration for others, or fear and embarrassment are broken out of;

not being limited by having to consider other peoples' judgment,

or the consequences of behaviour;

some repetitions, such as being cheeky, being noisy / shouting, not caring, being open, experiment, infer warnings, admonishments, lessons or advice such as 'be careful', 'be quiet', 'don't be rude', with their further inferences of 'draw yourself in', 'keep yourself to yourself', 'don't expose your ignorance or ridiculousness', 'be aware and influenced by what others think of you and your behaviour' ie social control and social conditioning.

Some expressions of freedom are:

being states eg. being cheeky, being open, not caring;

and others are action states eg breaking barriers, shouting, letting go of inhibitions, imagining all sorts or everything;

others are simply states eg experiment, noisy, free, fearless.

i) In the two CW exercises writing in response to poems, AC reacts to parental limitations because she *'didn't understand'* them, and *'didn't think these things were worth knowing'*. She was *'literally flying from the restrictions of my parents' fear'*. She says she *'would be fearless – not afraid to experiment, get things wrong, look silly'*.

The way she reacts to these identified parental limitations of *'don't talk to strangers, don't go far'* was to experience something she thought worth knowing:

'But flying was worth knowing

Sailing on my bike in Mayow Park.

Excitement fizzing in my chest like a shaken can of lemonade.

Little bugs hitting my face, sacrificing their lives for my pleasure.

The smell of grass almost suffocating me at speed.

My legs powering the wheels so that I could take off.

Getting a grazed knee, crying and getting up again.

Trying again – not caring to keep the other knee safe.

Fearless and free.'

ii) In the CW exercise recalling observation or experience of recent play, the adult pub experience different from the observed children's experience thus:

*The Castle is a pub.
A place for adults to enjoy grownup drinks.
It has a garden – no climbing frames or other toys.
Just grass and a tree.
This was enough for a kid's gang of three.*

*First came the running and calling, the chasing and tag.
Then came the huddle to divvy up roles and who was 'it'.
Nods of agreement and smiles all round.
Scattering and shouting with excitement of the Chaser's 'nearly' touch.
Making their own fun – happy and noisy.*

*Then a breakaway agent goes up the tree.
King of the castle, he teases the others,
Who look at the traitor bemused.
As they run to him in fits of laughter,
We look on from our seats with our crisps and our lager.*

AC, as adult was effected by the presence of the children playing. This was initially alluded to the 'gang of three', hinting at the children's slightly threatening and unwelcome intrusion. This is followed by the gradual introduction of words conveying positive emotions – agreement, smiles, excitement, fun, happy, laughter, noted by the adults who 'look on from our seats with our crisps and our lager'. I feel the participant would have used more pejorative language to describe the children's presence and activities, if she had not been positively affected by them, after expressing some initial ambiguity about the children energetically inhabiting and taking over 'a place for adults'.

iii) In the reflective writing exercise AC identifies her feelings around play now, as an adult: *'My memory of the kids playing in the pub garden came to me quickly and I couldn't think of a time recently when I had played. I felt sad about that. Don't I play anymore? But describing the children in their playful world of running and chasing took me back to my childhood and the playground – feeling part of the gang, running nosily and letting go. It reminded me that I was like them once. Can I be like that again?'*

She feels sad, as well as happy in this knowledge because she recognises the qualities of play she experienced in childhood, and experienced vicariously again in a recent observation of children playing. She could identify with them, from her childhood experiences. Having connected to this particular flavour of happiness, she is sad to realise that, in adulthood, she no longer has access to these specific qualities of freedom in play.

The way the theme of freedom relates to AC's reflective conclusions is in acknowledging where freedom is absent or present for her now as an adult. She realises how distant she is

from the particular freedom from parental fear she *experienced* as a child, and was reminded of in observing the children in the pub garden. She also acknowledges her adult freedom to restore such identified expressions of freedom. He points to adult action, in how to compensate or redress the realisation of this absence, and the feelings around it.

All of the above led me to the following principal points:

1. Freedom in the context of this CW is illustrated by fast physical movement and noisy communication; it is expressed in words which convey positive emotions and high energy. A sense of energised expansion is tangible in AC's writing when expressing and describing play.
2. Through creative writing in response to play-positive exercises AC has connected powerfully to the awakened emotions associated with freedom in childhood. Her experiences of the quality of freedom as a child enabled her to identify with and appreciate the same qualities when observed recently, as an adult, in children.
3. AC realises quite starkly that this particular expression of freedom does not manifest in her adult life; she seems surprised at how this absence came about, and is saddened by the realisation, now valuing it as something precious, and currently lost to her; it seems to be the first time she has had an opportunity to notice and acknowledge its absence as a negative experience.
4. AC noticed that the children had the collective power - apparently without an adult's intervention – to claim a playground space in an ostensibly adult space. As an adult she at first seemed to slightly resent the children their playtime in her adult space but then illustrated and appreciated their apparent lack of any obligation to be quiet and sit still, through her ability to identify with and appreciate the positive effects of this freedom in play.

Appendix Ten

Thematic analysis of Ruby's creative writing (found in Appendix Seven and the main text).

One Familiarisation with the text.

Two Underline repeated words

Three list repeated words

her / she / girl x 19
Hands x 6
washed / scrub x 4
swing x 4
stood x 2
again x 2
sink x 2
head / headphone x 2
higher x 2
branches / branch x 2

Four – identify repeated concepts / ideas

Five – list the repeated concepts / ideas

- a) Cleaning – sink; washed; stain; scrub; warm lavender scented bubbles; wash them; smooth them dry.
- b) Body parts - hands; knee; lip; hair; head; eye; body; heart.
- c) Movement / Speed / Noise – moved; flies; shrieks of joy; flies; propels; swaying; in the blink of an eye; higher and higher; stripped; leaps; soaring; one swift movement.
- d) Light – spotlight; lit up; early morning sun.
- e) Dark – Dark; to drown out; squint.
- f) Contrast – contrast; she stood at the sink; she stood...in front of the crowd; bravery; courage; qualities of the first and then the second wash; layering up; years of layers stripped away; warm; chill; light; dark; shrieks of joy; early hush.
- g) Gentleness / Care – carefully; gentle; soft; sweet smelling; I hold her hand for a while in mine; warm lavender scented.

Six – Choose one theme.

The theme of 'contrast' strikes me strongly. It has the most material and energy of the themes

identified. It also encompasses the two contrasting environments written about, as well as the two contrasting modes in each contrasting environment.

Seven - Consider how repetitions of chosen theme relate to one another. Compare and contrast how they relate to one another.

Contrast; she stood at the sink; she stood in front of the crowd; bravery; courage; qualities of the first and then the second wash; layering up; years of layers stripped away; warm; chill; light; dark; shrieks of joy; early hush.

First environment (first and second pieces of CW):

Girl standing at the sink obsessively scrubbing invisible stain on hands cf. standing in front of a crowd, on stage – *'in front of the crowd, speaking her words, her head held high. Her bravery and courage lit up the dark'*

Inference of washing and scrubbing (domestic, ordinary, menial) a (dark) stain cf. being in the spotlight, with glamorous associations

Grim conditions and disturbing sight of washing hands in grotty toilets, cf. Ruby's imagined washing, full of love, tenderness, care, generosity.

Second environment (third piece of CW):

almost teenage school girl, putting on her layers and preparing her 'kit', closing down ready for school cf. reverts to joy *'in the blink of an eye'* and freedom, movement and play *'free and soaring'*, *'the years and the layers are stripped back'*.

Absent (with headphones on) cf. noisy and moving and present.

Clobbered up with loads of listed stuff cf. *'drops her bag'*

'her shrieks of joy filling (cf.) the early hush'.

'Sorted and packed away' 'uniform' cf. 'Free ...Soaring'

Eight - Address some why and how questions in relation to chosen theme. Organise this in relation to the different CW exercises.

Piece one (Hands, part one) - i) writing in response to the poems.

Why does Ruby notice the girl in the toilets?

How does the girl make her feel?

Piece two (Hands, part two) – ii) writing into the writing in response to the poems.

How does Ruby want to treat the girl's hands?

Why does Ruby want to do this?

Piece three (The Swing) – iii) writing about a recently observed experience of play.

Why does Ruby notice the episode?

How does witnessing this make her feel?

Piece four iv) As Ruby did not proffer her reflection from the exercise **'Writing in response to the question 'what did it feel like to write about play, here, today?'** I shall use the comments she gave in her evaluation form that seem to relate most specifically to the creative writing produced in the RS to serve as her reflection.

How does Ruby's creative writing make her feel?

Why does it make her feel this?

(answers in section eleven)

Nine - Consider chosen theme in relation to the ending of the CW – the reflection.

Theme of Contrast.

Contrast between Ruby's own childhood, and the childhood of her daughters, and the childhood she wishes for them.

Contrast between feelings of confusion and anger about being abused in her own childhood and the joy she witnesses in her daughter's childhood.

The contrast between the evident love she feels for both her daughters, and some lack of love's positive expression when Ruby was a child.

Contrast between her really good intentions towards her daughters and their well-being, and a sense of that lack in her childhood.

Contrast in the mode of a question, and an answer.

Ten - What do I think is the overall point of the CW? How does my chosen theme relate to that point?

Ruby overtly states in her reflection that the girl washing her hands represents Ruby herself, that she identifies with the girl. I think the overall point in the CW is the highlighting of Ruby's preferred state, repeatedly, but in different forms: the gentle washing of hands as compared to the obsessive one; the brave, proud and confident performer as compared to the ashamed, notionally dirty, obsessive young woman; the free, joyful, uninhibited daughter, happy and comfortable in her body and happy with who she is as compared to the school girl she who has become highly aware of image - what she looks like rather than what she is.

I believe that Ruby is recognising and identifying her preferred states, and noticing sadness at their contrasting states.

Eleven – thematic analysis

Peruse my notes and write the TA. Address how and why questions; consider how my theme relates to the conclusion (Ruby's reflection) and the main point of the CW; organise my ideas so that each paragraph addresses one point only; make a list of important points about my theme, choose three or four of the most interesting points then write a paragraph about each

of these points.

How and why questions

Piece one (Hands, part one) - i) writing in response to the poems.

Why does Ruby notice the girl in the toilets?

Because the girl is washing her hands at the sink for an inordinate length of time, and because the quality of the washing has something intense about it.

How does the girl make her feel?

Ruby feels engaged with the sight, curious, concerned, a bit disturbed, intrigued.

Piece two (Hands, part two) – ii) writing into the writing in response to the poems.

How does Ruby want to treat the girl's hands?

She wants to look after them gently and indulgently, to soothe and hold them and make them feel loved and cared for.

Why does Ruby want to do this?

She has been disturbed by the aggressive way the girl is treating her hands (in piece one), trying to 'get rid of something' and feels a strong desire to counter it with care, gentleness, acceptance and love.

Piece three (The Swing) – iii) writing about a recently observed experience of play.

Why does Ruby notice the episode?

Ruby is struck by the powerful contrast in her twelve year old daughter's behaviour, on the one hand shoe-horning herself into the appearance and behaviour of a sophisticated teenager as she gets ready to go to school, and then shedding it all and leaping back into childhood and all the energy, freedom and joy this embodies.

How does witnessing this make her feel?

Ruby notes her huge pleasure and love at the sight of her daughter's sudden reversion to physical freedom and unselfconscious expressions of joy. She notes without comment that her daughter is growing out of this child phase. Juxtaposing it with the way she is dressing herself in preparation for school infers some sadness about the end of the child phase of her daughter's life.

Piece four - iv) As Ruby did not proffer her reflection from the exercise **'Writing in response to the question 'what did it feel like to write about play, here, today?'** I shall use the comments she gave in her evaluation form that seem to relate most specifically to the creative writing produced in the RS to serve as her reflection.

How did writing about play make Ruby feel?

Ruby felt several things during the writing.

Writing to the theme of play brought up powerful emotions for Ruby, putting her in touch with feeling confused, alone, abused and angry; she found it harder than normal to engage with the poems given, and with the group.

Because of the powerful image she had in her mind from something witnessed the night before, she at first felt frustrated with herself that I couldn't 'do the exercise properly' and write from the poems. She felt that the image seemed vaguely linked but couldn't articulate how.

Why did it make her feel this?

The theme took her back to her childhood - a time when she felt very confused, alone, abused and angry.

Towards the end of the session, Ruby realised that the girl in my image represented her, and what she had witnessed in the toilets had relevance for her, and her associations with her childhood.

She also felt a sense of urgency at the amount of time left she had to resolve her own issues, which she felt had impacted on her daughters, fast growing out of childhood.

consider how my theme relates to the conclusion (Ruby's reflection) and the main point of the CW

Ruby overtly states in her reflection that the girl washing her hands represents Ruby herself, that she identifies with the girl. I think the overall point in the CW is the highlighting of Ruby's preferred state, repeatedly, but in different forms: the gentle washing of hands as compared to the obsessive one; the brave, proud and confident performer as compared to the ashamed, notionally dirty, obsessive young woman; the free, joyful, uninhibited daughter, happy and comfortable in her body and happy with who she is as compared to the school girl she who has become highly aware of image - what she looks like rather than what she is.

I believe that Ruby is recognising and identifying her preferred states, and noticing sadness or discomfort at their contrasting states

organise my ideas so that each paragraph addresses one point only

Ruby notices the girl in the toilets because the girl is washing her hands at the sink for an

inordinate length of time, and because the quality of the washing has something intense about it. Ruby is very struck by this image and engaged with the sight. It makes her feel curious, concerned, a bit disturbed, and intrigued.

Reflection on witnessing the sight of the girl washing her hands makes Ruby realise that she wishes to wash them for the girl in a very different way. She is disturbed by the intense and aggressive way the girl is treating her hands, trying to 'get rid of something', and feels a strong desire to counter it with care, gentleness, acceptance and love.

Ruby is struck by the total contrast of one person's behaviour. She is impressed by the fact that the person Ruby witnessed in the toilets is also capable of displaying behaviour that is extrovert, courageous and brave, allowing herself to be seen alone on stage in a mode which surprises and impresses Ruby.

Ruby is similarly struck by the contrast in her daughter's behaviour. She notices the way the same person is in one moment embodying the self-conscious appearance and behaviour of a teenager; the next moment she is shedding it all and leaping back into child mode. The daughter has access to two very different modes of being. She is not yet restricted to one of them.

Ruby notices powerful feelings of pleasure and love at the sight of her daughter in free child mode.

make a list of important points about my theme, choose three or four of the most interesting points then write a paragraph about each of these points.

1. The theme of contrast is expressed using contrasting language Ruby uses. In piece one there is a rather oppressive tone to describe the washing 'again and again', but then Ruby says that she is 'struck and moved' to see the same girl on stage. A shift is elicited, in Ruby, not just the girl Ruby is witnessing. And when Ruby imagines washing the girl's hands, her tone is so gentle and nurturing. Similarly, in piece three, Ruby's language shifts from using an onerous sounding litany of all the things her daughter prepares herself with for school, to an irrepressible expression of love and heart-burst.

2. The very stark image of the girl made a vivid impression on Ruby. It was unresolved and somehow taking her attention, despite her good intentions to take part in the poem prompts I had offered. Having mentioned this impression in the opening round, Ruby refreshed the memory again, so wrote it down. It seemed to present a situation asking for attention. Her reflection on this experience gave her a resolution, a contrasting answer.

In each case where Ruby writes about two contrasting states, she clearly identifies which of the contrasted states that impress her positively: the actress performing on stage, 'under the spotlight....speaking her words....head held high...her bravery and courage lit up the dark'; the caring, gentle, tender way Ruby imagines taking care of the girl's hands; the joyful free uninhibited child, 'reaching for the rooftops, free, soaring.'

The Report

Themes I identified were cleaning; body parts; movement / speed / noise; light; dark; contrast; gentleness / care – carefully.

I decided to concentrate on the theme of contrast as it had a lot of energy and material. It was expressed by the following words and juxtaposed phrases: *she stood at the sink; she stood in front of the crowd; bravery; courage; contrast; qualities of the first and then the second wash; layering up; years of layers stripped away; warm; chill; light; dark; shrieks of joy; early hush.*

The following inferences about the theme of contrast were drawn from the text:
that contrast can be surprising and illuminating;
recognition of an uncomfortable state highlights appreciation of its opposite, when seen;
appreciating the positivity of one state can draw attention to sadness or discomfort about its opposite state;
balance or redress is something naturally sought.

In piece one (Hands, part one) Ruby notices the girl in the toilets because the girl is washing her hands at the sink for an inordinate length of time, and because the quality of the washing has something intense about it. The sight engages Ruby's attention. She feels curious, concerned, a bit disturbed, intrigued.

In piece two (Hands, part two) Ruby expresses how she wants to look after the girl's hands gently and indulgently, to soothe and hold them and make them feel loved and cared for. This is because she has been disturbed by the aggressive way the girl is treating her hands, trying to 'get rid of something' and feels a strong desire to counter it with care, gentleness, acceptance and love.

In piece three (The Swing) Ruby is struck by the powerful contrast in her twelve year old daughter's behaviour, on the one hand shoe-horning herself into the appearance and behaviour of a sophisticated teenager as she gets ready to go to school, and then shedding it all and leaping back into childhood and all the energy, freedom and joy this embodies.

In witnessing this Ruby notices her huge pleasure and love at the sight of her daughter's sudden reversion to physical freedom and unselfconscious expressions of joy. She notes without comment that her daughter is growing out of this child phase. Juxtaposing it with the way she is dressing herself in preparation for school infers some sadness about the end of the child phase of her daughter's life.

In piece four (reflection) Ruby owns that writing to the theme of play brought up powerful emotions for her; she found it harder than normal to engage with the poems given, and with the group. This was because the theme took her back to her childhood - a time when she felt very confused, alone, abused and angry. The writing put her in touch with these feelings.

Because of the powerful image she had in her mind from something witnessed the night before, Ruby at first felt frustrated with herself that I couldn't 'do the exercise properly' and

write from the poems. She felt that the image seemed vaguely linked but couldn't articulate how. Ruby realised later in the session that the girl washing her hands represented her, and what she had witnessed in the toilets had relevance for her, and her associations with her childhood.

Ruby also felt a sense of urgency at the amount of time she had left to resolve her own issues, and the impact these had had, through behaviour caused by her issues, on her daughters, fast growing out of their own childhoods.

Ruby overtly states in her reflection that the girl washing her hands represents Ruby herself, that she identifies with the girl. I think the overall point in the CW is the highlighting of Ruby's preferred state, repeatedly, but in different forms: the gentle washing of hands as compared to the obsessive one; the brave, proud and confident performer, speaking out and being heard and seen, as compared to the ashamed, notionally dirty, obsessive young woman; the free, joyful, uninhibited daughter, happy and comfortable in her body and happy with who she is as compared to the school girl she who has become highly aware of image - what she looks like rather than what she is; the mother whose issues impacted adversely on her daughter (Ruby) and the mother (Ruby) whose issues are resolved and which do not impact adversely on her children.

I believe that Ruby is recognising and identifying her preferred states, and noticing sadness or discomfort at their contrasting states.

All of the above led me to the following principal points:

1. The theme of contrast is expressed using contrasting language Ruby uses. In piece one there is a rather oppressive tone to describe the washing 'again and again', but then Ruby says that she is 'struck and moved' to see the same girl on stage. A shift is elicited, in Ruby, not just the girl Ruby is witnessing. And when Ruby imagines washing the girl's hands, her tone is so gentle and nurturing. Similarly, in piece three, Ruby's language shifts from using an onerous sounding litany of all the things her daughter prepares herself with for school, to an irrepressible expression of love and heart-burst.

2. The very stark image of the girl made a vivid impression on Ruby. It was unresolved and somehow taking her attention, despite her good intentions to take part in the poem prompts I had offered. Having mentioned this impression in the opening round, Ruby refreshed the memory again, so wrote it down. It seemed to present a situation asking for attention. Her reflection on this experience gave her a resolution, a contrasting answer.

In each case where Ruby writes about two contrasting states, she clearly identifies which of the contrasted states that impress her positively: the actress performing on stage, 'under the spotlight....speaking her words....head held high...her bravery and courage lit up the dark'; the caring, gentle, tender way Ruby imagines taking care of the girl's hands; the joyful free uninhibited child, 'reaching for the rooftops, free, soaring.'

Appendix Eleven

Ruby's written feedback after reading the finished dissertation, after first submission.

Dear Kate,

Thank you so much for sharing your dissertation with me.
There is so much in there for me to reflect on and look at further.
I appreciate having your thoughts on the complex topic of 'play' and also the references, which I can explore at my leisure.

I am very happy with the way you have included my words. It was interesting to re-visit those feelings and responses on reading it through, now that some time has elapsed. It feels less painful; more of an ache than a stabbing pain!

I have been thinking a lot about 'play' and 'playfulness'. I realised that my last job was all about play. I worked with pre-school children with additional needs; much of our play was multi-sensory and pre-verbal. I got such a buzz from seeing a child light up with curiosity, to engage with something, to explore at their own pace. Now I wonder if I was trying to heal myself through the play, as much as I was facilitating play for others. I got the rewards vicariously.

Recently I have noticed a shift in my writing. It is leading me in some interesting directions and continues to throw up some surprises and insights. I am still gaining so much from the whole process. One of the most helpful gifts, is a growing confidence and trust in my own voice and words.

I'm attaching a section from a poem that I may use for the Printing Day on Monday. I owe you, the writing group and Carol Ann Duffy this thank you.

with love and thanks for the words.

Words

Me and words,
we're friends again.
Now I say,
"I like some poetry.
I write some poetry."

Now I write the words
that spark the spark
that breathe life
into the fire
in my belly.

But it was you
that gave me back
the words.
And the words
gave me back
myself.

Appendix Twelve

Original, more expansive version of

'PART C Findings, possible applications, influence on my practice, conclusion' before amendments requested by the assessors.

C1 Findings

Writing about our experience of play is a powerful way of connecting us emotionally both to its joy and potency, and to sadness at its diminished presence in adulthood, if this is the case. What HP's writing and reflection demonstrated that the presence of play had been for her an important indicator of trust, in her case with her cat, as well as the means of re-establishing that trust.

One participant had referred to a time when she was excluded from the play of other children, and remembered the pain keenly. Audible reaction from others showed identification with such pain, marring the broadly accepted view of play as '*essentially light-hearted and positive*' (Christine). Was the behaviour of the other children part of their play?

In the above case exclusion from play was an unusual occurrence. Ruby however referred to the lack of opportunity for play in her childhood generally, and her feelings around this.

This confirmed my suspicion that introducing the theme of play explicitly in a CWTP session could expose very significant childhood dynamics. I had anticipated the potential link with childhood sexual abuse. I had not foreseen other factors that can interrupt development, such as Ruby's mother's mental health reducing Ruby's access to the play state.

This highlights for me that great care and awareness are required when working with such a powerful element as play. We cannot know what lock such a key might open, when the participant themselves may be finding this out in our presence. This, to me, demands a very responsible approach on behalf of the facilitator as an essential counter-balance to the commonly held assumptions of what play is. I see the holding quality and structure provided in a CWTP session as vital to the well-being of participants and facilitator alike. Conducting this research has underscored this.

C2 Possible applications

In preparation, I cited the purpose of this study as:

'to explore whether there are grounds to show that CWTP has the potential to extend its awareness, and adapt and develop its practice, in order to provide a safe place for adults to address and compensate for gaps in their play histories, in an overt or covert way. My play therapist consultant told me that the play state is the natural state of the child, and that the work of play therapists is to assist when a child's access to the play state is recognised as blocked, frozen, or shut down. Might this have implications for working with play and CWTP, when similar states are recognised in an adult?' (APPENDIX FOUR (ii): *Information for participants*)

This study has confirmed for me the importance of being person-centred and client-led. I already believed very strongly that enforced play is not play. In the information given to potential volunteers in advance of the RS and for the sake of transparency, I had written the following under the heading 'Ethical considerations linked to the research subject':

'Due to the complex nature of play, play signals, shifting power dynamics through adolescence and other factors, I appreciate that the clinical part of this research *could* uncover sexual trauma in workshop participants. Additionally, as play is the natural arena of childhood, I am aware that some exercises will draw on childhood experiences and could also trigger emotional reaction in participants.' (APPENDIX FOUR (ii))

I had worried about pre-emption, but I now wonder if Ruby read this warning, on some level, as an opportunity. This would be difficult to establish. She did volunteer, however, stepping forward to expose her feelings around play, knowing that they were complex and not fully understood. I would anticipate most benefit from a session such as this when an individual *chooses* to opt in, for whatever it might offer them.

I had written:

'the information I get from this study may help to inform the approach of future CWTP practitioners, working with adults who are historically or contemporaneously play-deprived, including those who are experiencing reduced physical access to play states due to accident, illness or the aging process.' (APPENDIX FOUR (ii))

I now feel that play should not be 'applied' as a 'cure' to anyone, including those mentioned above, in a CWTP session. A session such as my RS could add salt to the wound faced by people living with severe physical limitations, adding to their sense of loss and grief. Yet, in the same way as such a session may uncover childhood sexual trauma, if offered gently and with awareness and safeguards, it *could* provide an opportunity to deal with such grief in a supported way. It could be part of the process of acceptance. Additionally CWTP offers play inherently so the benefits of play can be accessed without even using the word, which can set up expectations, positive or negative.

If 'applying' play as a 'cure' was ever my intention subliminally, I now see clearly that this cannot be my approach, post RS.

Participants require room to view and make their own choices about if and how much they wish to engage with the subject. They may wish to simply consider it, as Ruby did. This is how any subject is ideally offered in a CWTP session. In the case of play, without this approach, childhood sexual trauma could be compounded by unwilling participation in an activity.

Simply providing an invitation to connect with our experience of play is a powerful enough trigger to encourage further investigation by participants, if inclined. In four of my five participants' cases the session provided opportunity to connect to their own play positively. In their own time, they may act on this. In Ruby's case it revealed her experience of play as '*constrained, controlled, dark, isolated, less than*'. The important factor here was her choice to examine this, and she did it at her own pace, in the time following the RS.

I am curious to know from all my RS participants what impact the RS experience has on their lives, at different time intervals. I am considering inviting the same group to partake in a 'one year on' reflective and creative workshop.

The tools learned in CWTP sessions - written dialogue between different parts of ourselves, or different aged selves, or imagined dialogue with the absent or dead, enabling us to state things now that we could not before, re-framing an experience etc – *could* provide the means for further therapeutic exploration for those who wished it.

This invitation, I believe, has beneficial potential across the board with informed awareness of specific settings and use, if needed, of scribes or adaptive technology. If developed with care and awareness, the work I have begun to investigate could develop, building on the important work of Brown, Bloomfield and others who already value the therapeutic qualities of play throughout life. It could, with further development, provide a mutually enriching basis for collaboration with a play therapist, working with adults, and thereby play a significant role in providing opportunity for exploring play-related issues with adults..

C3 Influence on my practice

CWTP sessions already provide opportunity for adults to partake in attunement, social-, imaginative- and narrative-play, even if we, as facilitators, do not explicitly draw attention to this. Sometimes, as in Ruby's case, CWTP sessions, including the RS, provide opportunity for transformative-play. My study has given me an enhanced understanding of the value of play in a form acceptable to adults. This knowledge feeds into the trust I already have in the process and the confidence I feel in offering it as a therapeutic tool.

I may have established *my* preferred way of *approaching* the subject of play in a CWTP workshop; now I sit with the question of how I might develop this.

I have been exploring ideas of introducing a more sensory element for those willing to engage in further exploration. I am also drawn to further explore overlaps with the field of Transactional Analysis (Williamson, 2014).

In terms of my professional development, my practice as a facilitator effected directly how I conducted my research, and conducting the research influenced the quality of my practice. I attribute this to: the high standards required through the research proposal procedure; the additional holding and feedback I received from my supervisor and research advisor and indirectly from the programme leader; positive critical feedback from my professional witness.

C4 Conclusion

Play is a beneficial state to be in, if we can access it. CWTP offers adults access to acceptable forms of socio-, narrative- and imaginative play. In my RS most accessed the beneficial state, one participant uncovered complex feelings and associations with play because of the particulars of her history. Ruby was then able to explore these, and made links with childhood abuse. Factors such as personality type play a rôle in an individual's predisposition to play, or their preferred manner of play. An apparent reluctance to play therefore is no indicator of childhood trauma or play-deprivation. Offering a session like my RS does, however, carry a real possibility of uncovering these.

I conclude that this was a worthwhile study. My tutor Graham Hartill noted that it asks a simple question with big ramifications and implications. I would add that asking the question carries big responsibilities. The RS provided an opportunity for participants to connect with qualities they associated with play – in most cases joy, freedom, energy, and pleasure. It provided insights about trust, inclusion and exclusion, and it shed light into dark places, painful reminders of the obstacles to childhood play, or some sadness at the lack of present opportunities for being in playstate.

The theme of play is not to be embarked on lightly, without due preparation or contingencies. I see it as most usefully approached as *part* of an ongoing group's stimulus, offered once the group is well-established.

This study marks a small but significant beginning. It has confirmed my respect for the potency of play as a distinct named theme in a CWTP session, as well as confirming its intrinsic presence in CWTP. Although I need to think carefully about how to develop research in this area, particularly if offered to groups of people in particularly challenging circumstances, such as prisons or a refuge for domestic abuse, I do think that further research is warranted.