

Transformation through Journal Writing
The Art of Journal Writing for the Helping Professions
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Preface

I have been involved in journal writing on and off since I was a teenager. In the early years there was the comfort of sharing my life with my silent friend, and exploring my creativity. When I travelled around the world, my journal was my record and the consolidation of all my experiences. As a professional, I began a self reflective journal and came to depend upon it as an invaluable tool for self supervision.

When I became involved in setting up a distance learning college, I wanted all of the students to learn self reflection for the benefit of their self understanding, and their future work as practitioners. I took the decision to ask for a weekly self reflective journal to be filled in online. I told the students that they could reflect on anything in the first year; including their studies, their home life or their work. By the third year, reflection was more focussed on their work as practitioners.

There was some resistance from the students at first, especially as most of them had never done anything like this. Many of them found it difficult to get beyond the descriptive stage to start with. They were good at telling the story, but found it difficult to learn from their experiences. But with lots of encouragement and some gentle challenges, I was thrilled to see them making great leaps in self understanding. It has been my privilege to witness extraordinary self-development over the years with many of the students.

It was more difficult, but equally rewarding, teaching the practitioner-patient relationship to university students. They were asked to keep a self reflective log on a regular basis, but the evidence of this was only revealed in the assignments, where I discovered that some of the students didn't understand what was expected from them. It was difficult giving lectures on self reflection, and I began to see the need for a new book on journal writing. In the meantime, I increased the opportunities for experiential work in the classroom, encouraging students to learn from their interactions with each other.

I have chosen the word "journal" above that of "diary". Technically they mean the same thing, but to some of us journals are more robust and professional, while diaries are perhaps a little more casual and romantic. Also, the word journal comes from the same root as journey, a timely reminder that the fun and learning are in following the pathway, not reaching the destination. The journeyman is the craftsmen who has progressed beyond apprenticeship, but still has not reached mastery. Journal writing reminds us that we have neither reached the destination nor achieved the mastery. This thought might be humbling but it is also exhilarating and liberating. If the journal is only a work

in progress, it takes away the pressure to be correct or complete, and allows us to simply be in the now.

In writing this book, I decided to take part myself by engaging in the journal exercises that I recommend for the reader. With my confused students in mind, there needed to be journal examples as well as theory. Creating all of these journal examples myself has been a fascinating reminder of the value of keeping a journal, whatever form it takes. It has also taken me on a journey from the simplest, most direct form of journal through to complex models of self-reflection. Each of my journal examples is an invented scenario, and yet inevitably as I write them, they come from my inner truth and experience. Inadvertently, I have learned a lot about myself, humbling me and reminding me yet again of the power of self reflection.

Each chapter contains suggestions about different types of journal writing and gives short exercises that the reader can experiment with. The exercises come without strings attached and are there to provide opportunities to stimulate the reader. They come from my reading, my experience and my imagination. Some won't have been seen before.

I recommend the reader tries out some of the exercises and ponders over others, in order to expand their repertoire and discover for themselves what provides the most interest and what provokes the most learning. These are not necessarily the same thing. I suggest that the value is in the experiential work, engaging with different styles and techniques. If in the course of looking at the exercises the reader gets the inspiration to try their own ideas, then even better.