

A Reflection on a Teaching Activity with a Focus on Emotions Conducted with First-year Social Work Students

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ABSTRACT

This article will argue that emotional learning leads to a deepening of the reflective process which contributes to the development of emotionally literate social work practitioners. We explain the psychological and theoretical framing for a teaching activity conducted in a first-year social work class; give examples of the texts produced; reflect upon our experiences as teachers conducting this activity; and discuss the implications for teaching when teachers become aware of students facing significant emotional challenges.

Keywords: *Reflective practice; Emotional learning; Professional identity; Social work education; Creative teaching methods; Duty of care issues in teaching*

INTRODUCTION

Social work as a profession is known for its engagement with the notion of reflective practice (Knott & Scragg, 2010; Pease & Fook, 1999; Ruch, 2002). Mezirow (1991) describes reflection as the process by which we “critically assess the content, process or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience” (p. 104). Practitioners who are encouraged to re-examine their unconscious or tacit beliefs are less likely to produce habitual professional responses that have little to do with their clients’ complex and unique needs (Redmond, 2007). There is no one, clearly defined, process to develop reflective capabilities in student social workers, but Rai (2012) argues that a beginning step is “drawing in the affective domain to academic writing” (p. 67). Attending to deeper and more complex issues such as emotion and identity that arise from students’ experiences in class can provide an excellent entry point for first-year social work students to begin to reflect on themselves and their practice. Layder (2004) suggests the lack of focus in academic settings on the emotional world risks the emotional self being minimised to obscurity, and argues that our self-identity is suffused with emotion, even when it is suppressed. Janks (2002) furthers this perspective by suggesting our irrational, emotional world is inextricably linked to identity and has a powerful influence on an individual’s expression of self. As the use of self is so central to critically reflective social work practice (Dewane, 2006), our self needs to be known to us in order to practise social work ethically and constructively. It follows that, if our most emotional life experiences will inevitably infuse into our social work self, this calls for students to deeply examine their emotional reactions before qualifying as practitioners. Our close relationships with others, especially those in vulnerable populations require us to be aware that “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). Encouraging social work students to explore their emotional worlds would therefore seem a paramount step for developing reflective practitioners. The Professional Capabilities Framework for Social Workers in the UK has recently formalised the expectation that social workers be “emotionally literate” (The College of Social Work (TCSW), 2012) which indicates a growing acknowledgement of the need for social work students to develop emotional awareness. Grant, Kinman, and Alexander (2014) note, however, that little is yet known about strategies that could be incorporated into the social work curriculum to this end. Australia has yet to formalise emotional literacy within its code of ethics (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010), however, it does recognise in section 5.1.1 e) under *General ethical responsibilities: Respect for human dignity and worth*, that “Social workers will be aware of and reflect on their personal beliefs and history, values, views, prejudices and preferences and refrain from imposing these on clients” (p. 17). Attending to emotion through self-reflection in social work education has become part of many course curricula, however, it has been conflated with notions of resilience and the ability of social work students to cope with the demands of social work practice (Adamson, 2011). This focus on resilience risks minimising the place emotion plays in the work and relegates it to a perceived weakness rather than as strength (Ingram, 2013a). It is difficult however, to imagine a resilient social worker who has not deeply explored their own inner emotional worlds in order to engage in the measured and emotionally regulated manner expected of social workers (Grant et al., 2014). The

connection between our cognition and emotions needs to be made as it is through reflexive engagement with the self that we can begin as social workers to engage deeply in decision making to effect change, both on an individual and social level (D'Cruz, Gillingham, & Melendez, 2007). We would argue, therefore, that social work educators must assist students to develop emotional intelligence through making the connection between emotions and cognitions using reflective methods.

There is a limited field of research exploring reflective methods of teaching from the perspective of students, and even less on the impact of what Berman (2001) describes as “risky writing” upon the social work educator. Ward (2010) describes the necessity for social work courses to prepare students for the emotional challenges that relationship-based social work practice brings. He articulates that this means “...moving beyond what might be called the ‘instructional mode’ of education into something more attuned to developing an understanding of the emotional process” (Ward, 2010, p. 184). Engaging in this kind of teaching practice places social work educators in a relational context with our students (Clare, 2007), thus adding a dimension to the teaching role that brings added complexity around issues of self-care and duty of care. When written texts require the student to share personal experience, it is essential to recognise the impact that self-disclosure can have, especially for those students with a personal history of “adverse life events” (Gilin & Kauffman, 2015). This is all the more pertinent where there is a power imbalance between those involved, such as in the teacher–student relationship and when assessments are linked to reflection and self-disclosure. Boud (1999) and Berman (2001) raise the question of how educators should respond to self-disclosure of a highly sensitive nature, considering both the students’ and the educators’ well-being. Boud (1999) suggests that self-reflection will sometimes result in an exploration of past trauma and he cautions teachers to use ethical practices with their students, similar to those used professionally in a client–social worker relationship. Ward (2008) asserts that it is a necessity for future social workers to have confronted, head-on, the power of potentially destabilising emotions whilst in their undergraduate courses so as to minimise risk to themselves and future clients. We must then, as educators, be mindful of how we ask students to personally reflect and consider how we can become a “safety net” should emotions arise that are previously hidden or dormant (Yip, 2006).

Reflective Practice and Emotional Learning in Social Work Education

It is well established that reflective methods are considered essential to social work teaching and learning, as social work practice requires us to consider our values and judgements as well as the impact of our personal experiences on our professional practice (Dewane, 2006; Taylor & Cheung, 2010). The work of Schön (1983) and Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) was heavily drawn upon in social work education throughout the late 1980s and 1990s (Pawar & Anscombe, 2014; Ruch, 2002). Social work students began to be challenged to think about the construction of knowledge and to consider the many aspects of themselves, their lives and the society they live within that contribute to the construction of this knowledge (Ruch, 2002). Critical reflection came to the fore as a core component of social work practice and the work of Habermas (1973, cited in Pawar & Anscombe, 2014; Ruch, 2002) with its examination of structural oppression married well with social work education’s anti-oppressive stance. Reflection and critical reflection therefore became

part of the landscape of social work education and it began with a heady, theory-driven foundation. Whilst standard reflective process has become a highly valued method of teaching in social work education (Clare, 2007; Ruch, 2002; Wilson, 2013), the development of emotional literacy in students has not received the same explicit attention. Indeed, both Ingram (2013b) and Morrison (2007) argue that emotional intelligence is at the heart of reflective social work. Standard reflective teaching however, often becomes an intellectual and cognitive process with the development of emotional awareness an anticipated (Ruch, 2002), rather than targeted, outcome. In standard reflective methods, students tend to *think* through various issues or scenarios and examine their self-positioning as part of the reflective process (Wang, 2012). Subsequent analysis of reflections will often make use of social work theories incorporating terms such as positivist *thinking* or feminist *thinking* (Ruch, 2002), thus endorsing reflection as a cognitive process. *Emotional learning* is a term we are using to define an outcome of a reflective process that encourages students to understand their emotional selves. Emotional learning can occur through the *triggering of an emotional experience* as part of a reflective teaching activity. One of the key differences between reflective activities with emotional learning as an outcome and more cognitively based reflective activities is that the experience of emotion occurs before any thinking and analysis takes place. Reflection arising from cognition-based reflective activities such as reflective writing *can* result in emotional change for the student, but it usually begins as an intellectual exercise. Through engaging students in reflective activities aimed at emotional learning, a deeper level of synthesis between intellectual understandings of social work practice and students' understanding of their own emotions can occur. This process is akin to "deep learning" as described by Clare (2007), however, it is different in that Clare primarily identifies that it is the critical analysis of situations, theories and/or issues (a largely cognitive process) that leads to the deeper emotional change, rather than the experience of emotion itself. Reflective activities designed to result in emotional learning, *begin* with the triggering of an emotional response through various means and it is the emotional experience itself that leads to self-reflection. Others (Cranton, 2011; Mezirow, 1991; Ruch, 2002) have discussed the transformative impact of learning activities and the emotional learning outcomes for students. We drew on these ideas for the development of a creative activity designed to achieve emotional learning for a cohort of first-year social work students.

The Development of Reflective Activity Aimed at Emotional Learning

Creative activities such as writing poetry or engaging in spontaneous art allows us to access subconscious or perhaps even our unconscious selves (Butterwick & Lipson Lawrence, 2009). As Jung (1965) writes, "I can understand myself only in the light of internal happenings" (p. 5). Through creative learning processes the potential exists for deep emotional learning to take place, where the unspoken is given voice through connection to the inner world and the understanding that springs from it. Eisner (2008) notes that the arts "are about emotion ... becoming aware of our capacity to feel is a way of discovering our humanity" (p. 11). These creative means enable people to understand and define themselves and make links between their personal and professional selves (Charles, 2010; Pavlovich, 2007; Wood, 2012). Some examples of the ways in which emotional learning might be achieved creatively include the use of visual triggers such as photographs, movies or personal video blogs; the use of drama in class group work

exercises; personal journaling or blogging and the use of artistic media for self-expression. Boud (1999) emphasises the importance of considering the learning context when setting up reflection tasks, by identifying particular barriers to effective reflection, and we would argue, emotional learning. This can be achieved through guiding the reflective process if it becomes intellectualised; discussing with students appropriate and safe self-disclosure; and providing clarity about whether the sharing of personal information is optional or whether it is a core requirement of academic progression. Ruch (2002) suggests that reflective exercises that are linked to assessments can be problematic and less effective, due to the inherent power imbalance between educator and student and subsequent censoring of the reflective experience. Reflective practice that attends to emotional learning techniques are therefore best used as formative learning, as part of workshop activities where students are free to experience emotion separate to any assessment-based learning. A debriefing should also occur, so that the emotions experienced by the students are discussed and their personal stories are related back to the topic of the reflection. This also enables teachers to help contain students' emotions and address any ongoing needs a student may have. Class size becomes an important consideration in this process, as smaller numbers are more conducive to the sharing of experiences, much like a therapeutic group dynamic. In a sense, this kind of learning activity has some similarities to a psychologically therapeutic process, akin to counselling modalities such as brief therapy, or group therapy. Ward (2008) discusses the need to create a "holding environment" within a student group in order to experientially learn about the use of self in social work practice, highlighting the need for teachers to create a therapeutic space for emotional learning to occur. This raises many issues for social work educators, as the activities may lead to a degree of personal impact on teachers, who experience the exposure to their students' emotional states, as well as the need to manage any emotional issues that arise which may be problematic for students. Boud (1999) suggests a relationship with the teacher needs to be established which recognises the emotional significance of the task or text. Van Manen (1991) argues that teachers who facilitate their students' expression of inner feelings gain a better understanding of the students' emotions and subjectivity, and this brings about "with-feelings" of sympathy or empathy in the teacher. As a result, teachers who participate in emotive learning activities must consider their own reactions and the ramifications of sharing these in a class context. While Rai (2012) suggests that emotional and reflective tasks that sit outside the formal assessment process can build trust with teachers through sharing experiences and providing opportunities for low-risk feedback, Van Manen (1991) notes that the sharing of emotional experiences demands care and love which, in turn, requires the teacher to reflect and manage their own emotional responses. The teaching activity in this paper was approached with an understanding of the social work teacher's role as a bridge, as "true teachers use themselves as bridges over which they invite their students to cross" (Kazantzakis, n.d, cited in Hogan, 2002, p. 45). The positioning of ourselves as a bridge required more strength and self-reflection than we had anticipated.

METHOD

Palmer (1998) notes that "intellect works in concert with feelings, so if I hope to open my students' minds, I must open their emotions as well" (p. 63). This reflective activity centred on emotional learning was conducted with first-year social work students who

were enrolled in a unit that relied heavily on reflective exercises. This two-part activity occurred during a class that explored the role of emotions in the development of individual identity. Firstly, students participated in a workshop where they were required to view imagery such as photographs, film footage and movie scenes designed to activate a range of emotional reactions. The sequence of images took about 30 minutes to run and was conducted in silence. The silence allowed students to experience their own reactions as a personal experience, without input from others. Imagery included a taped emergency call made by a child; photographs of people in desperate life situations; movie scenes that would be considered emotional and YouTube clips of real-life situations with an emotive focus. We attempted to provide exposure to a range of emotions, including anxiety, inspiration, joy, sadness and confusion. Once the screening of the imagery had finished, the whole class sat together in a circle and, one by one, they spoke about which images had triggered the most emotion in them and those which had affected them the least. They were asked then to consider why this might be. Students were able to reflect on personal experiences; core values they held; fears, hopes or wishes they had; and personal preferences for showing, hiding or suppressing any emotions they experienced. They were then asked to reflect upon the way in which their particular emotional reactions and understandings about themselves might influence their social work practice and being in a helping role.

A second activity took place after this initial reflective process. After these group reflections, they were each given a page of fictional text and asked to complete a *blackout poem* by blacking out words on the page, to reveal a poem on the topic of "Becoming a social worker". Students could choose from any words in the text to highlight what they could relate to on this topic. The aim was for students to use this creative process to express feelings associated with their journey of becoming a social worker, as reflected upon in the previous part of the class. As teachers, we also participated in the activity as our view is that, through modelling the process ourselves, we could better assist students to express emotion and self-reflect (Ward, 2008). After students and tutors had completed their poems, a whole class reading ensued, where students and tutors read out their poetry and commented if they chose to, on the personal meanings of the poem. Several students chose not to speak at this point and preferred to keep their poem and its meaning personal to them.

DISCUSSION

In conducting this reflective practice activity that focused on emotional learning, three key elements of the learning process came to light. Firstly the students' experiences as expressed in the group debrief and in their poems allowed stories of students' personal experiences to come forth. There was a depth of emotional self-reflection, the majority of which touched on core emotions such as grief and loss, hope, fear and love linked to the idea of "becoming a social worker". As students talked about their poems, they tended to self-disclose aspects of their life story and the pivotal life points along their pathway to social work. Many said they found that the writing of the poem helped them realise some of the deeper reasons why they had chosen social work and/or the emotions they felt about becoming a social worker. Figures 1, 2 and 3 show poems created by students, reproduced with their permission. It is important to note that students tended to display emotions during the reading of the poem that mirrored some of the emotive elements of the poem. This suggests that the

exercise was more than an intellectual process, rather it engaged the students emotionally as it was intended to do. Some students cried or expressed jubilation and excitement.

What it comes down to is that I want it all. I want
 my Mexican and Gran and Tony and Greg. I want
 a sky full of balloons and I also want the chance
 to patch things between Dad and me. I want to
 hold Sean in my arms. What a great thing I
 could do. I can help him learn to walk and talk.
 Well, you can't have it all. Greg keeps telling me
 you've got to decide. Think of Billy Buck. A vital
 issue isn't which horse you choose. What really matters
 is that once you've made the decision, you ride the one
 you've decided on for all your life. It's worth
 it. I got to the stage where I've got to decide pretty
 quickly or it'll be too late to book a flight to America
 before their second semester starts. So, on a warm
 Saturday morning I get on the bus down at the shop and
 go into the city alone. I feel I've got to be alone to make
 the decision, away from places where I've been with
 Tony or anyone else who's important to me.
 I get off in the centre of the city and walk up Collins
 Street toward Parliament House. This is unfamiliar
 territory to me, away from the area that Tony and I
 always head for, where the cinemas are, away from
 Connsdale Street where Mum and I used to drink Greek
 coffees and talk. I pass by some expensive-looking cafes
 with little tables outside on the footpath, and I pass
 some even more expensive-looking clothing shops, and
 then, between a clothing boutique and Georges I see
 some white steps leading up to a church. There's a sign
 on the church door that says 'Open for Prayer. All
 Welcome'.
 I walk past the white steps but then I turn back.

Figure 1.

smoker, she says, looking out the window with me. Then she turns her head and looks at me. 'What's wrong, son-of-a-bitch?' she asks, smacking me on the forehead with the hand that's not around my shoulders. 'Don't you tell your old mum? For old times' sake.' I feel a tear or two fall into tears. For the third or fourth time in **one day**, I'm sobbing like a baby. **I can't** stop myself. I can't stop what **stop** myself. I just lean against Mum and say, 'She puts her other arm around me. "Poor old Sam," she says, patting my back. I can hear the tears in her voice, too. "My poor old Sammy."

'When the sobs begin to **slow down**, I say, my face still buried in Mum's neck. 'Why didn't you try and resuscitate him?'

'What's that?' she says, pulling away from me a little.

'Why didn't you resuscitate Nicholas when you found him in the bath? We've got the instructions on how to do it taped to the side of the fridge.'

Mum drops her arms. 'Come over here,' she says in a grunted-sounding voice. She goes to the table **and** sits down. 'Come on,' she says, pointing to the chair next to her. She lights a cigarette as I sit down. She takes a deep drag, blows out the smoke. I can see her **thinking, trying hard not to cry, planning what to say**. Then she says, **panic** 'When I found him, Sam. Can you imagine how it was, finding him in the bath, face down, not moving? The first thing I did was scratch him up **and** shake him. **just** kept shaking him, begging him to breathe. I was in shock, Sam. I didn't know what I was doing. I remember taking him to the family room and

Figure 2.

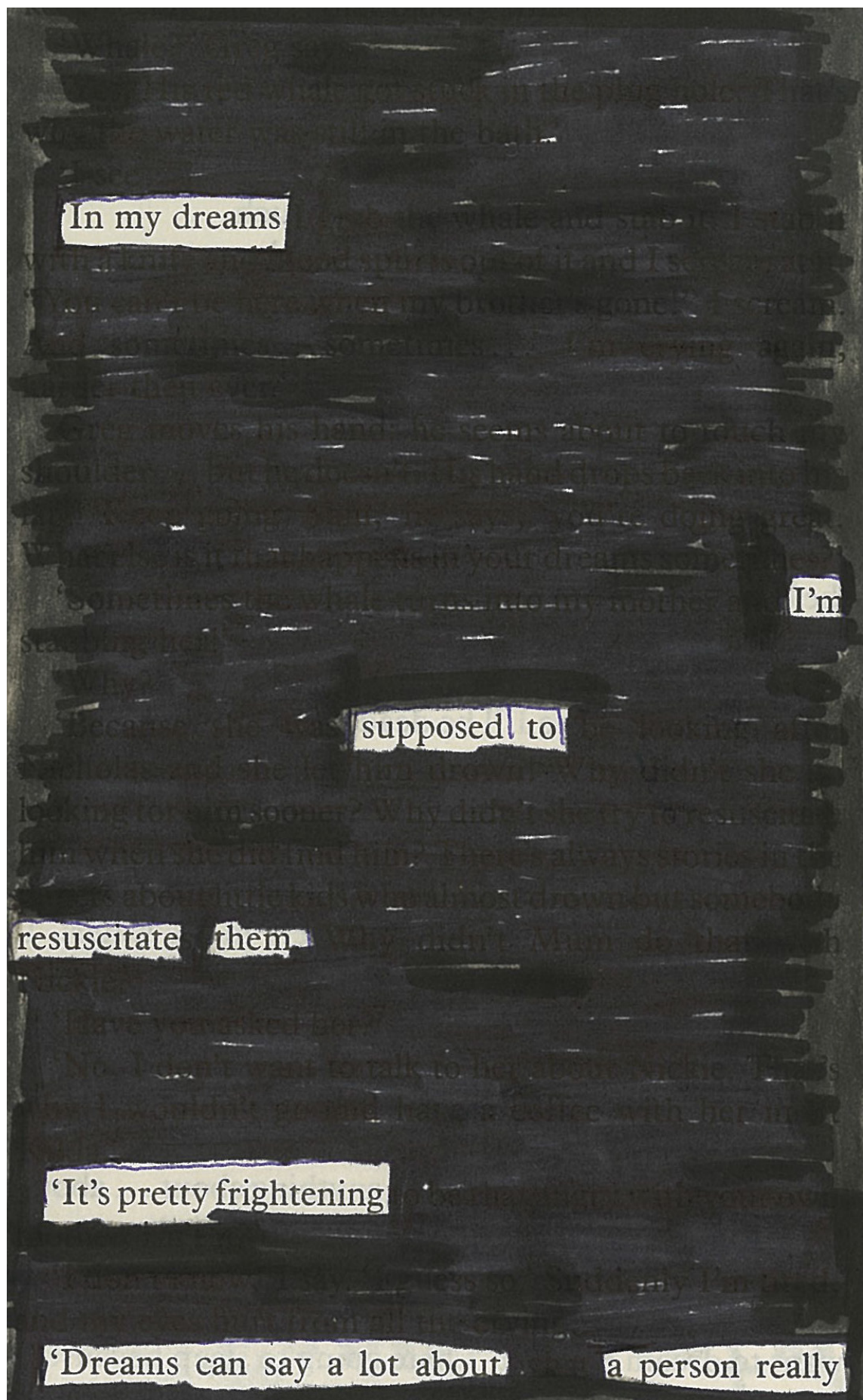


Figure 3.

The depth of personal reflection elicited by this activity led us to identify responsibility for the care of the students (in Australia referred to within social work practice as “duty of care”) as a second key element in this reflective exercise. Although most of the poetry and the students’ reading and debriefing of it was not worrisome, rather it appeared to have led to personal insights and a sense of self-discovery, there were one or two students per class who disclosed experiences of depression, self-harm or abuse. As this class activity was designed to activate an emotional state/s, care needed to be taken with vulnerable students who may have been destabilised by this process. Yip (2006) discusses the challenges of reflective activities in social work course, particularly in terms of the potential for activities to psychologically destabilise students and as a matter of course, to disrupt students’ world views. The question of ethical conduct as a teacher therefore arises whenever self-reflective activities are asked of students and probably more so if emotion-triggering strategies are used. It was imperative that we did not insist upon personal disclosures and we gave a choice as to whether a poem was read or not, so as not to risk the re-traumatisation of any student revisiting difficult memories and experiences (Butterwick & Lipson Lawrence, 2009). We were alerted to any students who might have required extra attention after the class by their choice not to read their poem; by the content of their poem; by their debrief of the experience; and/or by previous knowledge of a student’s personal experiences. Students who met any of these criteria were spoken to on a one-to-one basis after class or were followed up by email. We consider it necessary if teachers are to engage in emotional learning activities such as this one, that a similar process of professional responsibility to students is followed as would occur in a therapeutic environment. In this respect, it is much like following ethical guidelines in counselling relationships, where respect for autonomy needs to be balanced with assessing risk in an atmosphere of relational trust (Procter & Keys, 2013). Engaging students in emotional learning is therefore, a more time-intensive teaching process than the use of more traditional reflective practices, requiring teachers to take on the role of what Clare (2007) terms “practitioner-teachers”. Just as the work of counselling takes an emotional toll on the practitioner, so too, can emotive teaching wear on teachers who are required to debrief students and consider their duty of care as a result of the issues that may arise.

Thirdly, as participants ourselves in this emotive learning activity, we identified a further element to a reflective activity facilitating emotional learning, which is the personal experience of teachers. As the students’ emotions were activated during the activity, so were ours and our awareness that there can be an emotional drain attached to processing one’s own emotions, as well as the caretaking of others’ became evident. We reflected afterwards on the way in which we had each been affected by the classroom activity and the writing of the poem. Figures 4 (Author 1) and 5 (Author 2) show the poems each of us created as part of this activity.

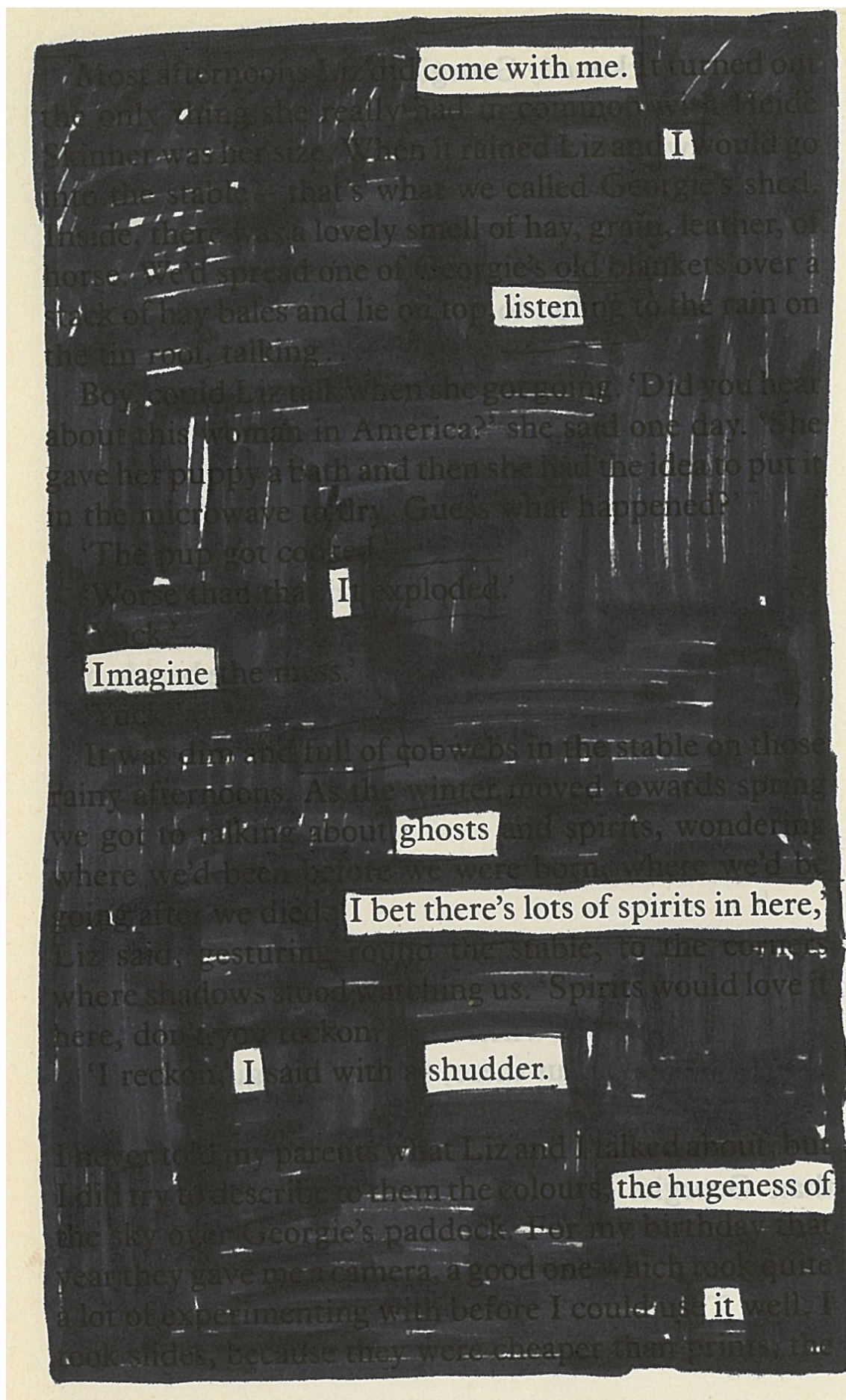


Figure 4.

games short-circuited very quickly, but "making progress" may be given as a reward for getting well and staying well, with the exceptions mentioned above. Furthermore, almost all the patients are grateful for this frank approach. After the meeting nearly always some of them come up to me and say, "This is the first time a doctor has talked to me like a human being and talked straight to me. This happens because hospital games are by no means unconscious." The patient knows exactly what he is doing and why he is doing it, and appreciates an understanding therapist who is not taken in by it. Even if he does not admit this on the first try, the patient is grateful because this approach relieves the tedium of conventional psychotherapy.

For those who are more comfortable thinking of their patients as "weak egos," I should say that I would not hesitate to read the above paragraph to a very large encounter with a group of psychiatric inpatients, even very disturbed ones, after only a very short period of preparation and getting acquainted (say thirty minutes). I have no doubt of its effectiveness since I have said just those things on many occasions under such circumstances.

When a patient who has already been to one or more therapists or psychiatric hospitals comes to a new therapist, as a new patient or a private patient, the proper procedure is as follows. During the interview the therapist makes sure he gets the social background, unobtrusively, as far as possible, swinging along with the patient's conversation, but later, if there are omissions, making a clear point of filling them in. First, he gets a medical and psychiatric history. In the course of this, he asks for a dream—any dream, because that is the quickest way to get a picture of the patient's superego and his world view. Then he inquires about each of the previous therapists why the

Figure 5.

Kirsty reflects:

I was a little shocked at the darkness of my poem. I was concerned students may think I was presenting social work as a negative, distressing profession. I reflected that what I had written was about how harrowing the work can be at times and how people always carry with them the weight of their pasts. Sometimes people's pasts felt to me like a nightmare they are carrying around. This is something I always bear in mind in my therapeutic work as a child and family therapist. When I read out the poem, I could sense some of the students reacting to the "heaviness" of the poem and I wasn't sure if this was a good thing or not. I told myself that my expression of self was just as valid as theirs and that I was being authentic by not censoring my poem. I did wonder however at the appropriateness of this and if it crossed a boundary that usually existed between me as a teacher and the students. I was aware that there were two students in my class who appeared extra quiet and possibly teary, who I wanted to speak with on their own after class. This affected the depth to which I wanted to explain my poem, as I wanted to be careful not to re-traumatise anyone. I wanted to ensure they left class feeling as emotionally stable as possible.

Robin reflects:

I enjoyed the process of creating my poem, and was interested to note I took care to present a "balanced" perspective on social work, as difficult but honourable, thoughtful and emotional, taxing and rewarding. I found myself editing for my audience, and became concerned that I was not being "honest" enough about my emotions, when I was asking the students to write from the heart. As I re-read my poem, however, I realised that I find teaching social work to be one step removed from the intensity of direct practice, so my emotions are broader, more like overarching emotional themes than when I was working in direct practice, for example ongoing community mental health work with a client with chronic suicidal ideation. Teaching social work allows me to reflect and have perspective on the intense new-ness of the emotions I felt when becoming a social worker. After each student read, I gave brief feedback on the emotions their poem had engendered in me, sharing in their excitement, fear, boredom and anxiety. I took care to debrief students as a group at the end of class, and also noted any strong reactions from students and checked in with them after class to ensure they were ok. This activity was a powerful experience for me in each class, and seemed to also be for most of the students.

Both of us engaged in experiencing an emotive response to the activity that challenged our identity as social workers and also as teachers. It also forced us to juggle the role of teacher with that of an emotional participant, which is a delicate bridge to cross.

Teaching based around emotional learning can be time intensive and, as previously discussed, there is greater emotional wear and tear on the teacher. Debriefing was required after classes to discuss what we had observed about the students' emotional learning as well as our own reactions. Plans should be made for any student who is identified to be struggling emotionally and who may require additional support. We found that we needed to speak with at least one student after class and/or needed to follow up one or two students by email if they left class before we had spoken with them. We were also aware that there may have been students who were emotionally rattled by the experience who may not have outwardly shown us anything of concern, but who may have struggled silently. To try and

address this issue, we engaged in a second, much shorter debrief in a following class and reminded students that they could speak with us if they felt the need to.

Social work educators carry a sense of responsibility for the students they engage with in learning activities such as this. There is a degree of self-disclosure that is required by the teacher, which challenges notions of traditional teacher–student relationships and the relational boundaries between them. This positions teachers similarly to students in that teachers are as likely to experience emotive learning that may be transformative for them as the students (Butterwick & Lipson Lawrence, 2009). Grant, Kinman, and Alexander (2014) argue that it is vital for social work educators, as well as students, to understand that “their emotional responses to practice situations will inevitably influence professional judgement, and develop the reflective skills required to interrogate and, if necessary, regulate their emotional reactions” (p. 3). The creation of the poetry in this exercise allowed students to begin to see themselves as social workers in the making. It made them aware of the importance of engaging in an ongoing process of reflection of their emotional reactions and experiences as part of their regular social work practice.

CONCLUSION

This article has reflected upon the experience of teaching social work students how developing insight into personal emotional reactions is the first step towards understanding the potential impact on the self and others and the importance of engaging in reflective practice. Reflective writing has previously been the most common technique used in social work education for developing emotional awareness (Knott & Scragg, 2010). We would suggest, however, that reflective class activities with a desired outcome of emotional learning can occur in conjunction with creative works such as the writing of poetry which gives students the opportunity to “experiment with language, to create, to know and to engage creatively and imaginatively with experience.” (Leggo, 2008, p. 165). This example of a two-part activity, involving the screening of emotionally evocative imagery and the creation of a black-out poem, offered the opportunity for what Smith (2014) terms a “new pedagogic space” (p. 8). Through the experience of emotion and the incorporation of personal experiences, the students’ developing of a professional social work identity was able to be explored. Leggo (2008) suggests that poetry “invites us to listen” (p. 166) and we would argue that this exercise allowed students and teachers to listen to ourselves and each other through the experiencing of emotion within a carefully constructed classroom activity. Including emotions in our reflective teaching activities can be an opportunity for students and teachers to learn from our emotional experiences and to reflect deeply on their inextricable connection to our social work practice.

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