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Abstract This paper will consider the significance of emotion in assessment through reflective or experiential writing in the context of professional practice-based learning. It is based on a 12 month study conducted with undergraduate social work students undertaking what are referred to as 'reflective writing' assessments. This form of assessment is a requirement in social work education and commonly used elsewhere in professional programmes of study in higher education such as nursing, business studies and education. Drawing on text orientated interviews with students and tutors this paper explores some of the challenges of both producing and assessing reflective writing. Drawing on debates relating to the assessment of reflective writing (Boud in Soc work Educ 18(2):121–132, 1999) and the benefits of experimental or 'risky' writing (Berman 2001), the paper offers some strategies for recognising and managing emotion arising from the inclusion of reflective writing professional education. In particular, it will explore the benefits of creating a space for dialogue which can recognise social, educational and historical factors, which influence individual students' writing practices.

Keywords Student writing · Emotion · Practice-based · Reflective learning

Introduction

This paper aims to re-evaluate debates concerned with the assessment of student writing which is reflective and/or experiential. Through an investigation of students' experiences on a national distance learning social work programme, the paper explores how such writing appears to draw in the affective domain to academic writing to an unusual degree. As such it contributes to a very limited field of research exploring reflective writing from the perspective of student experiences. This research arose from the author providing writing support to a group of social work students. Although students did need some support with technical language issues arising from the use of dual languages (for example

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Patois and standard English) it became clear that there were deeper and more complex issues such as identity and emotion arising from this group of students experiences of writing that warranted investigation.

This paper explores the experiences of three student social work writers, all challenged in different ways by the requirement to engage in reflective writing. It focuses on the following research questions:

- What is the nature of emotion in student writing?
- What impact does emotion have on student writer?

Drawing on Rai's work on student writing in social work education (2008) and Ivanič's work on writer identity (1998), a move from foregrounding 'the social' to 'the psychological' aspects of writer identity is proposed through an exploration of the concept of 'self-disclosure' (Chelune 1979) and psychoanalytic perspectives on identity (Henriques et al. 1998 and Janks 1999). The paper also draws upon the concept of 'risky writing' (Berman 2001). Finally the paper offers some pedagogical implications raised by a greater awareness of emotion when working with student writers, particularly in practice-based disciplines such as social work.

The study

The study on which this paper was based was a qualitative investigation of a national UK distance learning social work programme and was conducted over a period of 12 months. Data collected included 35 student texts, 16 text-orientated interviews with eight students and a text-orientated group discussion activity with four tutors. Interviews with students and the tutor discussion were recorded and transcribed. The researcher and author had no direct relationship with either the students or tutors on the programme, but she was a member of academic staff at the University and was therefore familiar with the courses and teaching methods and had access to the assessment and teaching documentation for the courses studied by all students. Texts were collected from 15 students undertaking two courses studied in the first year of the social work programme. These courses are referred to as the 'foundation' course and the 'practice learning' course. The former was a Health and Social Care foundation course, broadly similar to an applied social science course. The course was assessed though 'essays' which, although they involved contextual reference to given case studies, did not require discussion of students' personal experience, practice or values although reference to examples from personal experience were permitted as a way of scaffolding learning to the course concepts. The 'practice learning' course differed in that 50% of the learning was undertaken in the workplace and the course was assessed though 'reflective writing' in which students were required to draw together threads of academic argument, personal reflection and experience (both personal and professional) within one text.

The collection and analysis of data was an organic process. Analysis continued throughout the collection of data and the interview transcripts, for example, were used as ongoing tools for analysis as more observations were added. As the data collection and analysis progressed, however, it was necessary to focus in more closely on particular aspects of the data in order to gain sufficient depth or breadth. This process has been referred to as 'progressive focusing', a method which enables the qualitative researcher to analyse data during collection and thereby focus in (or out) on specific themes or areas of interest:

> Qualitative data analysis is an iterative and reflexive process that begins as the data are being collected rather than after data collection has ceased (Stake 1995). Next to the field notes or transcripts, the qualitative analyst jots down ideas about the meaning of the text and how it might relate to other issues. The process of reading through the data and interpreting it continue throughout the project and the analyst adjusts the data collection process itself when it begins to appear that additional concepts need to be investigated or new relationships explored. (Engel and Scutt 2005, p. 381)

From the full cohort of 15 students who contributed texts for this study, eight volunteered to be interviewed. Although eight students were interviewed, analysis and discussion in this paper is based on detailed case studies of three students referred to as Patricia, Bernie and David. These three students were selected as case studies as they illustrated a range of experience and identities in relation to gender, age, ethnicity and educational background. All of the eight students, however, were interviewed twice over a period of 8 months with each interview lasting between 60 and 90 min. Student interviews were semi-structured and allowed for participants to contribute to the direction of discussion; they also took place in the context of specific texts. This method of text-based interviewing, influenced by the research of Clark and Ivanič (1997) and Lillis (2001), enabled both interviews to focus upon the texts (including feedback comments) produced by the participant but about which the interviewer also had knowledge. As a result, texts provided a common reference point around which discussion took place. Making direct reference to texts (by both the participant and researcher) as suggested by Ivanič, provided rich data.

> However interesting and complex the writing process may appear in theory, the observations of writers themselves are even more interesting and reveal even greater complexity. (Ivanič 1998, p. 115)

This text-orientated approach was also used with the group exercise involving three tutors who had experience of teaching both the Foundation and Practice Learning course. The tutors are referred to in the analysis as Tutor 1, 2 and 3. Tutors were asked to assess the same two anonymised practice learning course assignments and to consider in advance a set of questions about their experience of assessing and providing feedback on this course compared with the Foundation Course. As far as the tutors were aware these assignments were selected randomly, whereas in fact they were chosen so as to provide a contrast. One of the assignments contained a considerable amount of personal reflection but was academically weak in terms of the use of language. The other assignment was very strong academically (language used, sophistication of argument and use of references) but contained limited personal reflection. A telephone conference was then conducted in which the tutors discussed their assessment of the assignments and reflections based on the questions sent to them in advance.

Analysis therefore involved drawing together the texts (including feedback comments from tutors), student interviews and the telephone conference with tutors. The texts were analysed primarily in the context of the interviews. In other words selected extracts from the transcripts of student interviews were tabulated against extracts from texts and these, along with the tutor conference transcript, were used to develop themes arising from the data. Where themes emerged in multiple interviews, progressive focusing enabled the researcher to revisit all data sources to mark up supporting evidence.

Emotion in reflective writing

The first research question driving this study queried the nature of emotion in student writing which is based on the premise that emotion is indeed significant. Based upon the data from this study emotion emerged most clearly through reflective writing. Social work as a discipline shares with other practice-based programmes the requirement to reflect upon experience through written assessments but it also places the 'self' at the centre of much student learning, including academic writing, to a strong degree. Such disciplinary valuing of the self has implications for the assessment of academic writing. Although there has been little debate in the UK about the implications of placing the self at the centre of academic student writing, there has been considerable academic interest in reflection as a tool of assessment and learning within social work and in related practice-based disciplines (Stierer 2000; Boud 1999; Winter and Buck 1999; Creme 2000, 2005; Moon 2004). Reflective practice is becoming a common feature of many practice-based courses and has a long-standing position in social work education, evolving from concepts such as the use of self (Goffman 1963) and the internal supervisor (Chelune 1979). The assessment of reflective practice requires students not only to draw upon their personal values and past experiences but also to make links with-relevant theoretical knowledge. This is a complex process, which not only challenges students' cognitive skills but involves sharing of personal experiences and insight.

Boud (1999) suggests that the specific nature of reflection can pose particular challenges when drawn into the arena of assessment and that the use of reflection in assessment should be treated with great caution (Boud 1999). He suggests that one solution would be to exclude reflective writing from formal assessment. Where this is not possible the continued assessment of reflective writing challenges the academy to take account of the emotional impact of such academic work participants. Boud questions the value and integrity of assessing reflective practice, suggesting that professions favour the teaching of reflective skills as they support the concept of professional self-regulation, but that there are dangers in associating assessment and reflection. Boud suggests that conflating assessment and reflection is unhelpful as there are inherent contradictions in the nature of reflection and the nature of assessment:

> Assessment involves putting forward one's best work… Reflection, on the other hand, is about exploration, understanding, questioning, probing discrepancies and so on. There is always a danger that assessment will obliterate the very practices of reflection which courses aim to promote. (Boud 1999, p. 127)

It is important to recognise that there is a distinction between the assessment of students' developing professional skills of reflective practice through academic writing and the merging of assessment and reflection through self-assessment.

According to Boud, therefore, assessment which incorporates a judgment on students' developing ability to reflect on their practice or indeed professional development, should both avoid penalising students for exposing practice which is not 'their best', whilst providing clear guidance as to what is expected in terms of *exploration*, *understanding*, *questioning*, *probing discrepancies*. Boud also emphases, the importance of taking account of the learning context when setting up reflection tasks and identifies some specific barriers to effective reflection which include intellectualising reflection, allowing or failing to protect students from making inappropriate disclosures and most significantly placing reflection in the context of writing an essay. One reason that such disclosures can be problematic is that they draw the domain of affect, or emotion, into academic texts, a process which is challenging to both student and tutor. Boud's discussion of assessed reflective writing, experienced as emotionally charged by all three students in this study, provides a helpful starting point both for

thinking about why emotion is relevant to student writing, in particular reflective writing, and also the kind of impact that such potentially emotionally charged writing may have on student writers and tutors.

Findings

Analysis of the assignment guidance, texts and transcriptions resulted in some consistent messages about the challenges involved in undertaking and assessing written assignments on the practice learning course. In particular data suggested that both students and tutors encountered a level of personal or emotional involvement which was not experienced in the foundation course assessments despite apparent similarity of the curriculum content. The key difference between the two assignment types appeared to be the requirement for the students to discuss their own personal or professional experience. The focus on experience and values on the practice learning course stemmed, in part, from the very different purpose of the assessment on the course. The practice learning course set out to teach and assess the application of theory and values to professional practice. The focus of the foundation course, in contrast, was to introduce students to core knowledge in the field and to enable them to develop study skills relevant to ongoing study in applied social sciences. These different purposes had implications for the ways in which students were expected to write. The requirement to write about experience, in particular personal experience and values, marks a departure from the essay genre taught on the foundation course. Although the inclusion of experience in writing was clear in relation to content, the implications of this for how students should write did not appear to have been made explicit for students or tutors. The implications of this inconsistency and the consequences of drawing such personal writing into the domain of assessed academic writing are central to this paper.

Tutors perceptions

In discussion with tutors, a dichotomy appeared from the discussion between the need for 'academic' writing and 'reflective' writing. Tutors suggested that both were needed in order to write a good assignment for the practice learning course but that these two features were very difficult for students to combine in one text. By 'academic' writing, tutors seemed to be referring to writing which was 'objective', typified within the institution by what was commonly referred to as the 'essay'. 'Reflective' writing seemed to encompass writing which demonstrates the ability to share personal experience. One tutor clarified that on the practice learning course there is an expectation that writing incorporates both an 'academic approach' and 'the personal reflection' and that these elements should be integrated:

> There has to be a kind of integration of that academic approach with the personal reflection that the person needs to bring, in my view. A little bit of supporting evidence from sources outside themselves, as part of that reflective process, and I think that's what a lot of students find difficult.
> Tutor 3: Tutor discussion

This dichotomy between academic and reflective aspects of writing was further illustrated through the anonymous marking of the two practice learning assignments. One of the two student texts was perceived by the three tutors to be more 'academic' and one more 'reflective'. Although there was broad agreement amongst the tutors on the strengths and

weaknesses of the two assignments, they were graded very differently. Text A was perceived as academically competent but 'distant', 'detached', 'far too philosophical' and 'lacking self awareness'. It was given the equivalent of a fail by two markers and a good pass by the other (and by the student's original marker). Text B was judged as making an 'honest attempt' at being reflective but lacking academic rigour. Tutor comments on text A imply that, although the student may have attempted to meet the requirements of the practice learning course, the student's text was viewed (negatively) as being substantially detached and depersonalised.

Whatever the motivation for the author's apparent reluctance to share more personal information, it appears that this failure to do so contributed to two out of four experienced tutors suggesting a fail grade for the assignment. In contrast text B caused less concern and was awarded a pass grade from all three tutors, despite concern that it lacked depth of analysis and rigour in relation to clarity, referencing and the quality of discussion:

> Text A is a technically better written piece of work. [text] B I think is better on the consideration of values. Now I am really very keen on well-written pieces of work, but you can work on that with the student who has got a basically decent level of literacy. What is harder to work on is somebody who is defensively academic, who won't 'give'. For them to work on their values is more difficult. So on balance I would say, for example, the person in script B she could be worked with beautifully to actually develop her writing skills, and they are not a bad standard, I have seen a lot worse, but they could be developed further. So I want to give plenty of encouragement and feedback on that. Whereas [text] A's writer, it would be harder.
> Tutor 3: Tutor discussion

This comment provides an important insight into the implicit expectations of tutors in relation to sharing personal information, which was not treated as optional but was perceived as a core requirement.

Students' perceptions

All of the students identified the practice learning assignments as being more challenging than the foundation course, although their reasons differed. Although they varied in experience and skill in scholarly writing, all of the students found negotiating the particular genre of reflective writing challenging. Additionally the experiential content of the practice learning course assignment appeared to 'emotionally sensitise' the experience of receiving tutor feedback.

Patricia's feedback on her writing for the practice learning course led her to believe that despite having shared very intimate experiences involving her experience and reflections on death and bereavement, which placed her in an emotionally vulnerable position, she had not met her tutor's expectations:

> It would be worth saying a little more about how you see these issues now. Has privacy become more important – seems so, and worth looking @ what this meant before the case happened.
> Tutor comment on Patricia's assignment

Whilst recognising the value of Patricia's writing about her experiences in this text, her tutor encourages her to evaluate the impact that this sensitive experience had upon her personal development. Patricia's tutor also asks for further reflection on her own values

and personal responses to a professional experience. The specific issue he appears to want 'more' on is the way in which Patricia's values and behaviour have changed over time in response to a specific incident, in other words evidence of her ability to reflect and then change her practice. Patricia commented that:

> It's the style that is so different because D [the tutor] wants 'I want, I think, I feel I felt'…. In this course you are going to be asked to write about yourself big style you have got to be king you have got to be in the centre.
> Patricia Interview 2

Here Patricia shows her frustration after trying hard to clarify her tutor's expectations and then meet them, only to find that she is still apparently not providing sufficient personal content. This example is indicative of not only the depth and extent that students are expected to share personal experiences in practice learning course assignments, but also the way that personal change (relating to beliefs and actions) is expected. This marks a significant departure from the target of 'objective' writing required on the foundation course where personal change does not figure at all. It also raises issues about students' emotional responses to writing and receiving feedback on experiential writing.

Another example of the sensitivities engendered by writing on the practice learning course is provided by Bernie. Bernie expresses strong feelings about her tutor's perceived failure to value the way in which she has written about her personal experiences in her practice learning text.

> I think he was looking at it in academic terms… I think he was forgetting that where you were supposed to be coming from for a practice and value side rather than thinking book [tapping the desk with her pen]. Like he was thinking this isn't in there and that isn't in there. But realised that I am in there and that it the true me, and there's nothing wrong with that person.
> Bernie Interview 2

In this extract Bernie also suggests that her tutor focused primarily on the 'academic' at the cost of valuing her as a person. While there is no clear evidence that her tutor failed to value or appreciate her discussion of racism, there is a suggestion that she has not justified that her experience is more broadly relevant which may itself have been experienced as insensitive:

> I would have been keen to see a little more exploration of the theme you discuss on p. 5 about professionals and playing a role in institutional discrimination. Developing a clear sense of how this works out is important if you think it applies as a general rule …rather than just with some colleagues.
> Tutor comment on Bernie's assignment

Bernie perceives herself as someone who is able to reflect well and sees this skill as an integral part of her identity. It is a strength which she feels she brings to the course. She also elects to write openly about an experience of witnessing racism as a Black woman in a team to which she belonged. There is no evidence that Bernie's tutor was critical in his feedback of her writing about personal experience, which he described as 'powerful' and 'relevant'.

Despite this she suggests that her tutor was unable to recognise and understand her as an individual. Based upon the text and interview alone is it difficult to find evidence to substantiate Bernie's feelings about her tutor's lack of empathy; she is clear however that

she believed the fact that he was a white man was significant in her perception of his ability to understand her writing:

> I think he was taken aback when he read it. I felt it made him think. Because I think anybody would stop and see another perspective on how Black people think and that we don't all think that you're all prejudiced, but we do think that you are sometimes… if it was a woman that was black.
> Bernie interview 2

In this extract Bernie makes an important point about addressivity (Lillis 2001); she feels that if she had been writing for a black woman they would have been able to appreciate and value her experiential writing in a way in which her tutor, as a white man, could not. Bernie went beyond suggesting that her white male tutor was not in a good position to fully empathise with her experiences described in writing, but also attributed his criticism of her writing (as she perceived it) as stemming from personal prejudice. This could have been one reason for Bernie's frustration with her practice learning course tutor, demonstrated by, for example, her belief that he unjustifiably criticised her spelling and grammar based on a the comment '*keep an eye on grammar/spelling—only occasionally an issue*'. Bernie's sensitivity to this comment on her competence in language use arises several times in her interviews when she refers to her tutor making erroneous assumptions about black students being weak at grammar and spelling.

Finally David provides another example of the particular significance of addressivity on the practice learning course. As a very competent scholarly writer, David acknowledges that he feels personally very uncomfortable with sharing experiences in his writing. The personal nature of writing on the practice learning course makes the addressee significant and he suggests that the content is inappropriate for a written communication context, as opposed to face-to-face with his practice supervisor. He also questions whether writing about values and experience in this way is a valid method of assessment due to the risk of misconceptions arising from trying to '*explain myself in 2,000 words'*. Here David expresses something both important and complex about the nature of writing about personal experience and the relationship with his reader. As an experienced practitioner David recognises the importance and relevance of exploring personal reflection as part of his professional development. He objects, however, to doing so in the context of assessed writing where his ability to express himself is limited both by a word count and by the lack of dialogue with his addressee; there is a need for such communication to be a '*two way thing'* which he implies is lost in an exchange of academic writing. He also suggests that the authenticity of his reflections cannot be judged outside of his direct practice, something his academic tutor does not have access to. David is not only demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of what is required of his writing on the practice learning and a rationale for the relevance of reflective writing, but also a convincing case for assessed writing being an inappropriate context for such reflection to take place.

David's tutor encourages him to be more concrete in his discussion of values, basing them on real experiences rather than focusing on hypothetical scenarios:

> It would have been really useful to pick up on an example in the advisor role where something came up that did challenge you…Framing things up in that way would have made your comments more concrete.
> Tutor comment on David's assignment

Although David's tutor awarded a mid level pass for this assignment, his comments suggest that he wanted David to talk more directly and openly about himself in asking

David to write less hypothetically and to 'personalise' his writing. This assessment of David's work implies that although David may have attempted to meet the requirements of the practice learning course, despite his evident skill, his writing remained substantially detached and depersonalised.

To conclude, all of the case studies illustrated the unusual nature of writing on the practice learning course and that, regardless of the degree of willingness or success in writing in this way, it raised issues for them which did not exist on the foundation course. The requirement to write experientially, and in particular to write about personal beliefs and values, resulted in some specific issues being foregrounded, such as the relationship with and identity of the addressee and the students' response to feedback. There were also issues raised in relation to the students' writing practices, such as the ways in which they coped with trying to integrate experiential and theoretical writing, which posed a technical, psychological and in David's case, an ethical challenge.

Discussion

Boud's work along with evidence from these three case studies appears to support the suggestion that assessing reflection in writing is potentially problematic. Emotion appears in several ways as a common theme in the data and in the following discussion the work of theorists and researchers with a shared interest in emotion are explored and applied to the context of student writing, beginning with the concept of self-disclosure.

Self-disclosure

The concept of self-disclosure has its roots in sociological perspectives on human interaction; the existence or degree of self-disclosure being based upon normative behaviour relating to the level of intimacy between individuals. Goffman (1963) was one of the first researchers to explore self-disclosure and suggested that conditions for the relative appropriateness of self-disclosure depended upon both the social context and the nature of the social relationship. Chelune (1979) proposed the following definition:

> The term self-disclosure has been loosely used to describe the degree to which person's reveal information about themselves to 'another, including their thoughts, feelings and experiences… Self disclosure includes any information exchange that refers to the self, including personal states, dispositions, events in the past, and plans for the future. (Chelune 1979, p. 152)

Normative approaches to self-disclosure suggest that making disclosures can help maintain cultural values by regulating expected social behaviour. Self-disclosure can also serve individuals' instrumental goals, dependant on the power relations involved. Chelune's exploration of the functions of self-disclosure concluded that it is a potential powerful tool, the impact of which, depends upon the context and relationships within which it is used. Chelune (1979) refers to three important aspects of self-disclosure which impact upon' its function.

Firstly he identifies the 'normative' nature of the context in which self-disclosure takes place, or in other words how socially acceptable or common-place self-disclosure is. For example it may be more socially acceptable to share intimate or personal information with your doctor than with a shop assistant. The second factor is the 'expressive value' of the

self-disclosure, how honest, detailed and significant to the teller the information is. The same piece of information may have very different meaning or significance depending upon who discloses it and who receives it. For example a disclosure of a bereavement may be relatively insignificant if the death was long ago, concerned a person to whom the teller was not emotionally close, or even if although the death was significant, the information is given in such a way as to protect the teller through humour or other defences. The third feature is 'voluntariness'. This relates to the power balance between the teller and listener and whether the self-disclosure arises from independent volition (maybe arising from trust or some other motivation which benefits the teller) or from a degree of compulsion. Members of less powerful groups may disclose more intimate information than they receive thereby increasing their vulnerability of influence.

> It should be noted that social norms may inhibit self disclosure and isolate individuals from one another. For instance, males may be expected to avoid self disclosure, 'particularly in areas that emphasis personal concerns, weakness, and emotional difficulties. (Chelune 1979, p. 164)

Within the therapeutic context, and that of mental health in particular, self-disclosure is a foundational concept, which originally referred only to information flowing to the helper from the service user. Self-disclosure is used in psychoanalysis to refer to the sharing of personal information, particularly in the context of an analyst sharing information with analysis. In this context such personal information is shared with great caution, but in the belief that such exchanges can potentially build trust within a confidential, therapeutic relationship.

A consideration of the relevance of Chelune's three variables to assessed writing in social work education is interesting. For example, the degree to which disclosure is voluntary in assessment requiring self-reflection is likely to be very limited. The normative value, however, may vary considerably depending upon the disciplinary discourse. In social work, for example self-disclosure is a common feature of professional development, although it is less common in the broader context of higher education. There is an expectation that the development of the ability to write reflectively will enhance and demonstrate students' ability to practice reflectively. The final variable of expressive value can only be an individual experience for each student and tutor but could, as we saw from the experiences of Patricia and Bernie be very powerful. Patricia had some degree of free choice when she wrote about bereavement, which was indeed a very sensitive area for her as she had had a recent loss, but given that she was required to write about her recent practice and this had been with a woman who was dying, she would have found it difficult to avoid the subject. It is important to recognise that although the challenges and pitfalls of reflection and self-disclosure are established aspects of practice in social work education, there has been little published analysis of the impact of self-disclosure through writing and the consequent impact on the writer.

The work of Henriques et al. presents a perspective on identity which incorporates social and emotional worlds through a critical analysis of psychoanalytic theory. Although the research on which Henriques et al. is based is not concerned with writing, the psychosocial theorisation of identity, emotion and discourse which they develop offers some very interesting opportunities for developing established ideas on writer identity, particularly in the context of non-traditional students. The work of Henriques et al. draws heavily upon feminist perspectives such as those of Mitchell and Rose (1982), Henriques et al. draw upon the concept of 'desire', developed by Lacan (1964). The concept of desire provides an explanation for individuals' motivation, which does not rely upon cognitive

explanations and is a core concept in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan suggests that desire is 'the essence of man' (Lacan 1964, p. 275). In very simple terms desire is the motivation within us to satisfy unmet wishes or needs (although Lacan does not use the term 'need' as he associates it with only biologically driven or instinctual requirements), and such needs are experienced emotionally rather than cognitively. Lacan's concept of desire is closely associated with inter-relationships as he proposes that individuals look to others to satisfy their desires. Importantly desire is unconscious, cannot be fully articulated in speech and can never be entirely fulfilled (Evans 1996, p. 37).

The concept of desire is used by Henriques et al. (1998) to explain the motivational core (or self), which can explain an individual's apparently irrational, unconscious and contradictory experiences and behaviour. Desire therefore is both a product of and a contributor to discourses and the nature of an individual's desires will reflect such discourses. The following quotation relates to the authors' research focusing on gender:

> The content of desire, then, is neither timeless nor arbitrary, but has a historical specificity. We are suggesting that its production can be understood in terms of the emergence of particular discursive practices. Similarly, particular anxieties, phobias, depressions and so forth become comprehensible when seen in relation to practices which produce particular norms and positions for women. (Henriques et al. 1998, p. 222)

Henriques et al. therefore locate the concept of desire within *evolving* discoursal relations, rather than as a fixed feature. Desire thus formulated is contradictory, unconscious and transient. This helps to explain contradictions in experiences of individuals between positions which are supported cognitively but resisted in desire. A simple example in the context of student writing might be a student whose actions appear irrational or to contradict their understanding of what is expected of them within the context of institutional discourses but are in fact consistent with the student meeting her own (perhaps irrational) emotional needs. It could be argued that David's experience provides such an example as he had a clear cognitive understanding of the requirement to include personal reflection in his assignments but still experienced emotional blocks in following this through. The contradictions resulting from conflicts between desire and discourses are the site for complex interactions where, Henriques et al., suggest, a Kleinian[1] account of defence mechanisms (ways to protect ourselves from unconscious threat) can be played out. The authors suggest that these only operate interpersonally (in the communication between individuals) and also that feelings about one event may be transferred to another less threatening event.

Risky writing

Although the work of Chelune and Henriques et al. provide interesting paradigms through which to consider the significance of emotion in assessed student writing, neither body of work has to date been applied directly to writing. There has been some work, however, which has taken the affective domain directly into consideration through research into writing. Prior (1998: 2004), in his presentation of writing as a 'social practice', includes the psychological concept of emotion in the process of writing. He associates a range of

[1] Kleinian refers to the influential work of (and work developed from) Melanie Klein, a twentieth century Austrian child psychoanalyst.

activities with the production of a text, including reading, thinking, planning, interacting with other people and texts, including seeking feedback. In describing the 'process' of writing, Prior does not break down these activities into stages, but instead suggests that:

> Writing moves forward (and backward), in fits and starts, with pauses and flurries, discontinuities and conflicts. (Prior 1998, p. 171).

Prior, reminding us that:

> Many of these behaviours seem related to the writing, to managing emotions as well as the creative process (Bazerman and Prior 2004, p. 171).

Thus Prior makes an important link between the process of writing and emotion, although he does not explore the influence of emotion in any depth.

The concept of expressive or personal writing is further discussed by Berman (2001) in the United States offering some interesting parallels to the reflective writing undertaken by Bernie, Patricia and David. Although Berman's research arose from different a different context, one common feature is the impact on both the writer and marker when texts require the author to share personal experience. This perspective recognises the social and potentially emotional-power-that self-disclosure can have in any relationship, but particularly where there is an imbalance of power between the parties. While research into the student experience of participating in reflective writing appears limited, an interesting comparison can be drawn with debates about the use of 'personal' or 'expressionist-writing' in the US, Berman (2001) evaluates the benefits, risks and practices surrounding what he terms 'risky writing'. Berman's research draws upon the practice of composition students in the US, undertaking 'personal writing' or 'expressionist writing'. Personal writing developed in the 1960s and involved students writing assessed academic memoirs. Although not undertaken in the context of professional education, 'personal writing' or 'expressionist writing' shares with reflective writing the importance of the writers drawing upon their own 'personal' or 'professional' experience. The purpose of each form of writing is a little different, the personal writing being undertaken in order to develop the writer's skills in conveying their ideas in writing whilst reflective writing is generally employed to develop the writer's reflective skills. This is necessarily a very loose distinction, as the term 'reflective writing' is used to refer to writing which mayor may not be assessed and which may be' required of students for different reasons.

Berman challenges, the view that personal writing is non-academic, suggesting that:

> Personal writing can be among the most intellectually rigorous genres; demanding self-discipline and self-criticism. (Berman 2001, p. 27)

Berman raises the question of how a teacher should respond to self-disclosure of highly sensitive experiences such as abuse. This is particularly pertinent for the kinds of reflective' writing undertaken by social work students, in which they may not 'only be writing' about experiences of working with emotive topics such as abuse or discrimination, but may also write about their own personal experiences.

Berman, in common with Boud (1999), discourages the grading of personal writing beyond, a broad 'pass/fail' to indicate participation, but where assignments are assessed he provides some guidance for assessors. Berman, in common with Waller (2000), focuses on the need for tutors to employ a sensitive approach to responding to expressive writing. He suggests that a teacher who keeps a focus on the technicality of 'the writing may appear cold, whilst entering into dialogue about the experience may risk over-stepping professional boundaries. He proposes that teachers should employ empathy and avoid critique or

contestation because to do otherwise would imply-that this is based on the misleading assumption (as in psychoanalysis) that the therapist/teacher knows more about the subject-than the-writer/analysand. Berman stresses that empathy does not necessarily imply agreement, but instead an understanding of another's world. The work of researchers such as Berman (2001), Waller (2000) and Boud (1999), although not all concerned specifically with the writing of students in practice-based-education, all identify the importance of student: tutor dialogue where writing involves the student sharing personal information. Patricia and Bernie both spoke about the slippage in communication with their tutors arising from feedback that was on paper only. Patricia also spoke about a much more positive experience with a tutor on another course where she had felt sufficiently encouraged to maintain a direct dialogue about her writing over the phone. In relation to the tutor for her reflective writing assignments she commented:

> Yes you can ring him up but to be able to do that you've got to feel that you've some sort of some sort - how can I put it – sort of relationship based upon trust
> Patricia Interview 2

With such sensitive writing, therefore it seems that not only is a dialogue important but also a relationship with the tutor needs to be established which recognises the emotional significance of the writing in order to generate a trusting relationship in which dialogue can take place.

Locating the self in writer identity

Research into writer identity, such as that of Ivanič (1998), reflects a more general trend in which the influence of the social context has become increasingly important. The lack of scholarly focus on the emotional world is, according to Layder (2004) risking the emotional self being minimised to obscurity by the forces of discourse and social construction. Whilst recognising the importance of discourse and social construction in shaping meaning and guiding action, Layder suggests that:

> Self-identity is suffused with feeling and emotion even if individuals attempt to suppress or to stifle their expression. Emotion is the foundation on which every aspect of human behaviour ultimately rests. All our intentions and purposes are coloured by it, especially, our attempts to control and influence others, (Layder 2004, p. 159).

This is a striking statement, particularly as Layder is a sociologist. The view he offers here shares much with the work of Henriques et al. (1998) and also Frosh (2002) who propose a theorisation of identity which draws both upon post-structuralist theories and a critical approach to psychoanalysis. In doing so, they also reaffirm the centrality of emotion and an inner world for our understanding of identity and provide 'an explanation for motivation, or 'desire'.

Janks (2002) provides a useful bridge between research in the field of writer identity and psychosocial perspectives as she is a researcher within the discipline of critical discourse analysis. Janks (2002) suggests that models of critical discourse analysis, as represented by the work of those within the tradition of Fairclough, restricts focus to the rational:

> What is missing from this model [critical discourse analysis] is the territory beyond reason. The territory of desire and identification, pleasure and play, the taboo and the transgressive; what Giroux calls 'disturbing pleasures'. (Janks 2002, p. 9)

This recognition of the importance of motivators driven less by conscious thought and more by elements 'beyond reason' again connects with my interest in unconscious or irrational explanations of student experiences and actions. Working in the context of secondary education in South Africa, Janks uses advertisements to investigate the ways in which our responses are not limited to those of the rational, intellectual mind but are also influenced by our affective identifications that may be unconscious or irrational. Janks draws on Freud's (1916) discussion of jokes and humour to explore the conflicts between rational and irrational affective responses and why emotion associated with identification is a forceful influence. Whilst Janks found that it was not easy to predict the emotive triggers associated with particular texts, or for individual people, the power of the responses that she noted were consistently strong and potentially dangerous:

> The research produced evidence that when texts or tasks touch something 'sacred' to a student, critical analysis is extremely threatening. I came to define as sacred meanings that were constitutive of students' identities, meaning that if challenged, attacked what one teacher described as 'the fibre of their belief'. (Janks 2002, p. 22)

Although Janks is (by her own estimation) in the early stages of this work, and her focus here is not on adult student texts, she raises some fundamental challenges to the ways in which identity and texts have been theorised which can be applied to student writing. She recognises the relevance of an irrational, emotional world which is both inextricably linked to identity and a powerful influence on individuals' relationships with texts and is equally applicable to student writing. In fact the quotation above broadens 'texts' to *'texts and tasks'* which I would suggest that there are a range of behaviours associated with texts which are equally influenced by 'the fibre of belief' of an individual (Janks 2002), including thinking in preparation of texts, reading, assessing, re-reading or responding to feedback in association with a specific text. Janks restricts her analysis to a discussion of identity and identification, but does not attempt to locate emotional identification or indeed to explain the relationships between the rational and emotional self. Another bridge is provided by the work of Creme (2005) in her work on using Winnicott's (1971) concept of 'play' to encourage emotional, intuitive and creative aspects of student thinking. Creme and Janks provide an important contribution, however, by placing psychoanalytic thinking on the map for those researching from an academic literacy perspective and who are focusing on writer identity in particular.

Working with the emotive text

Drawing on data from social work students and tutors, Rai (2008) suggests that in assessing that social work students' writing, tutors expected two distinct elements to be integrated. These elements were what Rai (2008) refers to as 'theoretical' and 'experiential' writing. Writing, therefore, involved students finding, a 'mysterious' path between theoretical 'academic' writing and personal experiential writing. Swaying too far towards the academic drew tutor criticism of being 'defensively academic' whilst at the other extreme students risked the criticism of being anecdotal. Tutors' expectations, although imprecise, implied the need for an integration of writing based on experience and writing which drew on theory and 'authoritative knowledge' or in other words published sources. Despite this expectation, tutors acknowledged that such integration was extremely, complex and difficult.

Data from students highlighted that integrating these two elements was challenging in part due to the emotional aspect of experiential writing. In the main, Rai suggests, students partitioned experiential from theoretical writing enabled students to regulate the emotive impact of the task as well a separating out cognitively two potentially different ways of writing. One possible explanation for the challenge posed by integrating these elements could be provided by Hoadley-Maidment (2000) who suggests that such synthesis involves high-order cognitive skills of analysis and critical reflection, which not normally associated, with early stages of higher education study. Based on the experiences of students in this study, this integration was certainly very challenging despite all three participants already being graduates. However, it was not the cognitive challenge alone that speared to create difficulties for students' success in reflective writing.

Drawing on Bazerman and Prior (2004), Rai (2008) suggests that based on her data, the writing practices developed by students involved the key elements of circularity, human interaction and emotion. She suggests that students developed individual writing practices in order to negotiate the demands of writing and drawn upon the features of circularity of actions, human interaction and emotion in exploring writing practices. All of these factors affected students differently, but the interaction between student and tutor (past and current) and the circular impact of feedback and writing were particularly striking features affecting students' writing practices. These dynamics reflected not only individuals' identities and subject positions but also defensive coping strategies developed in order to manage sometimes emotionally difficult tasks.

Pedagogic implications

This study, drawing on the work cited above and the data presented, provides some insight into both of the research questions proposed above:

- What is the nature of emotion in student writing?
- What impact does emotion have on student writer?

Both questions remain areas requiring further investigation, but an exploration of the impact of reflective writing in particular has highlighted the significance of emotion for the students in this study. The concept of self-disclosure (Chelune 1979) together with the work of Henriques et al. (1998) offers a socio-psychological perspective on student writing which, as a first step to taking these questions further, provides a language to analyse emotion in writing.

Drawing on Rai (2008) and others cited here, there are some important implications which arise from the centrality of the self in practice-based reflective writing. Firstly, educators should recognise that the content of academic writing is not emotionally neutral and any theory or knowledge can potentially connect with the student writer's own experiences and values. This brings into contention the nature of objectivity, a frequently stated objective of 'academic writing'. As illustrated by the students in this study, where required content is deeply personal, as in reflective writing in social work, there are implications both for the ways students felt about writing, received feedback on their work and also on the way in which they organised their content. For example in order to manage the requirement for both impersonal and highly emotive content, Partricia drafted and structured her assignments with a very clear division between the two elements. She refers to the emotional elements as 'guts':

> What's happening with this is I am writing what I'm thinking and then I am thinking… I can't get my head around that thinking what that is, 'cos that's legal stuff and I'm not doing legal stuff I'm doing guts, you know, got to write about feelings, blah blah balh, so I'll just put that in and when I come back I'll add that. So there is a mixture of changing Language, putting in new ideas, and also putting the non guts stuff in and trying to work out where to put it in.
> Patricia interview 2

Rai (2008) also suggests that it sensitises students' *experience* of receiving feedback and a grade on their work as well as creating a challenge for tutors who were aware (at least in part) of the ways in which students might experience their comments.

Tutors and students in Rai's study (2008) struggled with the personal and emotive content of reflective writing. The explicit teaching of reflective writing skills, however, opens up the possibility of creating a dialogue between students and tutors which explicitly recognises the social, educational and historical factors which influence individual students' writing practices. Writing tasks which sit outside of the formal assessment process such as narratives about personal or value laden experiences can both build trust with tutors through sharing experiences and provide opportunities for low risk feedback. Skills developed in these preparatory narrative tasks can then be applied to assessed reflective writing tasks. Low risk writing exercises such as this also provide some time and space for students to familiarise themselves with reflective writing and develop their own strategise both for writing about experience and seeking tutor support and clarification on their work.

Tutors also need support and guidance in developing the ability to respond empathically and constructively to texts involving self-disclosure through using communication skills closely associated with social work. The particular challenges of achieving this successfully may mean that a reliance on written feedback alone is unhelpful and that oral dialogue is required to reduce the degree of unhelpful interpretation of meaning. The emotive content along with the complexity of the task suggests that oral dialogue in some form is important in enabling tutors to respond sensitively to the highly emotive nature of the self-disclosures.

The learning experiences for students, as illustrated by Patricia, could also be improved if there had been a greater opportunity to open discussions about individual students' anxieties, needs and expectations but also the particular ways in which they would like to be supported. For some students, such as Bernie, specific identity issues were extremely important in relation to learning to write academically as well as the content of their writing. Facilitating open discussion about these issues may have therefore enhanced the students' writing skills as well as their understanding of the subject studied. More worryingly, again illustrated by Bernie, a failure to acknowledge such identity-based barriers could seriously disadvantage particular students who had previous unhelpful educational experiences.

Conclusion

This paper has drawn together research and thoughts from a range of disciplines in an attempt to foreground an aspect of learning in practice-based education that is rarely openly discussed. Through exploring the research questions proposed the data presented here suggests that writing reflectively raises important issues in relation to emotion for both students and tutors assessing their texts. Current work on writer identity, such as that of

Ivanič (1998) has not explored identity from a psychological perspective and as a consequence there has been little theorisation around ways in which to understand or respond to emotion in student writing. Henriques et al. (1998) provides a rigorous and challenging theorisation of identity which acknowledges both a social and psychoanalytic perspectives. Meanwhile the concept of self-disclosure, as presented by Chelune (1979) offers a useful paradigm to understand the experiences of students engaged in assessed reflective writing. From research more directly focused on writing, Berman (2001), Janks (2002) and Creme (2000) all suggest that 'emotion' is an important consideration in writing which has implications for both writer and addressee. Henriques et al. (1998) also contribute the concept of desire, or in other words the motivational element of identity which is often unconscious.

Together this discussion argues that emotion should not be overlooked in the process of student writing and assessment, particularly where the writing is reflective or involves experiential writing. The data from this study suggests that the full complexity of the impact of emotion on writing may not be obvious to the assessor or even the student but may nonetheless have a significant impact on the creation of texts and response to feedback. Research is needed on writer identity which recognises the significance of psychological as well as social influences as is work which further explores ways in which assessors can develop pedagogic responses and assessment strategies which actively recognise the importance of emotion.

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