Writing routes: a resource handbook of therapeutic writing
Gillie Bolton, Victoria Field, Kate Thompson (eds)
Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2010

Writing routes is a diverse collection of personal journeys, which introduces and demonstrates many different ways of beginning and deepening creative writing for personal or professional development.

No less than 70 contributors, from a variety of different backgrounds, explain how and why they came to write a particular piece, how they found ways of transforming their experience into writing, and how the process of so doing was beneficial to them.

Their writing styles and modes vary widely, from journal entries and stream of consciousness, to autobiography, poetry, fiction and drama. The pieces are organised by theme and genre – designed for ‘dipping into’ as needed – and two extremely useful appendices are included to help the reader find what is needed in the moment. The first appendix is organised by themes in alphabetical order (ancestors, bereavement, burnout, children, etc); the second is organised by types of writing (description, dialogue, freewriting etc). Both give the chapter and author for each category.

The accounts presented offer tried and tested ‘writing routes’ as models for practice, and also provide ‘ways in’ that facilitators, mentors or therapists might wish to recommend to others. All the same, this is not really a how-to; it’s more a ‘how I did it and why’ book, though obviously one can usefully adopt most of the techniques.

This is a visually attractive book and a pleasant size and shape to hold, but it didn’t really hold my interest. It all felt like too much un-British navel-gazing, and the naked pain of the writers was hard to bear. One notable exception was Sandy Hutchinson Nunn’s piece: ‘Finding your racket voice’ (chapter three: Writing the self). I know Sandy personally, and am therefore interested in what she has to say. I’m also deeply interested in TA (the perspective from which she writes this piece), so would have enjoyed this article anyway. Sandy writes well – as do all the contributors – and I know there are plenty of practitioners who would find this book useful and helpful. I regret that I didn’t, and am quite willing to accept that this is about me and not the book.

Margaret Akmakjian-Pitz, MA, MBACP (Accred), psychotherapist in private practice.

Growing old: a journey of self-discovery
Danielle Quinodoz
Routledge 2009

Freud said that psychoanalysis should not be attempted with the over-50s. In specialising in a much older age group, and treating them with traditional psychoanalytical methods, Danielle Quinodoz has proved him wrong. This book is the story of her successes in working with this group, and what she has learned over the years. Key concepts include the idea of helping elderly clients create a narrative of their life, so that there is a coherent whole, closing the circle of life; forgiving those who have caused hurt and making reparation with those who have been hurt; and, the concept that I most enjoyed, the idea that the Western perception of time (with the future ahead and the past behind) can be challenged. She offers the example of a South American tribe whose concept of time is that the future is behind (unseen) and the past in front (seen). The unseen future moves forward, becomes the present, and moves on to become the known past that is visible from the present moment.

The thrust of Quinodoz’s work is about helping clients come to terms with their lives as they both age and, inevitably, begin to consider the end of life. Because time is limited, it needs to be experienced intensely. The best place to do this, in her mind, is in psychoanalysis. Death or infirmity may mean that a full analysis is cut short, but nevertheless she makes the point that there is time, and need, to make sense of life as it approaches an end.

This is described as ‘growing old actively’ (as opposed to growing old passively). As a psychoanalyst, Quinodoz is constantly making links between the client’s internal and external worlds. She uses the metaphor of putting one’s internal house in order. Once this is done, the rest of life, however long that may be, can be lived out productively. In some ways this could serve as a metaphor for any therapy, but Quinodoz is dismissive of psychotherapy, seeing it as a poorer cousin to psychoanalysis, and humanist or behavioural therapies do not warrant a mention.

This is an excellent book, well worth reading. It is filled with engaging...
examples, both from the author’s own caseload, and from both clinical and fictional literature. If I have a quibble, it would be that some of the analytical interpretations (such as the assumption that all small girls suffer from penis-envy) are a little much for me, but that does seem a small grumble in such a good book. There is very little written about old age, and this book, written with warmth and compassion, makes a welcome contribution to the subject. If you only have time to read one book this quarter, consider this one.

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Attachment: expanding the cultural connections
Phyllis Erdman, Kok-Mun Ng
Routledge 2010

Attachment presents a variety of research papers on attachment across various cultures and explores the universals of attachment theory across a variety of Eastern and Western cultures. Divided into five sections, it covers: an introduction to attachment in cultural contexts; conceptual extension and measurement issues; child-caregiver attachment; adult attachment; and clinical applications.

The book provides educational, penetrating reading around variations in attachment across cultures, describing how what is a ‘secure’ attachment in one culture may be an ‘insecure’ attachment in another, and how this may impact upon the therapeutic alliance. Because it is research-based, it may sometimes seem a little ‘clinical’, given the various names, dates and references interjected into the text. However, overall, it is readable and thought-provoking.

Looking at attachment across various cultures, and within the context of these cultures, the book explores links between these and reactions to and experiences of such things as bereavement and romantic relationships. Various attachment questionnaires and inventories are explored and explained, and the foundations of John Bowlby’s theory of attachment and Mary Ainsworth’s ‘Strange Situation Procedure’ are included, challenged and explored within cultural contexts throughout.

The book is aimed at practitioners, counselling/psychotherapy/psychology students, practitioners and researchers. A basic understanding of research methods and terminology is assumed, although lack of this need not hinder general understanding of the book.

In my opinion, Attachment is essential reading, especially for those working with attachment, object relations, and psychodynamics. However, as attachment is a universal phenomenon, I feel it would be useful to practitioners across all approaches to therapy.

I found the book a thought-provoking, informative and useful resource, which challenged the Western-dominated research on attachment which seems to prevail. I have a strong interest in attachment theory, and have had many questions in my mind about variation and extensions of attachment over the lifespan and in various contexts. This book helped me to extend my questioning further, and into the context of various cultures. It also offered a stimulus for my own further research and writing on attachment in the future.

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Working with young men: activities for exploring personal, social and emotional issues
Vanessa Rogers
Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2010

I can thoroughly recommend this book for anyone working with groups of young men. It would be ideal for youth workers, youth offending teams, and schools. Some of the activities could be used by counsellors to supplement one-to-one work.

The book was first published in 2003 but was revised in 2010 and consists of 173 pages. It opens with a chapter on how to establish a young men’s group. The remainder of the book gives a wealth of practical activities that are categorised into seven chapters: include ‘Developing communication skills’, ‘Expressing emotions’, ‘Exploring values and attitudes’, ‘Taking risks’, ‘Working activities’, and ‘Endings’.

Each activity is very simply explained, and gives the user advice on how to facilitate the session. If materials are required, they are often minimal such as flip chart, paper, or paints, but many of the activities do not require materials. Additionally, some of the pages are clearly marked to indicate permission to photocopy them, which obviously assists the youth worker.

The activities are very creative and imaginative and would be excellent for team-building, encouraging communication, raising awareness of values and attitudes, and promoting self-confidence and self-esteem. There is also advice about creating boundaries, measuring success and setting ground-rules.

At the back of the book is a list of useful websites, including the author’s own, for further information.