

Lapidus Research Day:

‘Turning experience into research’

Context

Picture the scene: you’ve been actively involved in the world of writing for many years and have seen and experienced many examples of transformation and healing. But what now? How can those experiences be translated into research? These were some of the questions we addressed in our workshop on ‘turning experience into research’.

To get us thinking, **Amanda Rackstraw** kindly gave us insight into her own experiences with writing – both personally and professionally. Amanda is a poet, performer and storyteller with over a decade of experience as a creative writing teacher at the Cardiff University Centre for Lifelong Learning.

Our ideas

- **Collaboration:** writers could collaborate with researchers in order to document & analyse their experiences – as Lapidus members Cheryl Moskowitz and Kate McBarron are doing relating to Cheryl’s experiences working in a London primary school. Another example: Kim Etherington’s work with two brothers in the book *Narrative Approaches to Working with Adult Male Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*.
- **Teaching:** experience could be translated into teaching, allowing writers to pass on their knowledge.
- **Self-analysis:** writers could analyse their own journey and experiences. This could take the form of an autoethnographic study, for example.

- **Commentary:** writers could provide commentary alongside their work, or the work of another, to offer insight and analysis. This could include commenting on a single piece, or comparing forms.
- **Contributing to a wider project:** writers could offer their experiences as part of larger research projects.
- **Collecting data from reflective writing courses:** some courses – such as those offered by the Therapeutic Writing Institute – encourage reflection on the writing process.
- **Conducting a survey:** individuals could gather both quantitative and qualitative data by surveying other writers – either from groups they’re running or from among their peers.

Our questions/considerations

- What is ‘credible’ research? Who’s judging? Should writers be seeking to publish academic papers or is one’s own experience enough?
- Who’s paying for the research and who stands to gain? Transparency is vital.
- Beware of predicting results! Research should be transparent about both the good and the bad.
- With group work, the very act of participating in a group could be the biggest factor for change – rather than the writing.
- Surveys can be difficult to manage since it’s not always desirable to ask people to fill out forms during a writing class / session. There’s also a question of timings: how long after an event can a survey be conducted and still be useful?
- When is it ok to experiment / break the rules with research? Can this only be done once you’ve proven yourself within academic circles?