

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: The Open University		
Unit of Assessment: D27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Supporting survivors in post-conflict zones through Creative and Expressive Writing		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 1 November 2014 - 20 July 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Siobhan Campbell	Senior Lecturer	Nov 2014-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 November 2014 - 31 December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Campbell's Expressive Life Writing (ELW) methodology, a participatory and research-based practice, provides an adaptable, humanities-based resource for survivors of conflict in multiple contexts. Emerging from Campbell's post-conflict poetry and her applied research into creative writing as practice, the ELW methodology is now the basis for training programmes in Iraq, Lebanon and Northern Ireland. Campbell's ELW practice (1) benefits survivors of conflict, improving their well-being, coping abilities and decision-making; (2) has been adopted by aid workers and rights activists working to mitigate gender-based violence; and (3) has influenced the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) policy in Iraq. In summary, Campbell's research has had a positive impact on post-conflict societies, providing an effective and sustainable methodology for a wide range of beneficiaries.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Campbell's research into Creative Writing (CW) pedagogy develops new ways of using writing practice in post-conflict reconstruction. In her poetry and in her publications on CW pedagogy, Campbell explores the socially transformative potential of writing praxis. Her research, based on her formative work in post-conflict Northern Ireland, addresses how creative writing helps to support personal, community and organisational change.</p> <p>Since joining The Open University (OU) in 2014, Campbell has continued to develop her research focused on the connections between creative writing and post-combat recovery, in both clinical and non-clinical environments, with both military veterans and civilian survivors of conflict. Campbell's research reveals that creative writing practice with conflict survivors nurtures an ethics of recognition and stimulates social cohesion. Campbell's development of a methodology for 'interviewing-in-place' and her espousal of expressive life writing as 'research in practice' has led directly to projects in Northern Ireland, Lebanon and Iraq.</p> <p>Campbell's collection Heat Signature (2017) [O1] collects her 'Voices of War' award-winning work, as well as her poems showcased at the British Council 'Peace and Beyond' Conference (2018) marking 20 years since The Good Friday Agreement. Her co-editorship of Eavan Boland: Inside History (2017) containing her essay 'Eavan Boland and the development of a poetics' explores how a socially-engaged poetic practice emerges after conflict and how creative writing practice generates literary activism [O2].</p> <p>Discovering how well the CW disciplinary tenets of 'learning by doing' and 'iterative practice' can work, Campbell widened the remit of her projects. Collaborating with Dr Meg Jensen (researcher in trauma-testimony), Campbell developed responses to post-conflict recovery and peace-building, providing workshop exercises and self-reflective frameworks while training fellows from Gulf Cooperation nations (2016). These frameworks were then further adapted during writing-workshops with Iraqi activists (2017-18) and Lebanese social workers/Syrian refugees (2018-19). The co-authored output, The Expressive Life-Writing Handbook (2017, 2018), consolidates this research, setting out how it can be applied in post-conflict zones [O3].</p>		

At the same time, Campbell's poetry addressed the challenges of post-conflict art, not only in **Heat Signature** (2017) [O2], but also in a number of poetry-collaborations: with the Arts Council-supported 'What else' post-conflict poetry edition of the Poetry Jukebox (2018); with community-arts projects via the Institute of Conflict Research (Northern Ireland) (2018-19), and with the Peace IV/Reconciliation Fund-supported stage shows of work reflecting on the Northern Ireland peace process and Belfast Agreement (London, Belfast, Armagh, Dublin, 2018-19). This post-conflict work in poetic expression allowed Campbell to develop ways of dealing with difficult subject matter, practices that she then developed into workshop strategies for working with traumatised communities.

Noting that writing practice develops resilience in post-conflict zones when local stakeholders are involved, Campbell set out her inclusive iterative practice in the chapter '**Negotiated Truths and Iterative Practice: The Women in Conflict Expressive Life Writing Project**' [O4]. Developing these ideas in her next output, '**Writing-based interventions: from Communities of Practice to Life Stories**', Campbell drew upon Etienne Wenger's insight that shared experiences of writing can create 'communities of practice' (CoPs) (Wenger 1998: 73) in order to outline her own distinctive practice in which participation in her ELW workshops generates forms of knowledge development that can be shared [O5].

3. References to the research

- O1. Campbell, S.** (2017) *Heat Signature*. Bridgend: Seren Press. 72pp. ISBN 978-1781723678. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/50477/>
- O2. Campbell, S.** (2017) "Eavan Boland and the development of a poetics: 'It may be beauty/but it isn't truth'". In Siobhan Campbell & Nessa O'Mahony (eds.) *Eavan Boland: Inside History*. 155-176, and 1-22. London, Dublin, & New York. Arlen House. 368pp, ISBN 9781851321506. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/57806/>
- O3.** Jensen, M., & **Campbell, S.** (2017, 2018 reprint) *The Expressive Life-Writing Handbook. London and Edinburgh: Beyond Borders Scotland in association with The Stabilisation and Recovery Network*. 130pp, ISBN 9781526202604. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/56815/>
- O4.** Jensen, M., & **Campbell, S.** (2019) Negotiated Truths and Iterative Practice: The Women in Conflict Expressive Life Writing Project. In K. Douglas, & A. Barnwell (eds.), *Research Methods for Auto/Biography Studies*. 115-129. New York: Routledge 276pp, ISBN 9780429288432. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/57623/>
- O5. Campbell, S., & Jensen, M.** (2020) "Writing-based interventions: from Communities of Practice to Life Stories". *Writing in Education* 82 (Winter 2020). 54-60. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/73864/>

All outputs were subject to blind peer review and have been certified as 2* or above by an independent external consultant who was a member of the REF 2014 panel for English.

4. Details of the impact

Campbell's poetry has changed readers' views on the impact of war, as well as on the capacity for healing, and her CW methodology as set out in her expressive life-writing handbook has had a direct impact in three distinct areas: (i) on the health and well-being of survivors of conflict zones/ contested environments; (ii) on the operation of aid agencies, charities and aid workers, and; (iii) on the policies adopted by large aid agencies.

(i) Impact on the health and well-being of survivors of conflict zones/ contested environments

Akkar Network for Development (AND), Lebanon

In 2018-19, Campbell and Jensen used their research [O3] as the basis for setting up the ELW Capability Transfer project in collaboration with AND (a women's charity in Lebanon which works with up to 15,000 women). This led to an 11-week capacity-building program with 11 social

workers, followed by a year-long programme dedicated to training specialists in gender-based violence and children's support from AND, the International Rescue Committee and UNICEF. AND's Project Director testified that the *"impact of the exercises [has] been extremely visible on both social workers [who are themselves survivors of conflict zones] and participants', with a significant "effect on capability and resilience" [C1].* The Project Director expressed the potential longevity of the project with ELW being a *"gateway to more than one adapted/ customised tool in this period of acute crisis in Lebanon" [C1].* All the social workers working with adults (in feedback questionnaires) suggested ELW would change their practice [C1]. As a result of this enhanced training, 140 survivors (mainly Syrian refugees) now follow a *"life plan" written during ELW sessions, which has the "effect of making women attend [sessions] more regularly" and has increased "resilience and capacity" [C1].*

Furthermore, a peer-formed group of Syrian refugees settled in the Akkar region (Lebanon) who came through the ELW programme made a movie 'Our Life Stories as Refugees' to help other refugees deal with gender-based violence through reflective practice. One participant stated that *"what inspires me and encourages me to write stories about my life is knowing that it will increase my awareness and help me to be confident in myself and able to face the difficulties I've encountered in my life" [C2].* Another participant explained *"I was encouraged to participate in the group, so I did, and I overcame the pain that was inside me and I was encouraged to do expressive writing. I expressed things that happened to me that I had not previously expressed. I thank all the staff for the project" [C2].*

Participation and Practice of Rights (PPR), Belfast

In October-November 2019, Campbell devised the 'Re-Writing Ourselves' programme for campaign activists: a) to draw on personal experience in writing for activism, and b) to learn resilience-building techniques through writing-practice. PPR is a group that supports marginalised people in Belfast through a human rights-based approach, with the aim to make social and economic change in their communities. PPR integrated Campbell's writing-practice into their support programme. During these workshops, the five activists were presented with the opportunity for personal development through ELW. The PPR report concluded participants could *"recognise themselves and their stories in work by other writers" resulting in "reduced isolation" and increased confidence.* Participants noted they could *"articulate better", "felt okay when going public", and "felt how writing supports [their] overall well-being".* Participants also demonstrated enhanced activism (I *"will have notes in my journal to begin using my stories in telling how it is to powers that be"*) evidenced by participant-questionnaires and PPR's Participant-Observer testimonial [C3]. Furthermore, all participants felt *"more confident" and gained a sense of achievement, and all participants agreed with the statement that the "workshop had opened up new possibilities" [C3].*

(ii) Impact on the operations of aid agencies, charities and aid workers:

INMAA Organisation for Development, Iraq

Campbell's research shaped the publication 'Expressive Writing in documenting sexual violence' (August 2015 - May 2016). Campbell trained twelve social workers/activists in ELW in Iraq, who have adopted the **ELW Handbook** in Arabic as their standard text. The twelve were managing *"1000 on-going cases" of gender violence, with an additional "150 cases of sexual violence" [C4].* The INMAA Director stated that *"The training in the techniques of interviewing the victims, asking them to tell their stories and encouraging them to communicate [...] has also been important for both the lawyers and the social workers" [C4].* Beyond Borders Director Mark Muller QC states: *"The impact of this project on the working practices of the INMAA organisation are reflected in the change in their methods of interviewing survivors [...]. The team in Kirkuk are working when they can to input the backlog of cases going back several years" [C4].*

The INMAA Project completion report produced by Muller stated that *"the long-term impact [...] has made clear the extent to which the integration of this approach [...] will alter the experience of subjects" [C5].* He continued that *"the EW project has gone well beyond expectations in the*

depth and comprehensive material they have produced. This in turn enabled the INMAA team to reflect on and improve their working practices especially with respect to the interface with victims/clients” [C5]. The project dealt with 1,500 cases and 2,000 new referrals [C5]. As a result, the **Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s (FCO)** 2nd edition of the International Protocol (2017) now follows the approach advocated by the **ELW Report and Handbook**. In 2017, the study was conducted on survivors of violence in the Iraqi provinces: “*The sample included 100 women survivors from the governorates of Nineveh, Anbar, Kirkuk, Diyala, Babil and Salahuddin*” [C6]. After Daesh was defeated, the survivors sought safe havens in the provinces of Baghdad, Karbala, Dohuk and Basra. These projects were run by ELW-trainees, psychologist Dr. Nuha Al-Darwish, and Human Rights and International Law / Women’s Law Expert, Major General Khaled, who tested the ELW materials with trained psychotherapists and survivors of gender-based-violence [C5].

‘Countering Violent Extremism and Combatting Gender-Based Violence’ FCO project

Campbell and Jensen trained 12 participants from the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC) (March 2016-March 2017) with **The Stabilisation and Recovery Network (TSRN)** for the UK government’s ‘Countering Violent Extremism Programme’. They included representatives from the Ministry of Interior, Justice and Information. Fellows were taught life-story techniques, which consequently changed their interactions with survivors because of their training [C7]. One fellow noted, “*It provides a way to explore one’s feelings about their experience with extremism, to discover root causes of extremism, and [...] work toward a better understanding*” [C7].

Campbell and Jensen trained another 100 participants in Iraq (October 2016-January 2017) under the FCO project. This in turn brought together diverse Iraqi stakeholders who created practice-groups. The ELW practice was taken up by a peer-led group of practitioners in Iraq, where “*multi-disciplinary workshops [...] transferred knowledge/ experience of new practices to challenge negative narratives and explore narrative routes*” [C8].

(iii) Impact on the policies adopted by large aid agencies.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Support for Integrated Reconciliation in Iraq (SIRI)

In 2017-2018, Campbell and Jensen were lead consultants for the UNDP’s SIRI project in ELW. The project aims were: (a) capacity building for social workers in ELW techniques; and (b) documentation of individual experiences of reflective learning. Campbell and Jensen’s training comprised two five-day courses for 70 social workers.

UNDP adopted ELW techniques for training their new community workers, and they in turn adopted the programmes for their home locales (2018). A Minister at the Dept of Social Affairs, Iraq, stated now “*social workers play an active role in showcasing what is happening within society, especially civilians that have been subjected to violence [...] This kind of documentation is much needed*” [C9]. Testimony from UNDP’s Gender Specialist stated “*this project will help women to deal with the past, document their stories [...] as well as ensure all stories of those who suffered [and] also community stories*” survive [C10]. Abbas concludes that “*UNDP agreed to document all [these] stories*” which will “*become a reference for the Iraqi government to strengthen its social protection policies*” [C10]. Furthermore, UNDP has “*been able to apply ELW in light of an urgent need to respond to the potential increase in domestic violence [in Iraq] that we feared would be one result of the COVID-19 lockdown*” with 75 social workers from NGOs across 15 governorates in Iraq, with 7,500 women reached in 10 days [C10]. She sums up: “*In Iraq, the biggest obstacle facing reconciliation is dealing with the past in ways that make a fresh start possible. Expressive Writing in dealing with the past is a key methodology in achieving community reconciliation in Iraq’s post-conflict environment which help increasing the well-being of groups at risk*”. She added: “*Women voices, roles and stories are often ignored; therefore, we came up with this initiative to reach out to a wider group of women and listen to their stories through our newly-established partnership with the MOLSA team of female social workers*” [C10].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1.** Testimonial. Nadine Saba, Board Director, Akkar Network for Development (August 2020). Feedback Questionnaires and Extracts. ELW Workshops Lebanon (May 2019). Testimonial. Nadine Saba, Board Director, Akkar Network for Development (September 2020).
- C2.** Transcription. 'Our Life Stories as Refugees' Film, transcript and translation (May 2018 to May 2019).
- C3.** Participant-Observer Testimonial. Participation and Practice of Rights (PPR), Belfast, (October-November 2019). PPR Participant Questionnaire Responses. Re-Writing Ourselves into Activism (December 2019).
- C4.** Testimonials. Mark Muller QC, Director Beyond Borders (September 2016). Project Manager, INMAA, Iraq (September 2016).
- C5.** Project Completion Report. FCO INMAA, Mark Muller QC (2016). Programme Report. Authors: Psychologist and Human Rights and International Law/ Women's Law Expert, (2020).
- C6.** Translated Report. UNDP study by Dr. Lahi Abd Al-Hussein (2019). Report in Arabic. UNDP study by Dr. Lahi Abd Al-Hussein (2019).
- C7.** Impact evaluation report. TSRN: The Stabilisation and Recovery Network (2017).
- C8.** Project Completion Report. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Mark Muller QC. INMAA (2017).
- C9.** Report and Recommendations. UNDP SIRI Project Iraq (2017-2018).
- C10.** Testimonials. (SDG) Project Manager, (January 2018 and August 2020). Press Release. 'UNDP Supporting Women CRSV and SGBV Survivors of Trauma' (November 2018). Press Release. 'UNDP Finding virtual solutions: UNDP Iraq provides psychosocial support to Iraqi women during COVID-19 pandemic' (May 2020).