

Interactive Journaling[®], Motivation and Change

Can the use of Interactive Journaling[®] make a difference in an individual's life? Is such a tool useful and effective?

For many years, a number of disciplines have expressed interest in the processes and effects of journaling. It has been studied and utilized in psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, literature, art, medicine, education, and many other fields (Murtha, 2000). The following research studies illustrate journaling's diverse applications:

- Howatt (1999) studied a cognitive behaviorally-based journaling approach. His findings indicate that journaling helps adults differentiate fact from opinion, thus facilitating the learning process as well as the act of self-determination.
- Dayton (2000) employed a journaling-based model as a means of fostering emotional literacy. Through a series of case studies, Dayton explored the pathway a person follows from learning to understand and process a traumatic history to ultimately reconciling with it. Such a journey is made possible through the acquisition of specific esteem-

building and ego-strengthening skills that attend emotional literacy.

- Williams, Frame, and Green (1999) investigated the benefits of journaling within an African-American women's counseling group. Journaling, among other intervention modalities such as art and imagery, was found to enhance feelings of empowerment and self-care in a women's spirituality group.
- Kuiper (1999) studied the effects of self-regulation and journaling on groups of new graduate nurses. Nurses were asked to monitor their use of metacognitive, behavioral and environmental control strategies in journals during a 110-midweek program. The reflective journaling process was found to facilitate increased use of these self-regulatory strategies.
- Negron (1999) documented the use of pictorial journaling in an after-school care setting for developmentally disabled adolescents. The goal of this journaling-based therapeutic intervention was to increase children's use of appropriate anger management techniques.

- Ganim and Fox (1999) developed an art therapy-based process known as visual journaling. This process involves expressing thoughts and feelings through the medium of colors, shapes and images. Self-exploratory questions accompany the pictorial journaling experience in order to facilitate more complete comprehension of meaning.
- McClellan (1998) analyzed the relationship between the Transtheoretical Model of Change, the journaling process and evolution of self-concept. In his hypothesis, journal narratives capture an individual's personal history and provide an opportunity for self-evaluation. Data from journals kept by thirty individuals suggested that journal writing serves as a catalyst for change.

There is significant evidence in the literature to suggest that journaling in general, and structured or interactive journaling specifically, is a powerful tool for permanent and positive lifestyle change.

- Cameron and Nicholls (1998) investigated the effects of self-regulation and self-reflection in structured writing assignments. Their findings indicated that structured journaling exercises improved the health status and stress-related problems of university freshman.

Thus, there is significant evidence in the literature to suggest that journaling in general, and structured journaling specifically, is a powerful tool for permanent and positive lifestyle change. It has application in a wide variety of disciplines and human endeavors. Journaling has evolved from the ritual of maintaining a “daily record of things

thought, seen, and felt”, as Thoreau and many others have done, into an effective technique for personal growth and change (1949). As Adams has suggested (1990), over the centuries the journal has proved to be a flexible tool, used by many as a means of gaining perspective in order to direct the course of their lives. She asserts that journaling is inherently an authentic instrument in which individuals will honestly express themselves.

Ira Progoff, the seminal progenitor of modern therapeutic journaling, stated, “...the basic type of personal journal used throughout history wherever persons have felt the urge to use a journal at all has been an unstructured chronological journal kept either systematically by dates, or written in spontaneously from time to time as suited the temperament of the individual” (p.26). In 1957, Progoff began experimenting with the style and method of journal writing in his clinical practice. Progoff was a Jungian-trained psychotherapist who refined the model of holistic depth psychology in written self-expression. He transformed the conventional use of journaling into a powerful therapeutic intervention. Progoff began implementing a “psychological workbook” with his clients as an adjunct to psychotherapy. He asked people to keep a notebook, or journal, to record events of their inner life. Observing significant benefit with his clients, Progoff developed questions that were more definite and more pointed. As his workbook evolved, he documented a specific process that could be evoked more actively by the use of a journal procedure (Adams, 1990). Progoff identified an “inner movement” in the depths of a person's existence, and determined journaling to be the instrument through which individuals can consciously construct a view into their inner being and cognitively experience the thoughts, feelings, attitudes and behaviors that propel

their existence. By 1965, continuous revisions culminated in the creation of Progoff's Intensive Journal method. He incorporated specific techniques and procedures into his Intensive Journal to create an instrument "...by which persons can discover within themselves the resources they did not know they possessed" (p.10). Progoff's primary purpose in using this journaling method was to establish and strengthen the integrity, autonomy and creativity of the individual. He felt the journal would function appropriately by the individual's own use of it, independent of another person, particularly an authority figure. Progoff subsequently attempted to replace the authority aspect of psychotherapy with a method of working within oneself that would, in his words, "sustain the integrity of the individual" (p.28).

Lively discussion continues in the field of psychotherapy, as well as other fields, about the relative efficacy of therapist-facilitated change versus self-directed change (Miller, 1999). In order to maintain therapeutic integrity in the absence of an authority figure, Progoff developed a structure for his Intensive Journal. This structure required divisions within the journal "...to be of such a nature that they could be integrally connected with exercises and practices and disciplines of various kinds, so that the very process of working in the journal would have the effect of stimulating the development of the person" (Progoff, p.31). The result of Progoff's structured journal is the creation of "Journal Feedback," a method that activates an individual's inner energy to draw the movement of their life forward (p. 43). Journal Feedback is a mirroring effect of an individual's inner movement, and through the use of this method one can connect with the potential of life's inner processes and achieve a greater measure of personal growth.

Kathleen Adams, a psychotherapist and disciple of Progoff, agrees, "Your journal can serve as a magic mirror into which you can gaze and see reflected back to you the various parts of yourself" (1990).

Adams is the founder of The Center for Journal Therapy, and has been conducting workshops on journaling and teaching its therapeutic uses since 1985. She emphasizes journaling's application as a tool for personal growth and self-discovery for individuals who want to learn how to "heal" themselves; and even suggests that journaling is the marriage of writing and psychotherapy (p.7). In 1987, Adams conducted a study on journaling and its effectiveness as a therapeutic tool and discovered:

- 100% of the respondents said that one of the reasons they kept a journal was because, "I can talk to myself on paper and work myself through problems."
- 93% said that their journals were "valuable tools for self-therapy."
- 87% of the responses described the relationship to their journal as a "friendly" or "therapeutic" one (p.17).

A purposeful method of journal writing can amplify and accelerate the therapeutic process.

Adams is an enthusiastic proponent of the "tremendous potential" that journaling has as a therapeutic tool, and emphasizes its value in a program of counseling with a trained professional, and also in a "self-designed" program where individuals guide themselves toward personal growth (1990).

One of the most persuasive arguments for incorporating a journal into therapy is that a purposeful method of journal writing can

amplify and accelerate the therapeutic process. Tristine Rainer, who published one of the first comprehensive “guidebooks” on the effective use of journal writing, states, “In many cases the diary provides a place to sift insights and feelings that occur after the therapeutic hour, integrating and reinforcing the healing process” (p.286). Likewise, Adams has found that clients move through issues more quickly and integrate new knowledge more readily when using a journal in conjunction with a program of therapy. According to Proffoff:

“...one important observation that came from working with the Intensive Journal during the transitional years of its development was that the Journal Feedback effect is cumulative. The reports of persons using the method indicated that, as it generated energy and built a momentum, it accelerated the process of growth and deepened the life-awareness of persons.” (p.33)

By the mid 1980s, the therapeutic reputation of journaling began to uphold itself in the psychiatric community. James W. Pennebaker and his colleagues designed a series of clinical studies to determine if “expressive writing” about traumatic

“...individuals who showed the greatest health improvements were those who wrote about topics that they had actively held back from telling others.”

events could produce a measurable influence on the outcome of an individual’s health in the following four to six months. Pennebaker writes in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, “In recent years, evidence has accumulated indicating that not disclosing extremely personal and traumatic experiences to others over a long

period of time may be related to disease processes” (1986). Participants in the studies who were asked to write about their feelings associated with a traumatic event that occurred in their life, for 15-20 minutes each night for three to four consecutive nights (depending on the study), showed significantly greater increases in overall health in the following four to six months than those participants who were asked to write about “trivial” things. Expressive writing is an intense form of journal therapy that allows individuals to resolve psychological issues that have been impeding their personal growth and health. Expressive writing is especially therapeutic when used by individuals who have intentionally refrained from addressing their experience. Pennebaker notes that studies like these indicate the effectiveness of using writing as a general “preventive therapy.” He concludes:

“Within psychology, it has been generally accepted that stress can increase the incidence of illness. We have proposed that one form of stress is associated with the failure to confront traumatic experience. Specifically, the inhibition or active holding back of thoughts, emotions, or behaviors is associated with physical work that, over time, can become manifested in disease.... Individuals who are forced to confront upsetting experiences in their lives show improvements in physical health relative to control subjects. More important, in our study the individuals who showed the greatest health improvements were those who wrote about topics that they had actively held back from telling others.” (1988, p.244)

The *Journal of the American Medical Association* recently published a study conducted by Joshua M. Smyth and

colleagues that uses the expressive writing exercises developed in Pennebaker's studies to examine the effects this procedure has on the disease status of patients with chronic asthma or rheumatoid arthritis. This study differs from the others in that it measures the effects of expressive writing therapy in subjects who have an existing medical condition. In contrast, Pennebaker's studies were conducted with "healthy" subjects. Similarly, in Smyth's study, participants were asked to write for 20 minutes each day for three consecutive days. Participants in the experimental group were asked to write about "the most stressful experience" they had ever undergone, while participants in the control group were asked to "describe their plans for the day" (Smyth, p.1305). The results of this study are impressive: 47.1% of the experimental patients met the criteria for "clinically relevant" health improvement, whereas only 24.3% of the control patients met the same criteria (p.1308). According to Smyth, this study reveals that expressive writing about an emotionally stressful experience is an effective "psychological exercise" that can reduce the symptoms of these two chronic diseases (p.1309). In short, journal therapy, in the form of expressive writing, has proven in several studies to be a useful tool in relieving psychological distress and improving the health of its users. In Freudian terms, expressive writing therapy is "cathartic" in the sense that the resolution of an emotionally distressful experience has direct benefits on the physiological health of an individual. Lastly, in regard to Smyth's study, David Spiegel makes an insightful comment on "journaling" and its collaborative opportunities with clinical medicine: "...the authors have provided evidence that medical treatment is more effective when standard pharmacological intervention is combined with the management of emotional distress" (1999, p.1329).

Journal therapy continues to proliferate, proving its value in a diversity of programs. For example, Cook County Jail in Chicago has implemented an Expressive Therapy Program that includes a "Creative Journaling Project." Through journaling, the project "...encourages inmates to express their ideas and emotions through creative writing" (Vitucci, p.13). An Expressive Arts Therapist at the facility states, "Writing offers reflection on ideas and processing of emotions within a safe, structured framework" (Vitucci, p.13). Journal therapy offers inmates the opportunity to clarify and intensify the issues that are prevalent in their course of recovery.

For over a decade, The Change Companies® has incorporated *Interactive Journaling*® into journals designed to assist individuals in making positive, permanent lifestyle change. The consumers of Interactive Journaling® range from substance abuse recovery centers to therapeutic communities within prison facilities. *Interactive Journaling*® is an experiential writing

Interactive Journaling® is an experiential writing process that motivates and guides participants toward responsible lifestyle change.

process that motivates and guides participants toward responsible lifestyle change. This method of journal therapy encourages individuals to use their own unique experiences to promote self-reevaluation and encourage behavioral change. The process is based on experiential learning, defined as "...creating and transforming experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses" (Jarvis *et al*, p.46). The end users of Interactive Journals

internalize knowledge, skills, and values that are relevant to the behavior they wish to change, by linking them with a meaningful event that has occurred in their own life. Personal responsibility for lifestyle change is established in this manner, and the journal becomes an instrument of structure and guidance.

Furthermore, Interactive Journals incorporate the Prochaska Transtheretical Model of Change, and feature 16 techniques that facilitate self-change based on the end user's current aptitude for change. Prochaska states, "Any activity that you initiate to help modify your thinking, feeling, or behavior is a change process" (Prochaska *et al*, p.25). Interactive Journals provide the end user with an appropriate change process for an identified stage of change. Prochaska writes, "The processes of change are stage-dependent..." (p.64). A real strength of Interactive Journaling® is that it takes the guesswork out of matching an appropriate change process with a stage of change, an important requirement that many end users may either be unaware of or confused by. Indeed, the research conducted by Prochaska and his colleagues demonstrates that a connection exists between clients who drop out of therapy and mismatched stages and processes, providing evidence for the need to correctly match therapeutic treatments with the stages of change clients are in (p.58).

Interactive Journaling® also employs cognitive-behavioral techniques that encourage individuals to become proactive in the therapeutic process. For example open-ended questions stimulate individuals' participation in their personal journey of behavioral change. "Cognitive-behavioral therapists use skillful questioning, the Socratic method, to promote cognitive and behavioral changes. Such questioning allows a client to discover answers for himself or herself which leads to self-exploration and

self-awareness" (Sapp, p.253). *Interactive Journaling*® incorporates a number of therapeutic components and strategies derived from the most effective techniques from the major disciplines of psychotherapy. Rational Emotive Therapy (Albert Ellis) and Motivational Interviewing (William R. Miller) are two examples.

The Change Companies® have conducted a series of "corporate feedback studies" to determine the extent to which end users of their materials value journal therapy. The following results represent a composite of these studies that include responses from over 2,700 users of Interactive Journals:

- 88% agree "The Journal played an important role in my program."
- 74% agree "My Journal helps me stay clean and sober today."
- 88% agree "I share my honest feelings in my Journal."
- 92% agree "The Journal helps me learn more about myself."

The Change Companies® estimates that more than six million participants "...have counted on this proven method of experiential learning."

Convincingly, journal writing, in its various methods, has diverse and beneficial applications as a therapeutic tool. In closing, Pennebaker comments on the cost-effectiveness of journal writing as a form of therapy:

"Writing is tremendously cost-effective, allows people to confront traumas at their own rates, and encourages them to devise their own meaning and solutions to their problems. Above all, writing may provide an alternative form of preventive therapy that can be valuable for individuals who otherwise would not enter therapy." (1988, p.245)

References

- Adams, Kathleen. (1990). *Journal to the self: Twenty-two paths to personal growth*. New York: Warner Books, Inc.
- Cameron, L. & Nicholls, G. (1998). Expression of stressful experiences through writing: Effects of a self-regulation manipulation for pessimists and optimists. *Health Psychology, 17* (1), 84-92.
- Dayton, T. (2000). *Trauma and addiction: Ending the cycle of pain through emotional literacy*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc.
- Ganim, B. & Fox, S. (1999). *Visual journaling: Going deeper than words*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books/The Theosophical Publishing House.
- Howatt, W. A. (1999). Journaling to self-evaluation: A tool for adult learners. *International Journal of Reality Therapy, 18* (2), 32-34.
- Jarvis, P., Holford, J., & Griffin, C. (1998). *The theory and practice of learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing Inc.
- Kuiper, R. (1999). The effect of prompted self-regulated learning strategies in a clinical nursing preceptorship. *Dissertation Abstracts International:Section B:The Sciences and Engineering, 60* (4-B), 1532.
- McClellan, M. L., Schneider, M. F., & Perney, J. (1998). Rating (life task action) change in journal excerpts and narratives using Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross's Five Stages of Change. *Journal of Individual Psychology, 54* (4), 546-559.
- Miller, S. (1999). *What works in psychotherapy*. Chicago, IL: The Institute for the Study of Change. URL: talkingcure.com.
- Murtha, T. S. (2000). *Interactive journaling and the adult learner*. Unpublished paper, doctoral program, professional psychology, Walden University.
- Negron, C. (1999). Extended therapeutic enhancement project: A program design. *Dissertation Abstracts International:Section B:The Sciences and Engineering, 60* (4-B), 1865.
- Pennebaker, J. W. & Klihr Beall, S. (1986). Confronting a traumatic event: Toward an understanding of inhibition and disease. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 95*, 274-281.
- Pennebaker, J. W., Kiecolt-Glaser, J.K., & Glaser, R. (1988). Disclosure of traumas and immune function: Health implications for psychotherapy. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 56*, 239-245.
- Prochaska, J. O., Norcross, J. C., & DiClemente, C. C. (1994). *Changing for good*. New York: Avon Books, Inc.

Progoff, I. (1975). *At a journal workshop*. New York: Dialogue House Library.

Rainer, T. (1978). *The new diary: How to use a journal for self-guidance and expanded creativity*. Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, Inc.

Spiegel, D. (1999). Healing words: Emotional expression and disease outcome. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 281, 1328-1329.

Smyth, J. M., Stone, A. A., Hurewitz, A., & Kaell, A. (1999). Effects of writing about stressful experiences on symptom reduction in patients with asthma or rheumatoid arthritis: A randomized trial. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 281, 1304-1309.

Thoreau, H. D. (1949). *Journal*. Eds. Torrey, B. & Allen, F. H. Vol. 1. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Vitucci, Nancy. (1999). Art therapy reduces inmate isolation, improves self image. *CorrectCare*, 13 (4), 1,7,13.

Williams, C. B, Frame, M. W., & Green, E. (1999). Counseling groups for African American women: A focus on spirituality. *Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 24 (3), 260-273.

For more information contact:

The Change Companies®

Colorado office:

6795 East Tennessee Ave, #250
Denver, CO 80224
(888) 831-0046

Nevada office:

5221 Sigstrom Drive
Carson City, NV 89706
(888) 889-8866

www.changecompanies.net