CREATIVE PINCH POINTS: OPEN CONVERSATION

NOTES FROM OUR OPEN CONVERSATION ON 24/05/26

MEGAPHONE
FOR CHILDREN'S WRITERS OF COLOUR

About Open Conversations

Open Conversations are facilitated online group discussions which any children's writer of colour is welcome to join. They usually arise from a suggestion by a Megaphone Community member and are focused on topics of special interest or relevance to the community.

These notes combine a summary of the discussion with direct, anonymised quotes from writers of colour who took part.

1. Creative Pinch Points: what are they?

> **A *pinch point* is any point in which it's possible for a person or part of a person's body to be caught between two objects, and pinched, broken or crushed.**

- In this metaphor, a creative pinch point is a stage in the writing life when creativity is "caught and crushed" by life processes.
- Writing becomes significantly harder, confidence drops, and creativity feels dried up, creating a risk that writers may stop writing entirely.
- Unlike writer's block, which is framed as a single obstacle to "smash through," a pinch point suggests that life is happening all around us, and we're in a process. We might have to "wriggle around" to escape the creative bottleneck.
- Pinch points can happen at any career stage, whether a writer is published or not.

> **It can feel like the goalposts are constantly moving, especially as a person of colour.**

2. Exploring the problem in detail

Topics we discussed in the session included

- When have we experienced creative pinch points? What triggered them?
- How have we got past them, if we have?
- What unhelpful pressures do we put on ourselves, or have we learned from others?
- How can we get past negative emotions like self-blame?
- Finally, what suggestions and recommendations would we like to make to other minoritised writers facing the same problem?

> **Wanting success can make it really, really hard to write.**

The point was made that pinch points are **multi-layered**, involving personal life, industry barriers, and specific pressures faced by writers of colour. Triggers can include and be amplified by:

Pre-publication struggles:

- Long periods of submitting without success can dent confidence.

Life changes:

- Health issues, becoming a carer, or other external changes can leave writers with no time or energy to write.

> **Guilt if you're writing, guilt if you're not writing.**

Post-publication challenges:

- Continued rejections after being published can be even more/ just as damaging to confidence than pre-publication rejections.

- Lack of a new contract or being out of contract creates uncertainty about whether to continue writing.
- Publishers may push authors to repeat previous success rather than allowing them to evolve creatively.

> **“Almost feeling like entering the (publishing) industry is a dampener or inhibitor to creativity.”**

Industry barriers:

- Poor representation statistics in publishing can make writers feel the industry does not want their stories.
- White authors may have more consistent success with many books while authors of colour face more frequent rejections. This can be because authors of colour started their careers more recently in a very different market for literature, but also because they can be ‘tokenised’ by publishers or seen as only able to appeal to a minority readership.

> **“(meeting) the editing deadlines, you know, doesn't leave a lot of space for ideating and working on other things... the lack of transparency about what is happening to get your book out there.”**

There are many possible psychological Impacts of experiencing a creative pinch point.

- **Emotional toll:** Feelings of frustration, guilt, and anxiety are common.
- **Guilt:** Writers may feel guilty when writing (because it is unpaid time or because they are not spending free time on family) and guilty when not writing (because they are not progressing toward their aspirations).
- **Social media effect:** Seeing others' curated success on platforms like Instagram can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy.

> **“It's lovely to see people doing well when you go onto Instagram, but sometimes you just think, this is not showing actually what's behind it all, and it's not going to be relentlessly like this.”**

The impact of political events at home and abroad: As writers of diaspora heritage, we are often more personally affected by world events, conflicts and tragedies (as well as increasingly hostile politics in the UK) and this also exacerbates creative pinch points, leading to feelings that our writing is a flippant use of time.

> **I don't think it can *not* affect us, watching what we're watching in the world ...thinking ...what is writing a book going to do? ... it's not something necessarily that all white authors have to contend with... this constant internal battle of, is it the right time?... I don't wanna promote my book on Instagram because it feels really bad when this is happening in Palestine to talk about my book, right? So it's not just one thing, it's like, I feel like it's multi-layered.**

3. Ways to escape a creative pinch point

> **To deal with a creative pinch point, first of all, you've just got to keep writing.**

But also!

> **One way out of the Pinch Point is giving ourselves permission not to write when it's not a good time in our lives to to write.**

Think about your writing habits and mindset:

- Seasonal writing: Giving permission not to write during difficult periods and writing more immersively when the time is right.
- Authentic rituals: Identifying what actually works for the individual rather than following a "perfect" routine.

> **Be honest with yourself...are you a 5AM writer, or a commuter writer, or does that not work for you?**

- Positive affirmations: Keeping visible reminders of why writing is loved and the positive connections it creates, while putting negative thoughts "away in a box."
- "Revenge writing": Using a desire to prove a point as internal motivation.
- Taking breaks: Stepping away temporarily to return more productive.
- Reframing rejection: Recognizing that some rejections are not about the writer's work.

> **Remember that sometimes the rejection is not about you, it's somebody else's excuse.**

- Changing your environment: Moving to a library or different space to refresh the mind.
- Sensory comforts: Using simple pleasures like a hot drink or a candle to make writing feel more playful and less like a chore.

> **Writing should be playful, it should be fun, first and foremost.**

- Reframe goals: writing for relatives, loved ones, or a partner rather than focusing solely on a book deal.

> **Often, the goal is to get that book deal. It is to be on that bestseller list. But we maybe forget fulfilment can come and exist in different ways.**

Draw on community and support:

- Critique groups: Getting feedback on plot points or character devices.
- Writing buddies: "Body doubling" —writing alongside someone else, even virtually, to reduce isolation and increase motivation.
- Peer groups: Having honest conversations with other writers about the reality of the industry.

> **What's helped me recently is having someone that I've been able to write with.**

Take alternative paths to an audience:

- Short stories/competitions: Can provide a better turnaround and a way to stay in control of the creative process.

> **They don't rely on their agent for everything. They send out short stories and things like that, so that ... they're still very much in control of their creative process.**

- Self-publishing can be a way to get work out into the world, open new doors and take control, but some cautioned that the pressure to promote and sell your own books can lead to burnout.

- It is important to know what your goals are and properly assess costs and have a realistic view of how likely it is for you to achieve what you want to via either route.

The argument for self-publishing:

> **I think we need to be brave enough to say, right, I'm gonna put my book on Amazon... because we are writers, we have the stories, we can write them... at least you've given yourself a leg up, and we're not dependent.**

The argument against self-publishing:

> **I spent so much money on different (self-publishing) platforms.... I also had a pinch point at that point, because I didn't write for 3 years....I got really busy at work, but also I was saying to myself, well, what's the point? Nothing's really happening... Up until I decided to quit my job and work part-time and then try and go back to traditional publishing, I didn't write.**

- Managing expectations: Recognizing that success is not guaranteed

regardless of the publishing route.

> **Life can be quite hard at times. So realising that life is short and using that as just a way to just get on with writing.**

- Reminding ourselves of the reasons that we write:

> **Remembering that you have to love the story, first and foremost, to actually write the story. That's something I often forget personally, so I'm really grateful for that person who mentioned it.**