



Empowerment Script – An Innovative and Emergent Aide in Practice

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Abstract

Lowen Clarke presents a new therapeutic aide based on a phenomenon that complements the basics of EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing). The phenomenon has been made into a useful tool as a picture book. This combination has calming results for clients with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and dissociation. Lowen introduces the phenomenon, the book, and the lived experience that underlay its discovery and publication.

Keywords: empowerment, EMDR, PTSD, calming, autoethnography, lived experience

Background and Discussion of Empowerment Script and *Sam the Tram's Dance Club*

I am happy and thankful to present the phenomenon of 'Empowerment Script' and the picture book *Sam the Tram's Dance Club* and give some of the background for how they came about.

More Than A Phenomenon To Me

I feel I am meant to write an intellectual and dispassionate presentation and adduce evidence about Empowerment Script. However, it is my lived experience of using Empowerment Script myself that gave me the strength to persevere with trying to let the world know of the phenomenon I had discovered. My main 'proof' for Empowerment Script is that I am able to write this paper and have confidence that it will be treated with interest,

respect, and possible belief. It has been a long journey finding my place in any academic or professional arena. Although even when young I was recognised as having wisdom that helps others, that trust seemed never to be received in any public world—academic, professional, or media.

I discovered what I now call Empowerment Script in 1974. I studied classics at school and university, which led to my playing with boustrophedon and coming up with my specific variation. After some further toying, then, I put the phenomenon aside.

Next I studied for a Bachelor of Divinity and then a diploma in hypnotherapy. At this time, in 1988, I published *How Media and Advertising are Killing You* as I saw that people were replicating poor mental models from exposure to media. The method of this book was a form of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT). After my first children's book *Sam the Tram* was published in 1990, I earned a graduate diploma in professional writing.

I seem to have rediscovered my 'forwards-backwards script' in 2003 when I finally confronted my deep post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and got help with Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy. EMDR helped hugely but then within days, I was writing in forwards-backwards sentences—I had found what the phenomenon I first discovered in 1974 could do. Having studied hypnotherapy, I was able to observe that the script caused a change in my breathing and that it had potential. Use of Empowerment Script strengthened my hemispheric connections. My continuing use of Empowerment Script could break through the intense void between my overactive intellectualisation and the place where 'I' lived—a good world of art, creativity, and being human.

My first instinct was to use it as a form of CBT in visualisations and affirmations, and this meant I could build inner strength to eventually be able to face the source of my trauma head on. It was a difficult time in my life, and the script got me through.

Some years later, I began my doctoral research at the Miecat Institute with support from the National Institute for Organisation Dynamics Australia (NIODA). The combination of psychological and creative therapies was perfect for me and my creative work. My dissertation was examined and commended by a professor of creative writing and a professor of psychology. I successfully held and merged both fields.

As the starting point of the doctorate, I wrote, illustrated, and animated my story *Sam the Tram's Dance Club*. Adrian Masterman-Smith was the art

director, seeking to make illustrations that include the viewer and use quirky colouring.

During the doctoral research, I was encouraged in my work on Empowerment Script by Dr Sandra Hacker, Chair of the Victoria Department of Health HREC (Human Research Ethics Committee), of which I am a member. She is a psychiatrist who uses EMDR and liked my approach. I then published the *Sam the Tram* book I created in what I now called Empowerment Script. I took it to an International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation (ISSTD) conference and from there to Mary Sutton, an EMDR practitioner, who found that it helps her clients with PTSD and deep trauma.

I had created this strange book that seems to do in one reading all that I had hoped for in my long work with CBT, visualisations, and affirmations. Using 'Sam' generates more room within a session for work with clients in EMDR, CBT, visualisations, and affirmations.

Being on the HREC has given me insight into ethical issues. We differentiate between negligible and other risk levels, and I would warrant that *Sam the Tram's Dance Club* and Empowerment Script would both be negligible risk. It is just reading and beyond that, reading a very mild pleasant story with subtle dramatisation. In addition, the development of Empowerment Script was before modern standards and out of the academic arena.

Empowerment Script as a Phenomenon

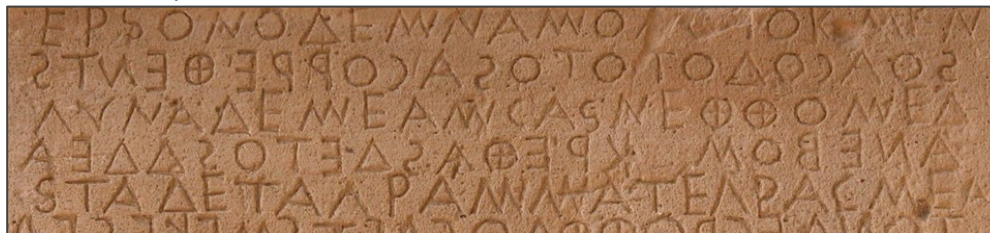
My work is based on a phenomenon that reading words in one line forward, as normally presented, and then reading alternate lines in which the words are presented backwards changes breathing, calms the mind, and in cases of PTSD, trauma, and dissociation, can help hemispheric linking by improving the switching mechanism. The phenomenon replicates EMDR. There is bilateral stimulation, connection, and reconnection. I speculate below as to how it works.

The term *Empowerment Script* describes my version of a forward and backward writing style known as *boustrophedon*—a style used by the ancient Greeks. Below is an example of boustrophedon written on the ancient walls of the city of Gortyn in Crete.

Illustration 1

Section of the ancient walls of Gortyn, Crete with an inscription in boustrophedon. *Code of Gortyn*, a city state.

Photo taken by Lowen Clarke.



The process is really quite simple. The first line of the paragraph reads from left to right, then the second line reads right to left and so on. An example this in English would be

A > rose > by > any > other > name
 .teews < sa < llems < dluow <

This is very challenging and hard work for a reader and, importantly, it does not contain the powerful therapeutic element of the saccade eye movement.

Below is an example of Empowerment Script. As you read this section, you will note that the eye makes a relaxed saccadic eye movement as it scans back and forth recognising each word.

It > is > very > difficult > to > explain > to > someone,
 .show < to < simple < very < is < it < fortunately < but <
 The > eyes > make > complex > movements > as > you
 .other < the < then < and < direction < one < in < read

That's how easy it is. Everyone relaxes into the rhythm within a couple of lines. Now try reading the following paragraph in Empowerment Script. You may be able to observe the beginnings of changes in your breathing.

My discovery of Empowerment Script started with a deeply embedded
 The .university and school at Classics studying days my from memory
 ancient Greeks read forwards and backwards. When the ancient Greeks
 ploughed they how at looked they ,BC 1000 after sometime writing started
 their fields with oxen and decided to write similarly. I recognised it as having
 those of brains the of hemispheres two the connect help to potential
 impacted by trauma and dissociation. Empowerment Script is a lot simpler
 .approach image mirror full a was which ,boustrophedon ancient than read to

The Phenomenon Made Useful

A picture book titled *Sam the Tram's Dance Club* in this format has been published by Unhooked Media in the US (links below). It is available for therapists and clients to assist in the treatment of PTSD, but anyone can enjoy it.

Illustration 2

Cover of book published in the US.



Clinical Experiences

I have material from Mary Sutton for a further paper on Empowerment Script, which she, Adrian, and I plan to submit to this journal. All I will write here is that Mary has used it extensively with deeply traumatised clients and found reductions in SUDS (Subjective Units of Distress Scale) levels. She was fascinated as to how it works and has created diagrams of the unique eye saccade it produces. Although Empowerment Script itself has an effect on a reader, the book *Sam the Tram's Dance Club* seems to have independent, deeper effects through the combination of Empowerment Script, colour values, words, and the pleasant story itself. My personal speculation on how Empowerment Script is effective follows.

A Speculation as to How Empowerment Script Works

Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing is a therapy which has had considerable acceptance in the mental health field. It was discovered by accident by Francine Shapiro in 1987 (Shapiro, 1989a, 1989b). A client is asked to look at a distant spot to the left and then a distant spot to the

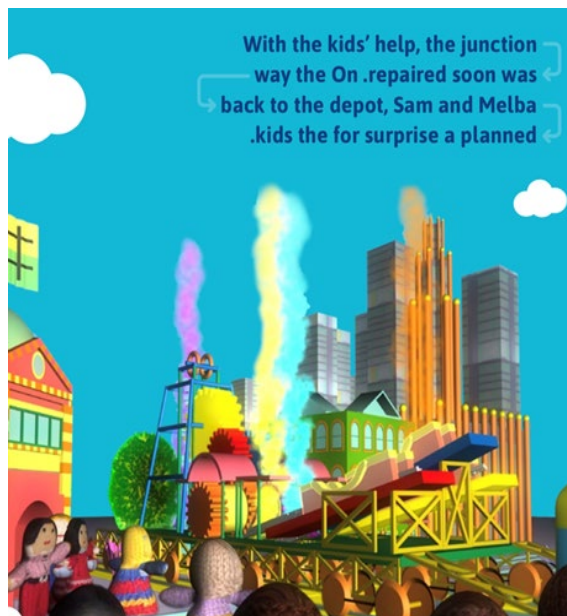
right. The eye movement engages both hemispheres of the brain. When the therapist draws the client back into the situation that is being reprocessed, the emotional memory is reduced in influence.

Just how EMDR works is still unclear. Empowerment Script seems to work both from the eye movement left to right and right to left, and the eye saccades created as each word is recognised. These many small ‘puzzles’ have a lot to do with it.

My speculation is that the efficacy of Empowerment Script has to do with interhemispheric switching. Theoretically, I refer to the work of Pettigrew and Stephen (1998). This was taken up by Mitchell (2011) and by Schmidt (2008). Recent work by MacInnes et al. (2016) on the ventral tegmental area also points to a possible source of what Empowerment Script affects. However, only brain imaging will show if this speculation is correct. It may also provide other answers to the quest for understanding what Empowerment Script is doing as it calms and helps people find ‘mental space’ and reconnection.

Illustration 3

A page from Sam the Tram's Dance Club.



What Empowerment Script and the Book Do

The following is a list of observations from clinical practice with Empowerment Script:

- Changes breathing, relaxes, and reduces anxiety.
- Replicates EMDR in the processing of trauma, PTSD, dissociation and general mental exhaustion, with an experienced clinician.
- Activates or re-activates, and exercises, the interhemispheric switching mechanism in structurally traumatised people and non-traumatised people. This is at least a theoretical possibility.
- Assists in creative practice.
- Creates a unique eye movement saccade.
- Allows information such as visualisations and affirmations to go into the brain.
- Is not 'done' to a person. A person enjoys reading the book and can become immersed in the experience.
- Is client centred.
- Gives a client some autonomy in the process.
- Is of use to both traumatised and non-traumatised people.

Sam the Tram's Dance Club Published in the US

As part of my doctorate, I was invited by the ISSTD to do a poster presentation in the US. I took my work to New York and a very brave US publisher Megan Hunter of Unhooked Media liked it enough to publish it there. Adrian and I were to launch it at the postponed 2020 ISSTD conference in San Francisco.

Life and Story Combine

I have mentioned my own story of my studies because it shows how many different strands of thought and learning had to come together

Illustration 4

Informal book launch in San Francisco.
(Photo by Adrian Masterman-Smith.)



to create a dynamic where Empowerment Script could emerge. Diverse studies and experiences can be the basis for many insights. On their own, such a range of studies could have been seen as symptomatic of a life with PTSD, but as it has turned out, there was a traceable progression in all that muddle.

After I used Empowerment Script for my own visualisation and affirmations, I was strengthened to be able to work on my own art and learn the difficult skill of digital illustration and animation to create the book *Sam the Tram's Dance Club*. Further healing of my PTSD then allowed me to merge *Sam the Tram's Dance Club* and Empowerment Script. It is a union between my art and worldview and the intellectualisation of writing.

My doctorate paper details this journey, parts of which were described by one examiner as 'harrowing'. My doctorate was the culmination of a lifetime research inquiry into narrative therapy and trauma. My dissertation pushed at the norms of what such papers are meant to look like. It is a palimpsest of creative moments and realisations. It combines autoethnography, creative writing, and traumatology. I feel that I have made a new pathway for people who have suffered trauma and for whom it has resulted in PTSD and dissociation. My doctorate charts new territory in therapeutic practice by using a method I first tried to formulate in the 1980s—creative writing. (This will be the subject matter of a future paper.)

So, I have been on a long journey of gradually building up knowledge and the confidence to take rather daring steps. Persevering was difficult at times.

Prospects for the Use of Empowerment Script

Right now, both because of the pandemic and because people consume too much media, the world needs anything that will help people relax and calm down, and *Sam the Tram's Dance Club* can be part of that now, while a second book *Missing Persons Bureau* to be published shortly will add extra scope for help.

The world needs calming at the moment. Reading in Empowerment Script can help with creativity and relaxation for everyone. We all seek a balance of awe, curiosity, connection to, and respect for the material world, and confidence in the goodness of humanity. This balance is easily upset, and Empowerment Script, by stimulating both hemispheres, can help with the rebalancing and be a counterweight to the mass of dogmatic,

argumentative, and upsetting input we receive in our normal reading. This can lead to the 'unperturbedness' or 'ataraxia' of the ancient Sceptics, and also allow for a dynamic creativity. That is therapeutic arts practice in action.

Because I fully believe that trauma can be overcome, I can be more relaxed about the steps-forward and steps-back nature of healing.

Final Words

Finally, I studied hypnotherapy, divinity, and created an early CBT in the 1980s. None touched my trauma which was intellectually well defended. Because of what I had to unravel, I knew how powerful Empowerment Script is, and I persevered with trying to get attention for it.

What I stumbled upon in 1974 now has the potential for use with people suffering with trauma, people experiencing elevated anxiety, the creative community, and for further research.

Next Moves

Sam the Tram's Dance Club is for children and adults. That it presents as a children's book works well for children and adults with trauma as they experience it as therapy and therefore do not set up defences. However, professionals have asked for an 'adult' book, and a second book, titled *Missing Persons Bureau* was launched in November 2021 at the ISSTD Asia-Pacific Virtual Conference. We also plan a series of relaxation and calming books for the general public. We have the ability to reformat out-of-copyright books.

Where is the book available?

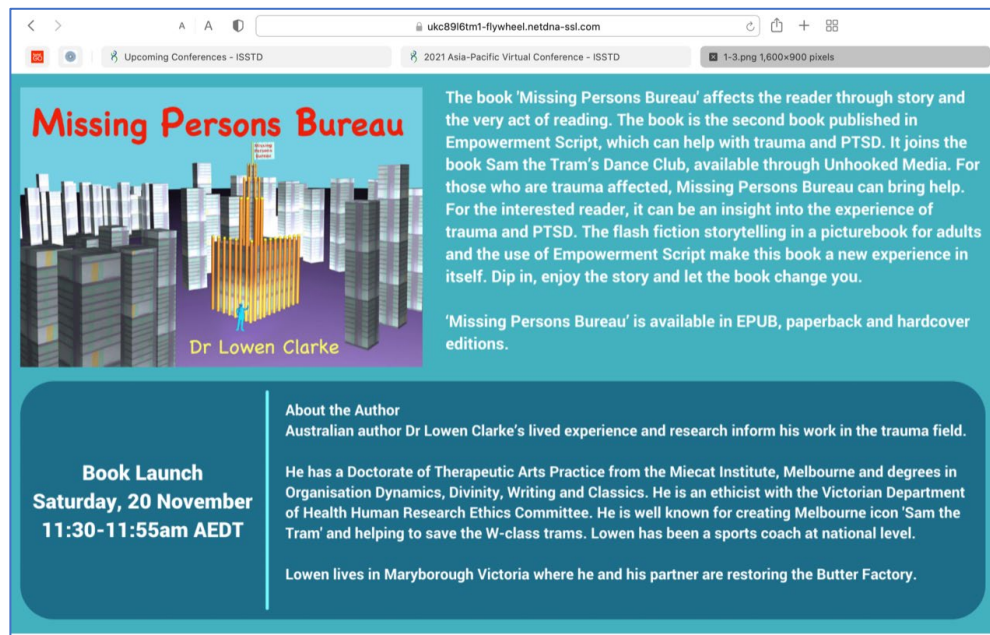
Unhooked Media are the publishers of *Sam the Tram's Dance Club*, which is available in print generally and as an ebook on Apple Books. A special imprint, Brain Bridge Books, has been created for Empowerment Script and further books are in production. Here are links to more information, their online store, and the ebook:

<https://www.unhookedmedia.com/stock/sam-the-tram>

https://store.bookbaby.com/bookshop/book/index.aspx?b=p_ca-bu-gr&bookURL=Sam-the-Trams-Dance-Club

Illustration 5

Missing Persons Bureau virtual book launch.



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Lowen Clarke is a published author and a Doctor of Therapeutic Arts Practice. He is also an ethicist with the Victoria Department of Health HREC. Lowen's life work has been research into the effects of trauma and dissociation. He has diverse educational qualifications and life experience. He holds degrees in classics, divinity, professional writing, and group dynamics. He has been a national-level sports coach and was a member of the National Trust committee that saved the Melbourne W-class trams. He was vice-president of the Williamstown Literary Festival. He and his partner Adrian Masterman-Smith are restoring a heritage factory in regional Victoria as a community arts facility and a place of healing.
