

# **Creative Self Reflection For Wellbeing**

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PhD Student York St John University**

# **My Background**

**Photography and film**

**Art practice**

**Charity sector and participatory arts**

**Mental Health, Social Prescribing, LAC**

**Art psychotherapy**

**MA research**

**PhD research**

**Variety of roles, but medical/mental health innovation and history, arts in health and creativity are the threads that join them.**

**My training as an art psychotherapist informs my theoretical approach.**

# Art Psychotherapy

## British Association of Art Therapists

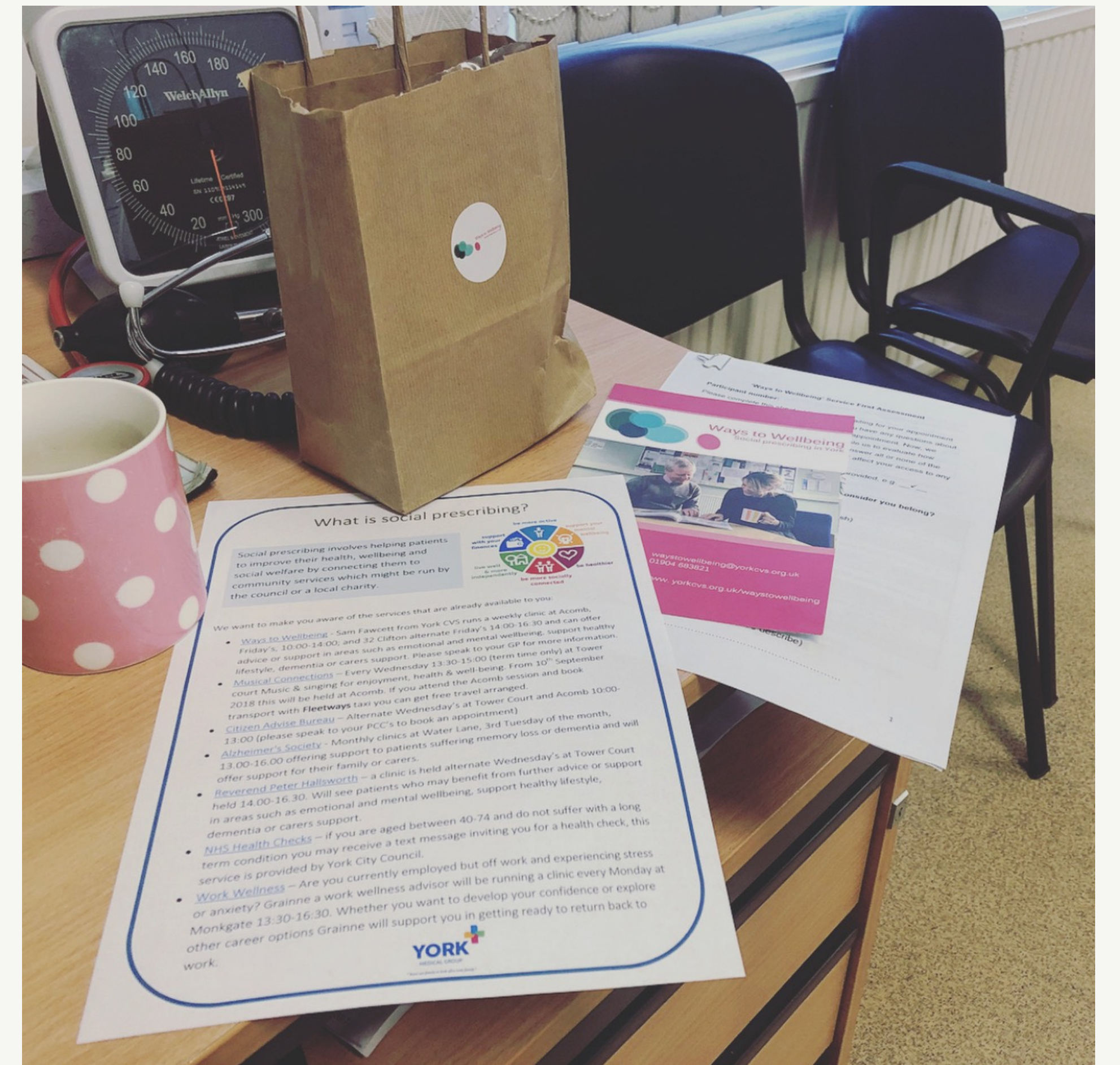
“Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses art media as its primary mode of expression and communication. Within this context, art is not used as diagnostic tool but as a medium to address emotional issues which may be confusing and distressing.

Art therapists work with children, young people, adults and the elderly. Clients may have a wide range of difficulties, disabilities or diagnoses. These include emotional, behavioural or mental health problems, learning or physical disabilities, life-limiting conditions, neurological conditions and physical illnesses.

Art therapy is provided in groups or individually, depending on clients' needs. It is not a recreational activity or an art lesson, although the sessions can be enjoyable. Clients do not need to have any previous experience or expertise in art.

Although influenced by psychoanalysis, art therapists have been inspired by theories such as attachment-based psychotherapy and have developed a broad range of client-centred approaches such as psycho-educational, mindfulness and mentalization-based treatments, compassion-focussed and cognitive analytic therapies, and socially engaged practice. Exploring the links between neuro-science and art therapy has also been at the forefront of some of the BAAT's conferences. Importantly, art therapy practice has evolved to reflect the cultural and social diversity of the people who engage in it.”





# PhD Research

- A humanistic approach to exploring cultural shifts in community mental health, service design & theory.
- Coproduction, lived experience and mental health systems change.
- Interviews with participants in the project to explore their experiences of system change and collaboration in mental health.
- My MA research - using art therapy and creative methodologies to explore medically unexplained symptoms, medical history, service structure in the NHS, the mindbody.

## **Exploring and Evaluating York's Innovative “Connecting Our City” Mental Health Transformation Project**

**Why creative reflection for wellbeing?**

**How is it relevant to teaching, and the student experience?**





## Exploring how arts-based reflection can support teachers' resilience and well-being

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### HIGHLIGHTS

- Art-based reflection helps to tap into the affect of teaching.
- Deeper reflection allows personal resources to be actioned in response to emotional events.
- Deeper reflection helps teachers to reimagine their future work.

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### ABSTRACT

Teaching is a complex profession, and it can have a significant impact on teachers' wellbeing. Awareness of personal and contextual factors that support resilience can help to improve teachers' wellbeing and counter burnout. Three case studies are presented to illustrate how arts-based reflection helped the participants to identify and express their thoughts, feelings and actions within their complex work space. A range of arts-based reflective practices, helped to elicit participants' awareness of the personal and contextual resources that supported their resilience and wellbeing. Such practices enabled them to reimagine their roles by identifying personal, strategic and contextual resources that could support and protect their resilience and wellbeing.

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### 1. Introduction

Teaching is a complex profession that is constantly undergoing constant change (Fullan, 2016), and teachers require a particular set of skills to reflect on, and respond to the changing landscapes within this complex space. Evidence suggests that teaching is often characterised by high levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Vesely, Saklofske, & Nordstokke, 2014). Furthermore, teachers are currently under increasing pressure in an era of accountability. Processes that are favoured to define or rate the performance of students and their teachers are usually in the form of quantitative measures (Comber, 2013; Dulfer, Polesel, & Rice, 2012). Consequently, high-stakes testing simultaneously drives and limits teachers' work (Zhao, 2012). Keddie (2015) notes that teacher professional judgement is often disregarded. Mockler

and Groundwater-Smith (2017) suggest that in the current era, it is the ease with which something can be measured that often determines its value in education. Concerns have been raised about the toll this situation is reportedly taking on teachers in relation to their resilience and wellbeing (Clarà, 2017; Mansfield, Beltman, Broadley, & Weatherby-Fell, 2016).

The status of teaching, the decreasing applications for teacher education university places and the choice of many to leave the profession are areas of concern for governments, educational institutions and educational researchers (Richardson & Watt, 2016). In Australia, a Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) indicated a need to improve the quality and standing of teaching as a profession as a means of countering the declining interest in university placements within teacher education (Craven et al., 2015). Furthermore, teachers' autonomy in relation to pedagogical and curriculum decisions has been reduced due to the influence of accountability measures. Conklin (2014) suggests that one important consequence of this is a diminished sense of joy and wonder felt by teachers about learning and teaching.

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# Exploring how arts-based reflection can support teachers' resilience & well-being

Teaching and Teacher Education (2018)  
Loraine McKay, Georgina Barton



# Metaphor, collage, photo elicitation, writing

## Using art making to identify the pressures of a challenging profession together

- The reflective and arts-based tools used in this study enabled the teachers to put a name to the challenging elements that they perceived were associated with their roles. (Barton, G. McKay, L. 2018)
- Participants to utilise oral and written modes of communication as well as tangible methods to explore and represent their thinking allowed these teachers to uncover and utilise important emotions related to their work. Furthermore, sharing their reflections as a team, over a period of time, strengthened collegiality among the group and supported their commitment to push through the obstacles they encountered. For each of our teachers, knowing that others were also experiencing similar challenges opened conversations that highlighted an awareness of the core qualities being used to navigate the relentless challenges they encountered on a daily basis. (Barton, G. McKay, L. 2018)
- Using arts-based approaches can enhance the quality and depth of reflection. When teachers engage with arts-based reflection, it has the potential to reveal valuable information about personal and contextual resources on which they can draw when elements of their work become a threat. Providing teachers with strategies and time to be reflective such as opportunities for creating collage with colleagues may help to support teachers' wellbeing and resilience. Finding avenues to build teachers' agency, job satisfaction and sense of belonging may help to retain some teachers who may be at risk of leaving the profession. (Barton, G. McKay, L. 2018)

**CRITICAL REFLECTION AND ARTS-BASED ACTION RESEARCH  
FOR THE EDUCATOR SELF**

**Amber Clarke**  
Yorkville University

**Darryl Bautista**  
University of New Brunswick

**ABSTRACT**

*Research suggests many educators are challenged to incorporate self-reflection into daily routines. Most often, self-reflection is practiced as a cognitive and text-based activity. This first-person action research project explores if alternative methods used for self-reflection achieves a more reflexive practice. In phase one, arts-based approaches, specifically photography and unstructured narrative, were employed as self-reflective tools on the first author's practice. In phase two, principles of autoethnography were used to reflect on and to share the experiences from phase one. The research concludes with recommendations for building a better reflective process and a stronger reflexive practice for adult educators.*

**KEYWORDS:** Autoethnography, critical reflection, photography, reflexive practice, first-person action research

The most common self-reflection formats we have encountered, as both educators and learners, is the practice of recording one's thoughts in a journal, log, or diary. Yet, we know that confining learning to the cognitive domain will not fully engage all learners, or the whole learner. So, it is not surprising that self-reflection often ends up occurring sporadically, usually in response to an extreme (positive or negative) experience or in

# Critical reflection and arts-based action research

**Canadian Journal of Action Research (2017)**  
**Amber Clarke, Darryl Bautista**

# Creative storytelling, photography, autoethnography

## Arts based action research and reflective inquiry for professional and personal growth

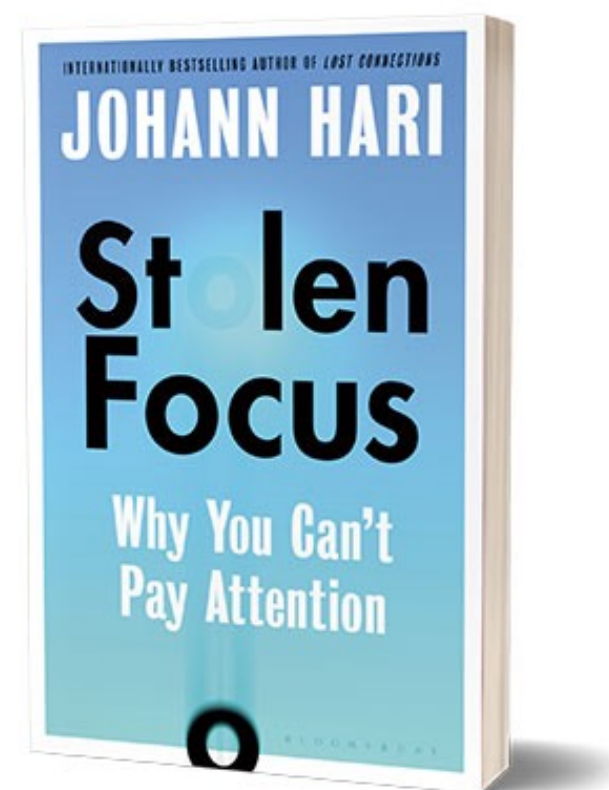
- Research suggests many educators are challenged to incorporate self-reflection into daily routines. Most often, self-reflection is practiced as a cognitive and text-based activity...The most common self-reflection formats we have encountered, as both educators and learners, is the practice of recording one's thoughts in a journal, log, or diary. Yet, we know that confining learning to the cognitive domain will not fully engage all learners, or the whole learner. So, it is not surprising that self-reflection often ends up occurring sporadically, usually in response to an extreme (positive or negative) experience or in response to a peak of emotion, instead of as a tool for short and long-term growth. (Bautista, D. Clarke, A. 2017)
- Exposing educators to first-person action research under the guise of an arts-based approach offers an alternative means to building a more reflective and reflexive practice. As we create deeper senses of self(ves) for our practice we further support our students who have the most to gain from enlightened practitioners. (Bautista, D. Clarke, A. 2017)

# **Benefits of Creative Self Reflection**

**For teachers and students**

- Builds personal resilience
- Supports identification of stressors and self awareness
- Encourages divergent thinking
- Facilitates communication
- Can be used to explore team dynamics
- Create better mind body awareness and manage physical health
- Identify symptoms of burnout or boundary issues before they become serious

# “Cruel Optimism”



(Hari, J. 2022)

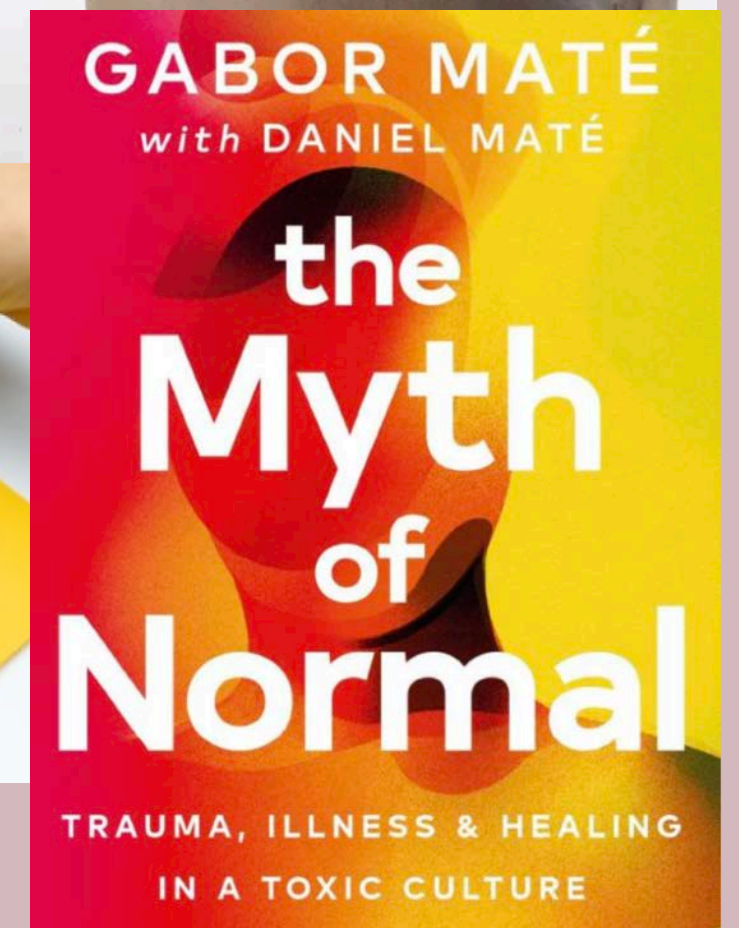
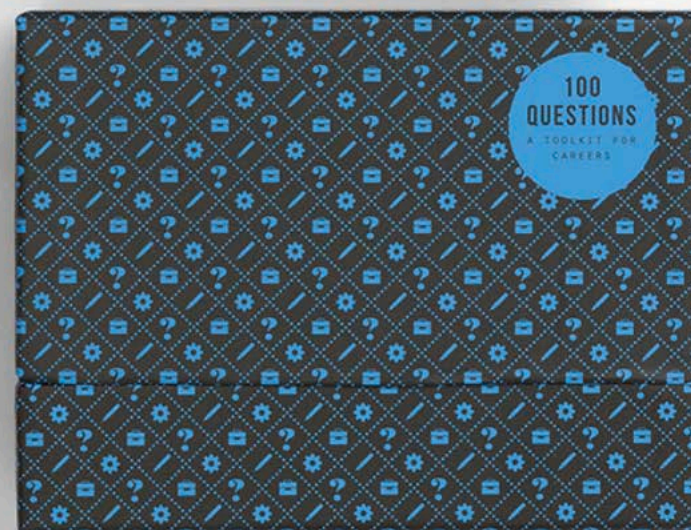
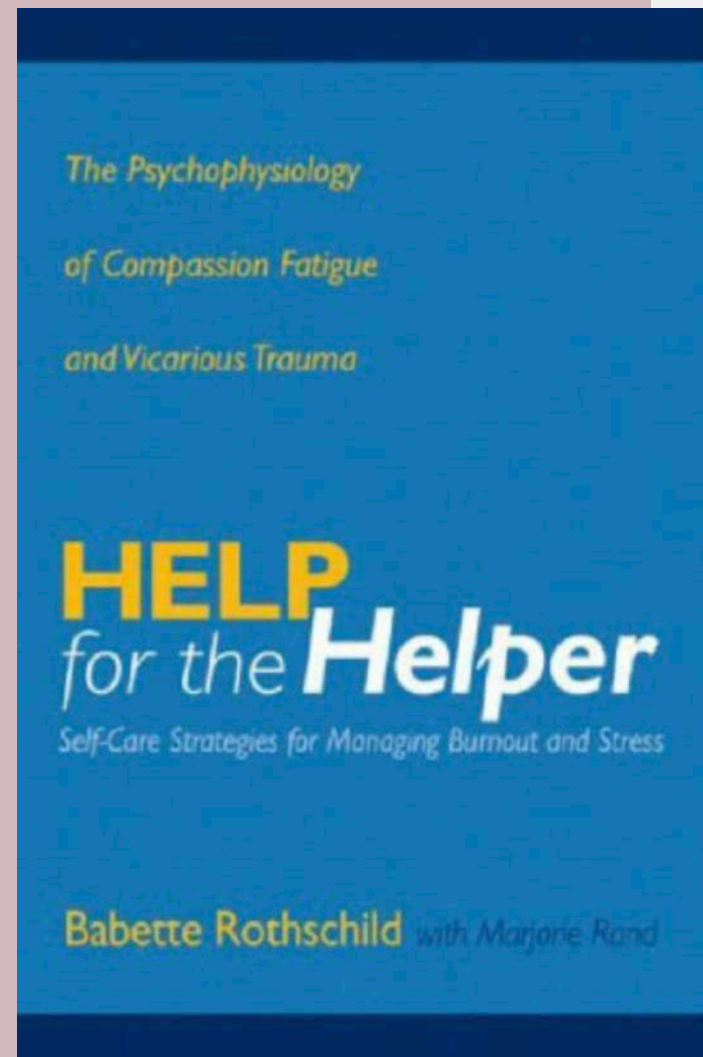
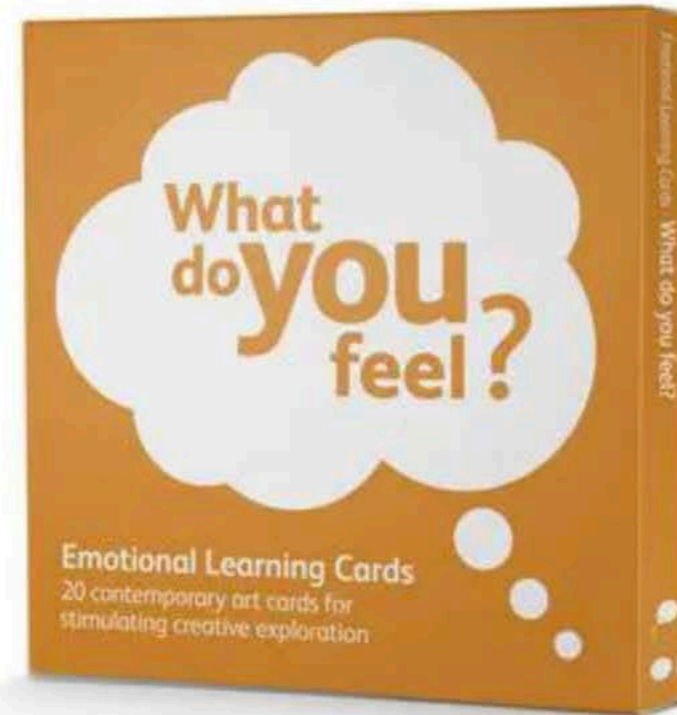
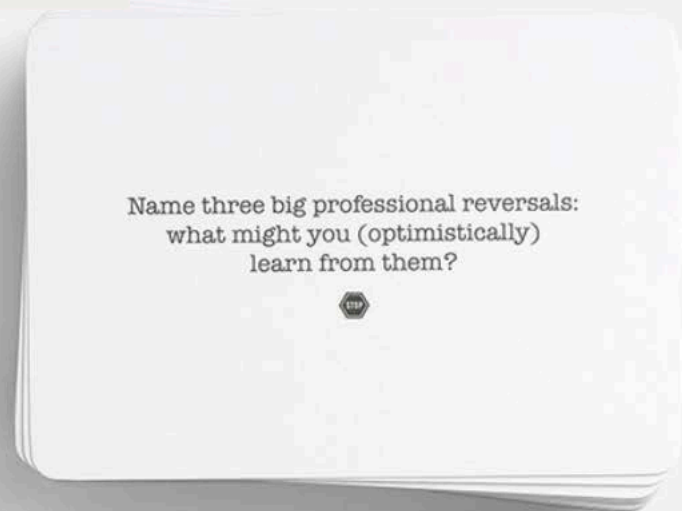
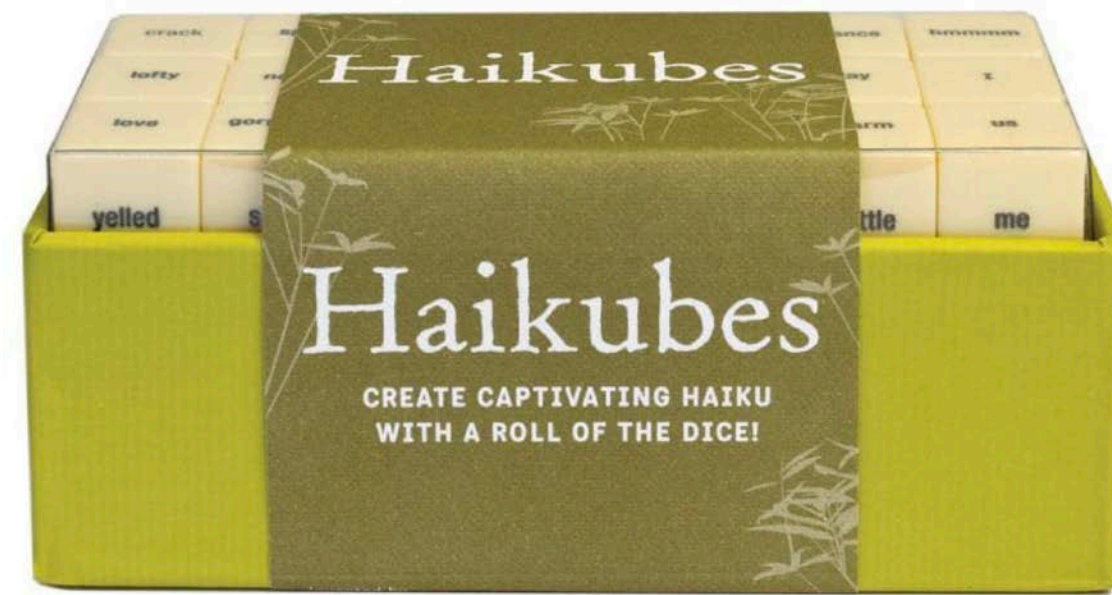
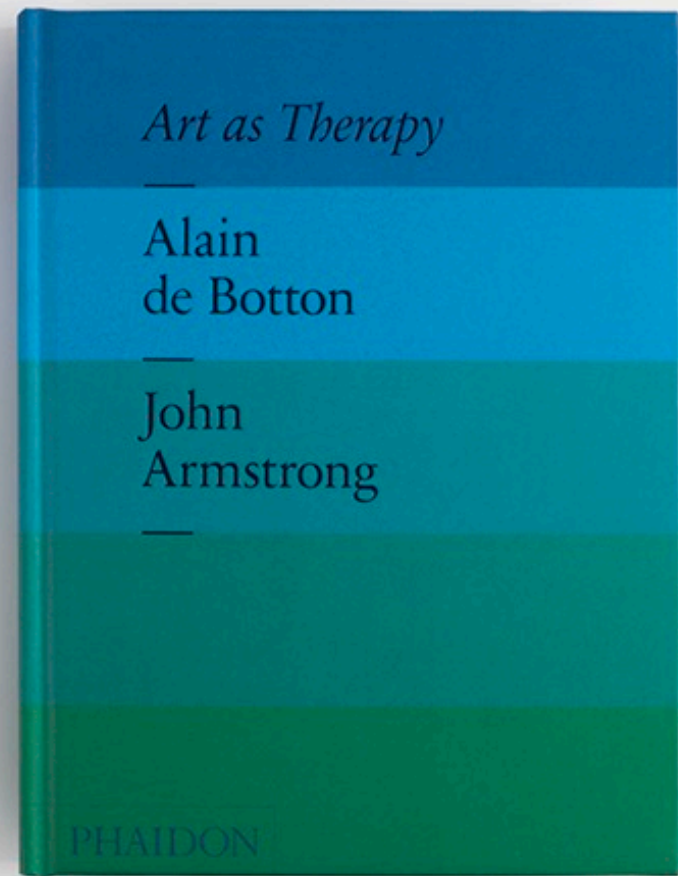
**Suggesting only individuals reflect on their struggles individualises systemic issues.**

**Toxic cultures and systemic patterns cannot be changed by asking for individual changes in isolation.**

**Can cause people to blame themselves for their stress.**

**Individual changes and awareness are an important start, but not enough.**

**Our environments, schedules and leaders need to prioritise wellbeing and listen to causes of burnout and stress.**

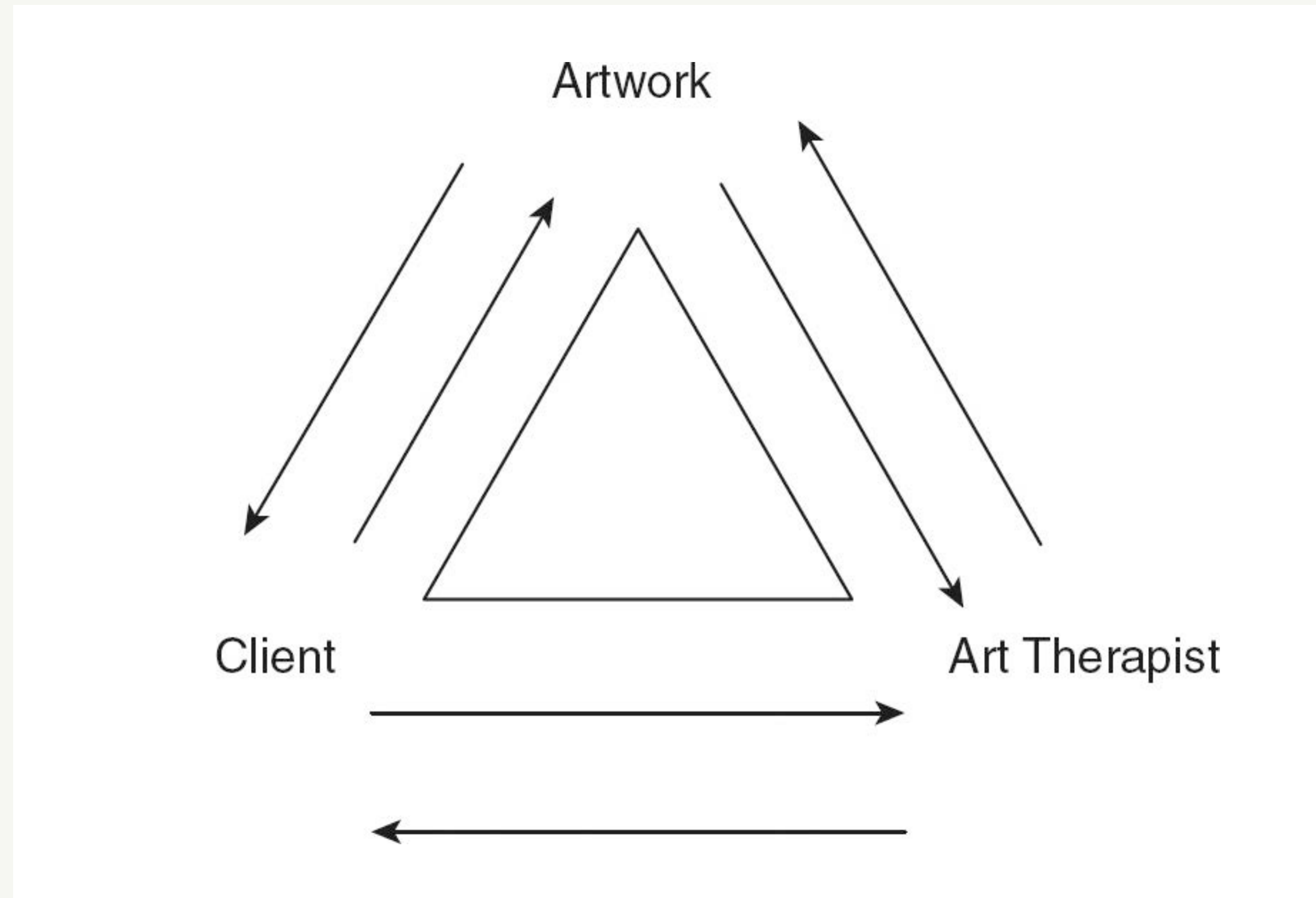


# Have A Go

## Crafting a Life Raft in Small Groups

- Use the play doh to sculpt a life raft
- AND/OR
- Make an object for your life raft. It might be something you love, wish you had more time for, need for your work, or feel is missing in life.
  - If play doh isn't the thing for you, write about your life raft or object instead using some automatic writing.





# Reflecting On Your Experience

The Triangular Relationship in Art Therapy, Joy Schaverien



# Summary

## Creative self reflection techniques can support your wellbeing

- Creative techniques help us to think in different ways
- Play is important
- Reflective practice exercises help us think about boundaries, burnout, and personal resilience
- Puts us in touch with our unconscious, back in touch with our bodies
- Another way to explore challenges and tensions with groups and teams
- “Exposing educators to first-person action research under the guise of an arts-based approach offers an alternative means to building a more reflective and reflexive practice. As we create deeper senses of self(ves) for our practice we further support our students who have the most to gain from enlightened practitioners.” (Bautista, D., Clarke. A., 2017).

# Further Reading

- L. McKay, G. Barton / Teaching and Teacher Education 75 (2018)
- Stolen Focus and Lost Connections, Johann Hari
- Myth of Normal, Gabor Mate
- Joy Schaverien in The Changing Shape of Art Therapy, Andrea Gilroy, Gary McNeilly
- Helping the Helper: the Psychophysiology of Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma, Babette Rothschild
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- Bautista, D. Clarke, A. 2017. Critical reflection and arts based action research for the educator self. Canadian Journal of Action Research, 18:1, 52-70.
- The British Association of Art Therapists; <https://www.baat.org>
- Art Therapy (Creative Therapies in Practice Series) by Dave Edwards
- Health Care Professions Council
- The All Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry and other resources; <https://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/>
- The Arts Council England National Alliance for Arts, Health and Wellbeing; <http://www.artshealthandwellbeing.org.uk>
- Public Health England Arts for Health and Wellbeing Evaluation Framework; <http://www.ae-sop.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/PHE-Aesop-Arts-in-health-evaluation-framework.pdf>
- Aesop Arts Enterprise with a Social Purpose; <http://www.ae-sop.org>