

<b>Institution: University of Salford</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: D29 English Language and Literature</b>
<b>Title of case study: Writing Lives</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p><i>Writing Lives</i> is a community storytelling project. It develops creative writing with people and communities as a way of expressing their past and present, and has resulted in a self-sustaining model of community arts practice. It demonstrates the following impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowering people and communities to gain confidence in self-expression;</li> <li>• Developing a listening and responsive model of participation, which ensures participants feel ownership over their involvement, which is tailored to meet their objectives, rather than being pre-structured and 'imposed';</li> <li>• Supporting a diverse range of voluntary sector organisations in engaging people and communities;</li> <li>• Evolving partnership models which do not end abruptly with the initial project but endure and deepen beyond the research grant period.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The key researchers and positions they held at the institution at the time of the research are as follows: Dr Ursula Hurley, Senior Lecturer, English and Creative Writing (from 2005) Dr Judy Kendall, Senior Lecturer, English and Creative Writing (from 2006), School of Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Hurley's interview and poems in the journal <i>Erbacce</i> (2007) and her chapbook, <i>Tree</i> (2009), analyse dislocations of self and the interaction of memory with the urban environment. Kendall's collections, <i>The Drier the Brighter</i> (2007) and <i>Joy Change</i> (2010) address the interactions of culture, place and poetic process. This common concern for poetry as an expression of individual and communal relationships with history, identity and locality informed the initial design of the Writing Lives project. The aim was to provide a supportive space in which participants could explore a range of identity and community-related issues in creative and innovative ways.</li> <li>• Participants in the Writing Lives project were self-selecting, and at first the groups consisted almost exclusively of young mothers. Hurley's research on gender and its influence on creative writing processes and products (Continuum, 2007) directly informed delivery of the sessions, which focused on shared experiences and expressions of parenthood, and children's literacy. At the request of participating parents, the project funded the commission of a book artist to support the group in the production of books for their children.</li> <li>• Issues of personal and collective senses of place and belonging arose as the groups gained in skill and confidence, articulating the need to express the experience of living in Broughton, both positive and negative. Kendall's research-informed collaborative community arts practice (Ordsall, 2009 and white peak: dark peak, 2010) directed the development of creative activities designed to facilitate the expression of individual and community perceptions of locality, resulting in a collective exhibition of digital cartography at MediaCityUK, 2012: <a href="http://www.salford.ac.uk/home-page/news/2012/east-salford-residents-map-out-digital-storytelling">http://www.salford.ac.uk/home-page/news/2012/east-salford-residents-map-out-digital-storytelling</a>.</li> <li>• As the groups progressed and gained greater competence and confidence in creative expression, some participants began to reflect upon issues of identity and self-esteem, exploring autobiography as a means of dealing with difficult experiences. Hurley's research into the processes of autobiography, and their relationship with personal well-being, offered strategies for participants to find a voice, to gain agency over challenging material in a safe space, and to express themselves without making themselves vulnerable (Hurley, 2010, 2011).</li> </ul>

### 3. References to the research

#### Key outputs

1. Hurley, U 2007 '3000 words on gender and writing', in: Leach, H & Graham, R (eds.), *Everything You Need to Know About Creative Writing (but knowing isn't everything)*, Continuum, London, UK. ISBN 9780826490223
2. Hurley, U 2007, *Erbacce* Issue 10 eds. Alan Corkish and Andrew Taylor, 2007 ISSN 1744-2966 and chapbook *Tree*, 2009, Erbacce Press, Liverpool, UK. ISBN 9781906588656
3. Kendall, J 2007, *The Drier The Brighter* and 2010 *Joy Change* (poetry collections), Cinnamon Press, Blaenua Ffestiniog, Wales [URL](#)
4. Kendall, J 2009, 'Lullaby', Commissioned by Ordsall Acapella Singers for Ordsall Hall, Ordsall, Salford. Led workshops where local people collaborated in the production of lyrics to signal the refurbishment of Ordsall Hall. Performed, Ordsall Hall, February 2009.
5. Hurley, U 2010 'Life Writing as a Route to Self-discovery, Reflection and Enhanced Well-being', paper given at A Novel Opportunity: Reading, Writing, and Performing to Aid the Explication of Mental Health and Well-Being, University of Salford. Proposal was peer-reviewed.
6. Hurley, U 2011 'Walking in the World of Ruins: Explorations in the Processes and Products of Autobiographical Fiction', *The International Journal of the Arts in Society*, vol. 5. ISSN: 1833-1866 [URL](#)
7. Finlay, A & Kendall, J 2010 'white peak | dark peak', in: Finlay, A (ed.), *white peak | dark peak*, morning star, Derbyshire Arts Group, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. [URL](#)

#### Key grants

8. Hurley, U and Kendall, J. Writing Lives: Community Arts-based Project 'Engaging Communities through Arts'. £60,000 HEFCE's Urban Regeneration: Making a Difference programme, 2007.

### 4. Details of the impact

#### Empowering people and communities to gain confidence in self-expression:

- Between 2009 and 2012, 78 people have attended the creative writing workshops and 89 have attended the children's book-making activities. Crèche facilities were provided, enabling opportunities for cultural engagement and creative self-expression that would otherwise not have been available to parents with young children. Participants range from young mothers to those over 50, with multi-cultural and multi-national membership, some with English as a second language, or with literacy issues, and some with mental health issues or physical disabilities. One participant said: *'I'm a single mum from Salford who has got three poor GCSEs, but that's my work and I am proud of what I have done and achieved.'*
- This intervention has enhanced existing literacy and English provision at the Broughton Centre in Salford, Greater Manchester, developed participants' critical thinking and practical writing skills, and provided the opportunity for participants to build social relationships and feelings of trust. 12 members of the group have entered paid employment, and over 50% of the original members have moved on to other unaccredited or accredited courses. One participant said: *'I would like to continue with the classes as my life has changed though them and they help with my confidence.'* Access to University resources continues to be provided via invitations to visit events on campus, for example, the World Book Night celebration, 23 April, 2013, at which participants read their work to an audience of students and academics (transport for participants is provided from project funds). Such interactions raise awareness of the relevance of the University to local communities and possible routes into higher education. One member of the Mocha Parade group said: *'I particularly enjoyed the trip to the Art Gallery at Salford University.'* Two former members are currently in higher education and another has become a qualified counsellor. One participant said: *'With this, it was about me. I learned a lot about myself. It re-affirmed my feelings and passion for community work and I now want to get a job in community work.'*

Developing a listening and responsive model of participation, which ensures participants feel ownership over their engagement, which is tailored to meet their objectives, rather than being pre-structured and 'imposed':

- The project design was informed by Hurley and Kendall's work in inclusive community arts practice. Participants are self-selecting. There is no attendance or registration fee, and people are welcome to 'dip in' to sessions without making a formal commitment to attend regularly. The researchers worked in collaboration with locally-based writers to shape provision according to participants' expressed needs and ambitions (for example, working with a book artist to create work to share with their children). One participant said: *'I've never thought I could see it in black and white. A book I have done for my own son.'*
- The evaluation of the project was also participatory. For example, participants volunteered to receive training in the use of hand-held video cameras, and then negotiated what, how and who they would film. Participants were also invited to join a focus group, and to sit on a project steering group. The researchers only attended group sessions when invited to do so by group members. At all times the ownership and development of the writing groups was firmly with the participants rather than the researchers. Dr Danijela Bogdanovich, the sociologist commissioned to evaluate the project, states:  
*[Participants] valued being engaged and consulted, being asked about their experiences of attending Writing Lives and their views about how those experiences can be improved. This demonstrates that the group members are active contributors to the programme, with their contribution extending beyond their creative output.*  
 (Bogdanovich, 2012)
- This sense of collective ownership and self-determination can be seen in entries to the participant-maintained blog, 'Writing lives: fragments of imagination in words' (<http://broughtonwritinglives.blogspot.com/>): *'We meet once a week to share written treats, try new poetic rhymes and memories of old times, pen short fiction as well as fact - all this and that - and whatever else, creative and written, that takes our fancy.'*

Supporting a diverse range of voluntary sector organisations in engaging people and communities:

- Partnerships have been established with the Embrace project (Salford Museum & Art Gallery), Manchester Art Gallery, Martin Harris Centre, Refugee and Asylum Seeker Participatory Action Research (RAPAR), Salford Ethnic Minority & Traveller Achievement Service, Salford Library Service, START in Salford, Contour Housing Group, The Hive in the Cliff, Salford Women Writers, The Duchy of Lancaster, Symphony Housing, Women Working Together. These partnerships have been centred around the Broughton Trust in Salford, Greater Manchester, whose objectives are:
  - To get more local people into paid employment;
  - To raise aspiration and participation in adult learning programmes;
  - To strengthen community infrastructure, resilience and sustainability;
  - To create developmental and diversionary activities for young people.
- Participation in adult learning in East Salford has quadrupled over the past five years. Workshops have brought about interactions between people from diverse ethnic, social and age groups who may not otherwise have met. Workshops and evaluations are co-led by Writing Lives members, demonstrating that participation in this project is empowering participants to undertake leadership and mentoring roles within their communities: *'Belonging to a group gives you a lot of confidence and you make friends that way'*.

Evolving partnership models which do not end abruptly with the research but endure and deepen beyond the research grant period:

- Writing Lives workshops are now a recognised part of the Broughton Trust's education programme and the 'Broughton Wordsmiths' has become an established group, meeting weekly at Mocha Parade, with a core attendance of 8-9 participants from diverse backgrounds. In 2010, due to local demand, two more writing workshop programmes were set-up. A Children's Story Writing & Book Making Workshop meets weekly on

Wednesdays at St Sebastian's Community Centre, Lower Broughton with single parents as the target participants and a core membership of 13. In September 2010, in partnership with Contour Housing Group, a developmental group of 5 local residents began meeting weekly at St James' Church Hall. All 3 programmes of writing workshops continue to attract enthusiastic attendance from self-selecting participants. Writing Lives is also a partner in the following projects and bidding activities :

- The Broughton Trust's Towpath funded InterActive Arts Programme provided 2 x 10 week courses exploring personal and community histories/stories.
- 'Put a Plug in it', intergenerational project on the heritage of communication technology: gained £4,500 funding from Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust, 2010.
- The Hive in the Cliff bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- Gypsy Storytelling Project for Roma women, hosted by Women Working Together (predominantly South Asian membership).
- Story Exchange for National Refugee Week, June 2011.
- 'World in a Box' cultural exchange with the Embrace Project Jan – April 2011. The Broughton Trust is involved in the British Council's Active Citizens project, which has twinned them with the Israeli organisation SPARK PRO. Writing Lives is to be used as a model for the provision of conflict resolution training for young people via the medium of story-telling.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- a) Principal Officer, The Broughton Trust, <http://www.thebroughtontrust.org.uk/>
- b) Contact details for local artists/writers involved in the project and for the Project Evaluation Report are provided.