

Creative Writing as a Response to Bullying

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Abstract

Bullying remains a prevalent issue within schools worldwide, with severe emotional and psychological consequences for victims. This study examines the role of creative writing as a coping mechanism for students affected by bullying, aiming to explore its therapeutic potential in emotional healing, resilience-building, and personal empowerment. Through qualitative research, ten Grade 11 students who had experienced various forms of bullying participated in semi-structured interviews and provided writing samples to investigate how creative writing could aid in processing trauma and rebuilding self-worth. The findings reveal that creative writing helped students reclaim their voice, process their emotions, and find a safe space for self-expression, ultimately fostering emotional resilience and contributing to peace education objectives. This study emphasizes the significance of integrating creative writing into anti-bullying and peace education programs to help students cope with the aftermath of bullying.

Keywords: Creative Writing, Anti-bullying, Peace Education

INTRODUCTION

Bullying remains a pervasive issue in schools worldwide, significantly affecting students' emotional well-being and academic performance. The problem of bullying, in its various forms such as physical, verbal, and cyberbullying, is linked to a range of detrimental outcomes, including psychological distress, anxiety, depression, and poor academic achievement. The emotional and psychological scars left on victims are not always adequately addressed (World Health Organization, 2020). This gap in focus creates a need for strategies that support students in coping with the emotional trauma resulting from bullying. This study seeks to answer the question: How can creative writing help students to cope with bullying? Creative writing, as an expressive and reflective activity, has shown promise as a potential coping mechanism for individuals affected by trauma (Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005).

The deficiency in the existing literature lies in the limited exploration of creative writing as a targeted intervention for victims of bullying. While studies have demonstrated the benefits of creative writing for trauma survivors, they often do not specifically address bullying-related trauma or the unique needs of adolescent students. Furthermore, existing research does not adequately explore how creative writing can complement peace education frameworks aimed at fostering emotional intelligence and empathy in students (Harris, 2004).

This study is significant for educators, school counselors, and researchers interested in both bullying prevention and emotional resilience-building among students. For educators, this research offers insights into alternative interventions that promote emotional healing. School counselors can benefit from understanding how creative writing can be integrated into therapeutic practices for students who experience bullying.

Furthermore, policymakers and education leaders can use this research to design programs that not only address bullying behavior but also support the emotional recovery of victims.

The purpose of this study was to explore how creative writing helped students cope with the emotional consequences of bullying. Specifically, it aimed to understand the role of creative writing in emotional healing, resilience-building, and personal empowerment. By investigating the experiences of ten Grade 11 students who have used creative writing as a coping tool, this study offered valuable insights into the therapeutic potential of creative writing for victims of bullying and its alignment with peace education objectives. Peace education enhances skills which include collaboration, imagination or creativity, critical thinking skills, active dialogue, and communication (Jabor, 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying

Bullying is a serious issue in educational settings, defined as intentional, repeated aggressive behavior involving a power imbalance between the bully and the victim. According to Olweus (2013), bullying is a pervasive issue that occurs in various forms, including physical, verbal, and social exclusion. The key characteristic of bullying is the repetition of harmful behavior over time, making the victim feel helpless and isolated. Patchin and Hinduja (2020) highlight the growing concern of cyberbullying, which occurs through digital platforms, exacerbating the problem by allowing bullying to take place beyond the school environment. They noted that cyberbullying is particularly harmful because it can happen at any time and may be more difficult for victims to escape from. Smith et al. (2019) broaden the understanding of bullying by considering relational aggression, where bullying occurs through social exclusion or manipulation rather than physical harm. This form of bullying, although less visible, is equally damaging to the emotional well-being of victims. Furthermore, Rigby (2000) emphasizes the role of bystanders in bullying situations, arguing that the social context in which bullying occurs can either enable or discourage such behavior. By focusing on bystander's behavior, Rigby suggests that bullying is not just an issue of individual actions but a broader social problem. Finally, Juvonen and Graham (2014) address the contextual factors influencing bullying within the school environment. They argue that bullying is not only shaped by individual behavior but is influenced by peer group norms and the broader school climate. Their work suggests that addressing bullying requires a comprehensive approach that includes the involvement of peers and the creation of a positive school culture.

Impacts of Bullying

The impact of bullying on victims is profound and far-reaching. Hawker and Boulton (2000) conducted a comprehensive review of studies on the psychological effects of bullying and found that victims are at a higher risk for developing mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. These effects can persist long after the bullying has stopped, creating a lasting emotional burden for victims. Similarly, Sutton and Smith (2020) emphasize the academic consequences of bullying, noting that victims often struggle with concentration, school attendance, and academic achievement due to the emotional distress caused by bullying.

Kowalski et al. (2014) further explored the physical and psychological toll of bullying, highlighting the increased risk of somatic complaints, such as headaches and sleep disturbances, among bullying victims. These findings suggest that the consequences of bullying extend beyond mental health and can negatively affect the overall well-being of victims. Wright et al. (2021) conducted a longitudinal study that demonstrated the lasting psychological effects of bullying, including the development of post-traumatic

stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms in severe cases. This research underscores the need for early intervention to address the long-term effects of bullying. Moreover, Juvonen and Graham (2014) investigated the social repercussions of bullying, focusing on the difficulty victims face in building relationships and trusting others. They argued that the social scars left by bullying can interfere with the development of healthy, supportive social networks, leading to lifelong challenges in forming meaningful relationships.

Creative Writing

Creative writing, which encompasses various forms of self-expression such as fiction, poetry, and personal narratives, has gained recognition as a therapeutic tool for emotional processing. Pennebaker (2004) first proposed that expressive writing, including creative writing, can significantly improve psychological well-being by allowing individuals to express and process emotions related to traumatic experiences. This form of writing provides an outlet for individuals to externalize their feelings and create a sense of distance from the pain they have experienced. Research conducted by Pennebaker and Chung (2011) supports this, showing that expressive writing leads to reductions in stress, anxiety, and depression by helping individuals make sense of their emotions and integrate them into a coherent narrative. Frattaroli (2020) builds on this idea, noting that expressive writing can be particularly beneficial for those who have experienced trauma, including bullying. By writing about their experiences, individuals are able to reclaim their narrative and gain a sense of control over their emotions. Lepore et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of expressive writing interventions, finding that writing about personal experiences leads to significant improvements in mental health, including reductions in anxiety and depression. Further research by Baikie and Wilhelm (2005) emphasizes the emotional benefits of creative writing, suggesting that it promotes emotional regulation and allows individuals to structure and organize their thoughts in a therapeutic way. This process can facilitate healing by helping individuals reflect on their experiences in a meaningful way. Lastly, Graham and Harris (2013) explore the educational benefits of creative writing, noting that it helps students develop both cognitive and emotional skills. Through writing, students not only improve their literacy but also foster personal growth by providing them with a safe space for self-expression. This aspect of creative writing is crucial in supporting the emotional resilience of students, particularly those who have faced bullying.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This research employed a qualitative design to explore how creative writing helps students cope with bullying. Given the subjective nature of emotional experiences, a qualitative approach was chosen to allow participants to express their personal narratives in their own words. Creswell (1994) defines qualitative design as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting. Semi-structured interviews and writing samples were the primary data collection methods. The study aimed to capture rich, descriptive insights into the emotional experiences of students who had been bullied and used creative writing as a coping strategy. Through this design, the study seeks to understand the personal and emotional processes that creative writing facilitates in dealing with bullying.

Participants

The study focused on 10 Grade 11 students from a local public high school, each of whom had experienced bullying in some form (physical, verbal, or cyberbullying) and had engaged in creative writing as a response to these experiences. The participants were selected based on their willingness to share personal

accounts of their bullying experiences and their use of creative writing to cope with these events. The inclusion criteria required participants to have been involved in at least one instance of bullying and to have used creative writing (e.g., journaling, poetry, or short stories) as a means of self-expression or emotional processing.

The sample was diverse in terms of gender, socio-economic background, and type of bullying experienced. Of the 10 participants, six were female and four were male. The students ranged in age from 16 to 17 years old and had been victims of bullying over the past 1-3 years. The bullying they experienced included physical aggression (e.g., being pushed, hit), verbal bullying (e.g., name-calling, teasing), and cyberbullying (e.g., mean comments on social media, online harassment).

Data Collection Methods

The data for this study were collected through two primary methods: semi-structured interviews and writing samples.

- **Semi-structured Interviews:** Each participant participated in an in-depth, one-on-one interview lasting approximately 10 to 30 minutes. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, with open-ended questions that allowed participants to share their experiences with bullying, the impact it had on their emotional well-being, and how creative writing helped them cope. The interview questions were designed to explore both the emotional impact of bullying and the therapeutic role of writing. Key questions included:

- Have you experienced being bullied, and what was the nature of that bullying?
- How did you feel during and after the bullying events?
- Have you used creative writing as a way to cope with bullying? If yes, how?
- What specific forms of creative writing (journaling, poetry, etc.) have you used?

To ensure that participants' rights and well-being were protected throughout the research process, a number of key ethical protocols were followed.

Before participating in the study, informed consent was obtained from all participants. As the participants were minors, consent was also sought from their parents or legal guardians. This dual consent process ensured that both the students and their guardians understood the purpose of the study, the potential risks, and the voluntary nature of participation.

All participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential. To protect their privacy, pseudonyms were used when reporting findings, and no personal identifying information was disclosed in the study. Furthermore, participants were explicitly informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences, ensuring their autonomy and freedom of choice throughout the process.

Given the emotional sensitivity of the topic, special care was taken to ensure that participants felt safe and supported. The nature of bullying can evoke strong emotions, and it was anticipated that discussing personal experiences might be distressing for some participants. To mitigate any potential distress, the researcher ensured that the school guidance counselor was present during both the interviews and the writing activities. This support provided a professional resource for participants should they feel overwhelmed during the process.

The participants selected for the study were those identified by the guidance counselor as students who had experienced bullying. The guidance counselor's involvement in the participant selection process ensured that the students included in the study had a history of being bullied, which was necessary to address the research question effectively. By working with the guidance counselor, the study aimed to

include students who would benefit from reflecting on and expressing their experiences through creative writing, while also ensuring that they had access to appropriate support.

In addition to the presence of the guidance counselor, participants were informed about the availability of counseling services if they found the interview or writing process distressing. This was done to ensure that participants had access to appropriate emotional support, should they need it. All these measures were taken to ensure that the study was conducted in an ethically responsible and supportive manner, prioritizing the well-being of participants at every stage of the research.

Data analysis

The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis, a technique that involves identifying patterns, themes, and meanings within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility in identifying key themes in interview responses while ensuring alignment with the research question.

The analysis process began with verbatim transcription of all interview recordings. After transcribing, the data were reviewed multiple times to familiarize the researcher with the content. Next, initial codes were generated to capture significant segments of data. These codes were subsequently organized into broader themes that directly related to the research question, specifically addressing the emotional impact of bullying, the role of creative writing in coping, and the therapeutic benefits of creative expression.

The analysis concentrated on how participants utilized writing to process their trauma and gain deeper insights into their experiences. This was further supported by reviewing the students' reflections on their writing, shared during the interviews.

Ultimately, the thematic findings from the interviews were synthesized to offer a comprehensive understanding of how creative writing assisted students in coping with bullying. The themes identified provided valuable insights into this process.

RESULTS

Finding Voice Through Writing: Creating a safe space

Creative writing serves as a transformative tool for reclaiming the voice of participants after experiencing bullying. This act of writing allowed them to break free from the silence imposed by their bullies and express their unique perspectives, emotions, and experiences. Student 1 explained, "Writing gave me the voice I didn't have in real life. It allowed me to speak my truth without fear of ridicule." Student 4 also shared, "Writing helped me put the pieces of my experiences together. It made me sense of the chaos inside my head, and for the first time, I felt like I wasn't just a victim."

Bullying had left participants feeling voiceless and powerless, however, creative writing provided a safe space where they could express themselves without fear or judgement. Writing allowed participants to express their feelings and regain their sense of self. Student 10 shared, "Through writing, I could put a voice to my hurt, and doing so, I felt a sense of release. It made me feel more powerful than I ever felt when I was bullied." "Writing gave me a sense of clarity. It was like everything that had been bottled up inside me could finally spill out unto the page; by doing so, I found a sense of peace.", student 9 added.

Moreover, the safety and privacy offered by creative writing enabled participants to reclaim their narrative and challenge the power dynamics of bullying. They found strength in expressing their perspective, giving voice to their experiences and regaining a sense of control over their emotions and their stories. Student 10 answered, "I've used writing to release all the things I couldn't say to anyone. It became a safe space where I could just be honest, without fear of being hurt again." Student 6 added, "Writing didn't fix

everything, but it helped me find peace with the pain. It was a way of coming to terms with my past and giving myself permission to heal.”. Student 7 also emphasized, “It allowed me to feel seen. When the world made me feel invisible, my words on paper were the proof that I existed and that my feelings matter. Writing was part of my healing journey. It allowed me to release my pain without fear of judgement, and it gave me a sense of control I had lost in my real life.”. Ultimately, the safe space offered by creative writing gave participants the opportunity to process their traumatic experiences, confront their emotions, and begin the journey of healing. Writing provided comfort and relief as they released pent-up emotions, allowed them to navigate a path toward resilience, and fostered a sense of self-acceptance. It became a vital space for emotional exploration and recovery, enabling them to turn their pain into a source of strength. Through the act of writing, they found not only release but also the beginnings of emotional restoration and empowerment.

Creative writing emerged as a powerful tool for participants who had experienced bullying, offering them a transformative way to reclaim their voice and sense of identity. It allowed them to break free from the silence imposed by their tormentors, giving them a private and safe space to express their emotions, thoughts, and experiences without fear of judgment or ridicule. For many, writing became a means of empowerment, helping them process their trauma, regain control over their emotions, and challenge the power dynamics of bullying. Through writing, participants found clarity and release, with many reporting a sense of emotional liberation and healing. It allowed them to confront their pain and begin the journey of self-acceptance. As they expressed their feelings, they not only reasserted their agency but also felt seen and validated in a way that they hadn’t before. Writing offered comfort and a pathway to resilience, becoming a vital part of their healing process by giving them the freedom to reclaim their narrative and, ultimately, their sense of self.

Creative Writing: A Healing Activity

Creative writing served as a profound source of emotional healing for participants, offering them an opportunity to process the trauma of bullying in a way that was both deeply personal and cathartic. As a form of self-expression, writing allowed them to articulate the complex emotions they were experiencing, many of which they might have found difficult or impossible to express in conversations. This allowed participants to reflect on their pain and make sense of it, ultimately empowering them to take control of their emotional healing. Writing became not just a method of coping, but a powerful tool for emotional release, self-reflection, and reclaiming agency over their experiences.

The therapeutic benefits of creative writing are reflected in the participants' experiences. Student 3’s statement, “Creative writing was one of the only things that helped me cope. I used journaling to express what I couldn’t speak, and it became a form of therapy.” highlights the crucial role that journaling played in giving them a voice where they previously felt silenced. This aligns with the idea that bullying can often silence victims, making it difficult for them to communicate their feelings or ask for help. Through writing, participants were able to break that silence and begin processing the emotions that had built up over time. The act of journaling became a refuge—a space where they could freely express themselves without fear of judgment or misunderstanding. This is further emphasized by their statement, “I used journaling to record my thoughts. It felt like the only place I could be real with myself without fear of being judged or rejected.”.

For many students, the act of writing provided them with the emotional space to understand and untangle the complex emotions they experienced as a result of bullying. The writing process became a means of clarity, where thoughts that had been scattered and overwhelming could be organized into something

coherent. As Student 5 described, “It was a slow healing process, but writing was like a gentle balm to my wounded soul. Every time I wrote, I could feel the burden lifting, little by little.”. This metaphor of writing as a “gentle balm” speaks to the gradual, yet consistent healing that participants experienced through creative expression. Just as a balm soothes a physical wound over time, writing helped soothe emotional wounds, providing comfort and allowing the pain to lessen bit by bit.

Writing also allowed participants to confront their inner turmoil, offering them the opportunity to make sense of their past experiences. Student 4 shared, “Writing helped me put the pieces of my experiences together. It made sense of the chaos inside my head, and for the first time, I felt like I wasn’t just a victim.”. This illustrates how writing provided participants with a structured way to navigate their emotions. Bullying often leaves its victims feeling overwhelmed by confusion, shame, or anger, but writing helped bring order to those emotions. By putting their experiences into words, they could begin to understand and process what had happened, which gave them a sense of control and empowerment over their own stories. Writing, in this sense, became an act of reclaiming their identity.

In addition to providing emotional relief, writing also served as a way to process and integrate both the negative and positive aspects of their experiences. As Student 2 expressed, “Writing allowed me to process everything – good and bad. It helped me understand my emotions, and in doing so, it gave me the power to start healing.”. This highlights the dual nature of the writing process: not only did it allow them to confront the painful aspects of bullying, but it also gave them a chance to reflect on the positive aspects of their lives, their personal growth, and their resilience. By addressing both the “good” and the “bad,” writing helped participants achieve a sense of balance and emotional clarity, allowing them to view themselves as whole individuals rather than solely defined by their trauma.

Moreover, writing allowed participants to take control of their narratives, transforming their bullying experiences from something that defined them into a story they could rewrite. Student 10 shared, “Writing gave me a chance to reclaim my story, to rewrite it, and in doing so, it became a key part of my emotional healing.”. This process of “rewriting” their experiences was crucial for many participants, as bullying often causes individuals to feel powerless or invisible. Through writing, they were able to shift from being passive recipients of their circumstances to active authors of their own narratives. This act of rewriting became an essential part of their healing journey, allowing them to regain agency and reframe their stories on their own terms.

Creative writing also played an essential role in building coping mechanisms that would serve participants beyond the healing process. Writing provided a structured space for reflection and self-exploration, helping participants develop a deeper understanding of their emotions, thoughts, and reactions. This emotional awareness helped them manage future challenges, including new instances of bullying or difficult situations. Writing gave them tools for emotional resilience, helping them create a solid foundation for emotional well-being and growth.

The gradual nature of the healing process through writing is important to note. While writing may not have instantly erased the pain caused by bullying, it provided a steady, supportive framework for emotional recovery. Writing became an ongoing journey that allowed participants to heal at their own pace, as Student 5’s comment about the gradual lifting of their burdens suggests. Writing acted as a consistent and reliable outlet for emotional release, providing comfort during times of emotional distress.

Creative writing was a multifaceted tool for emotional healing, allowing participants to express themselves, process their emotions, and regain control over their stories. The therapeutic process of writing helped them reclaim their voices, rebuild their sense of self, and develop resilience. As they articulated

their pain, they found strength in their words and began to rewrite their futures. Writing served as a powerful catalyst for healing, enabling participants to transform their experiences of victimhood into stories of empowerment and recovery.

Understanding bullying for a better future

Bullying can leave deep emotional scars, shattering self-esteem and silencing voices. The pain of being targeted and marginalized can result in long-lasting feelings of worthlessness and isolation. However, creative writing has emerged as a powerful tool for healing, offering a way to process these traumatic experiences and rebuild one's sense of self. Many participants shared how writing became a means of reflection and self-discovery, helping them identify patterns in their bullying experiences. Through their writing, they were able to recognize the emotional triggers, the responses they had, and the profound impact bullying had on their self-esteem. This process of reflection and analysis allowed them not only to make sense of the past but also to understand their own vulnerabilities and strengths, ultimately giving them the tools to heal and move forward.

As Student 8 expressed, "Writing helps me find a new perspective on my experiences. It wasn't about forgetting what happened, but about learning to move forward, stronger than before." Writing gave participants the opportunity to reframe their experiences, taking painful memories and transforming them into personal lessons of growth. The act of putting their emotions on paper enabled them to separate themselves from their trauma and view it from a distance, giving them a clearer understanding of how they had been affected. Through this, they began to understand that while they couldn't change what had happened, they had the power to shape how they responded and to move toward a healthier future.

Similarly, Student 4 added, "Writing helped me see that while the bullying happened, it doesn't have to define who I am or who I will become. It gave me hope that the future could be different." This insight was a turning point for many participants, as writing allowed them to gain control over the narrative of their lives. Instead of letting bullying define them, they were able to take ownership of their story and see themselves as resilient, capable individuals who could rebuild their confidence and move beyond the hurtful experiences of the past.

The process of making sense of their experiences through writing empowered participants to envision a brighter future. It provided them with a tool for healing and personal growth, enabling them to reflect on their pain while simultaneously cultivating hope and optimism for what lay ahead. Writing became not only an outlet for emotional release but also a powerful way to set personal goals and develop coping mechanisms for dealing with the challenges they faced. For many, writing helped them reconnect with their sense of purpose, reminding them of their inner strength and capacity for resilience.

As Student 2 shared, "Writing gave me a way to cope with the aftermath, to process the emotions that otherwise would've stayed trapped inside." This quote highlights the liberating power of writing, as it gave participants an opportunity to release pent-up emotions that may have otherwise festered in silence. Through their written words, they found a safe space to explore their feelings, vent their frustrations, and express their pain. This emotional release was a key step in healing, allowing them to let go of the heavy burden they had carried for so long.

In addition to providing emotional relief, writing helped participants to develop coping strategies that allowed them to better navigate their feelings and respond to future challenges. Writing became a tool for emotional regulation, helping them process complex feelings of anger, sadness, and confusion in a constructive way. As they wrote, they also gained a sense of hope for the future, developing a new outlook on their lives and relationships. Through the act of reflecting on their experiences, they could envision a

future that was not constrained by the bullying they had endured but instead filled with potential for personal growth and healing.

Through creative writing, participants were able to transform their painful experiences into a source of strength and resilience. Writing allowed them to reclaim their personal narrative and see themselves as empowered individuals, capable of healing and overcoming adversity. By acknowledging their pain and expressing their emotions, they took an active role in their recovery and began to build a future grounded in hope, self-confidence, and emotional well-being. Overall, creative writing serves as a powerful tool for individuals who have experienced bullying, offering a safe space for emotional processing, self-expression, and healing. Creative writing in this study functioned as more than just a coping mechanism for bullying; it acted as a bridge to the broader goals of peace education. It helped students develop empathy by encouraging them to consider the experiences of others, build emotional intelligence by fostering awareness of their own and others' emotions, and practice conflict resolution through the constructive processing of their trauma.

“Creative writing helped me see my pain from a new perspective. I could write about what was happening in a way that made sense to me and helped me begin to heal”. Creative writing emerged as a transformative tool for individuals healing from the emotional scars of bullying, offering a safe space for self-reflection, emotional release, and personal growth. Through writing, participants were able to identify patterns in their bullying experiences, recognizing the emotional triggers and the impact on their self-esteem. This process of reflection and analysis not only allowed them to understand their vulnerabilities but also helped them discover their inner strengths. As they articulated their pain and experiences, they reframed their past, gaining a new perspective that empowered them to move forward with strength and resilience.

Writing provided more than just a means of emotional release; it enabled participants to reframe their experiences and take control of their personal narrative. Instead of allowing bullying to define them, they were able to see their stories through a lens of growth and hope. Creative writing became an essential tool for envisioning a brighter future, offering a space to set goals for personal growth, build coping mechanisms, and foster optimism. By processing their emotions and gaining clarity through writing, participants not only healed from their trauma but also developed the resilience necessary to face future challenges.

Overall, creative writing played a pivotal role in helping participants reclaim their sense of self and embark on a journey of emotional healing. For many who had been silenced by the trauma of bullying, writing provided a means of breaking the silence, allowing them to articulate their thoughts and emotions in a way that felt safe and empowering. This act of self-expression gave them the opportunity to reassert control over their stories, a control that bullying had once stripped away. Through writing, participants were able to reflect on their experiences, reframe their past, and view themselves not as victims of bullying, but as resilient individuals capable of overcoming adversity.

By engaging in the creative writing process, participants began to rebuild their confidence. The act of putting their thoughts and feelings onto paper helped them understand and process their emotions, making it easier to move past the hurt and toward self-acceptance. For many, this was a gradual but transformative process—each word written, each story told, helped them rebuild the foundation of self-worth that bullying had threatened to destroy. Creative writing allowed them to rediscover their voice, reaffirm their value, and feel seen and heard again, both by themselves and, in some cases, by others.

Perhaps one of the most significant outcomes of creative writing was the sense of agency it instilled in participants. For those who had felt powerless and voiceless due to bullying, writing became a tool for

taking back control. It gave them the power to shape their own narratives, create new possibilities, and redefine their identities on their own terms. By engaging in writing, participants were not only processing the emotional aftermath of bullying, but they were also actively participating in their own healing. They no longer saw themselves solely as the victims of their past experiences but as individuals with the strength and agency to heal, grow, and chart a new course for their future.

This process ultimately created a path toward healing that was not just about overcoming the trauma of bullying, but about building a more hopeful, self-affirming future. Writing helped participants envision a future where they could flourish, free from the constraints of their past experiences. It opened up a space for them to cultivate a sense of hope and optimism, inspiring them to set new personal goals and explore new possibilities. Through creative writing, they discovered that healing was not just about recovering from their past wounds, but also about empowering themselves to thrive in the present and future, grounded in their regained sense of self-worth and confidence.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study highlighted the profound impact of creative writing as a therapeutic tool for individuals who had experienced bullying. By examining how writing helped participants process and heal from their traumatic experiences, the study underscores the transformative role of creative expression in reclaiming one's voice, rebuilding self-confidence, and cultivating a sense of agency in the healing process. These findings resonate strongly with previous research on the emotional and psychological impacts of bullying, as well as the potential of creative writing for emotional regulation and self-reflection (Pennebaker, 2004; Graham & Harris, 2013). This discussion connects the results of the study with the broader literature, offering insight into the ways that creative writing can be integrated into interventions aimed at healing and empowering victims of bullying.

One of the key themes emerging from the study is the role of creative writing in helping participants find their voice: creating a safe space. Many victims of bullying often experience feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, unable to express themselves or defend their dignity in the face of repeated harm. Creative writing provides a safe, private space for individuals to externalize their experiences, process their emotions, and regain a sense of control over their narrative. As noted by Student 1, writing allowed them to speak their truth without fear of judgment, effectively breaking the silence imposed by their bullies. This finding aligns with the work of Pennebaker (2004), who posits that expressive writing can be a powerful tool for healing, allowing individuals to make sense of their trauma and regain a sense of agency. By writing about their experiences, participants in this study were able to give voice to their pain, transforming what had once been a source of shame and isolation into an empowering tool for self-expression. As Student 4 shared, writing helped them organize the chaos inside their mind and see themselves not just as victims but as individuals with agency. This shift from victimhood to self-empowerment is consistent with the therapeutic benefits of creative writing as described in previous studies (Pennebaker & Chung, 2011; Frattaroli, 2020), where writing helps individuals externalize and process emotional trauma, ultimately facilitating healing.

The process of making sense of bullying experiences through writing emerged as a key element in the emotional healing of participants. Writing provided them with an opportunity to reflect on their trauma, recognize emotional triggers, and gain insight into their vulnerabilities and strengths. This process allowed participants to not only make sense of their past but also to reframe their experiences in a way that

promoted self-acceptance and growth. As Student 8 expressed, writing helped them move forward, stronger than before, by transforming painful memories into opportunities for personal development. Research by Kowalski et al. (2014) and Wright et al. (2021) emphasized the lasting psychological consequences of bullying, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD. The results of this study align with these findings, as many participants noted how their engagement with writing allowed them to confront and process their emotional distress in a safe, structured manner. Writing enabled participants to gain clarity, releasing pent-up emotions that otherwise would have remained trapped inside. As Student 10 shared, writing helped them feel more powerful than they had ever felt during their experiences with bullying. Through this process of emotional release, participants were able to rebuild their confidence, with writing becoming a catalyst for emotional restoration and self-discovery.

Creative writing also provided participants with a crucial emotional outlet for managing their trauma. Many students described how writing allowed them to process their pain in a controlled way, offering a pathway to emotional healing. As Student 3 described, journaling became a form of therapy, enabling them to express what they could not verbalize in other settings. This echoes the findings of Lepore et al. (2021), who found that expressive writing led to improvements in mental health, including reductions in anxiety and depression. Writing helped participants organize and make sense of their emotions, ultimately leading to emotional regulation and relief.

The process of reflecting on their experiences through writing enabled participants to develop coping mechanisms that were crucial for navigating future challenges. By engaging with their emotions in a constructive way, participants were better equipped to manage their feelings of anger, sadness, and confusion. This process of emotional regulation through writing is consistent with research by Baikié and Wilhelm (2005), which found that creative writing promotes emotional resilience and personal growth. For many participants, writing became a tool for building coping strategies that they could apply to future experiences, helping them to navigate life's challenges with greater emotional intelligence and strength. Beyond emotional release, creative writing played a crucial role in helping participants envision a more hopeful future. Writing provided them with a space to reflect on their pain, but it also allowed them to set goals for personal growth and develop optimism for what lay ahead. As Student 4 shared, writing helped them see that while the bullying had happened, it did not have to define who they were or who they would become. This shift in perspective is consistent with the findings of Juvonen and Graham (2014), who argue that addressing bullying requires a holistic approach that includes fostering a positive outlook for the future. Writing empowered participants to transform their experiences into sources of personal growth, allowing them to envision a future not defined by their past trauma but by their strength and resilience.

The act of writing provided participants with a sense of closure and self-empowerment. It allowed them to reframe their past experiences, taking ownership of their stories and moving toward a future grounded in hope, self-worth, and emotional well-being. As Student 2 explained, writing helped them process their emotions and provided them with the space to cope with the aftermath of bullying. Writing became a tool for personal reflection, growth, and healing, helping participants to not only process their past but also shape their future.

The results of this study suggest that creative writing can serve as a powerful intervention for students who have experienced bullying. By providing a safe space for emotional expression, creative writing allows individuals to process their trauma, regain control over their narrative, and develop coping mechanisms for future challenges. This approach aligns with the goals of peace education, which seeks to promote empathy, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution skills. As noted by the participants in this

study, creative writing helped them develop a deeper understanding of their own emotions and the experiences of others, fostering empathy and emotional awareness. In this sense, creative writing offers a bridge to the broader goals of peace education, helping individuals not only heal from their trauma but also build the emotional resilience necessary for peaceful, constructive interactions in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the important role of creative writing in emotional healing and empowerment for individuals who have experienced bullying. The literature reviewed shows that bullying has lasting psychological, social, and academic effects, and the study's findings align with previous research, demonstrating that creative writing helps individuals process trauma, reclaim their voices, and regain control over their narratives.

Participants reported that creative writing provided a safe space for self-expression, aiding emotional release and healing. Writing allowed them to confront pain, gain clarity, and reframe their experiences. By articulating their emotions, they were able to process complex feelings and take charge of their healing journey, ultimately rebuilding self-worth and resilience.

Creative writing also empowered participants to transform their bullying experiences into a source of strength. It was not just a coping mechanism but a way to reclaim their narratives, reassert their identities, and cultivate hope. Writing thus became a critical step in moving from victimhood to empowerment.

In conclusion, the study supports the idea that creative writing is an effective tool for individuals who have faced bullying, offering an outlet for emotional expression and a path to healing, resilience, and personal growth. Incorporating creative writing into therapeutic and educational settings could benefit those seeking emotional recovery and empowerment.

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