Using Auto Ethnography as a Learning Tool within the Social Work Class-Room: The Experience of Delivering an 'Immersive' Module

Annastasia Maksymluk, School of Health Professions, University of Plymouth

Contact: annastasia.maksymluk@plymouth.ac.uk

Abstract:
This paper explores the first delivery of an introductory module, 'What is Social Work' to a Year 1 cohort of students on a B.A Social Work programme. Unusually, this module is delivered in an immersive format. Delivery of teaching via the vehicle of an 'immersive module' lies under an umbrella term for shortened, intensive courses. The immersive module is constructed with an aim of achieving double/triple loop learning via auto ethnographic practice. Specifically, with relation to Social Work education, auto ethnography is utilized within this accelerated teaching space to assist students to assimilate a rigorous form of critical reflection. Auto ethnography also provides the educator with a form of data collection and method of analysis. My findings reveal how this method of teaching provides an opportunity to model practice that is contextualised and relationship-based. This is in contrast to a current U.K practice background of largely statutory based de-politicized, individualistic Social Work.

Key words:
Auto ethnography; auto/biographical; immersive intensive teaching; critical reflection.

This paper explores the first delivery of an immersive module to a Year 1 cohort of students on a B.A Social Work programme. The focus is on how the adoption of an auto-ethnographical approach acts as a tool to assist students to achieve double/triple loop learning and to simultaneously assimilate critical reflection (given the specific opportunities an immersive module affords). The immersive module provides opportunities to apply auto-ethnography within a process of learning, as students embark on their professional education. Delivering teaching in this manner provided an opportunity to fore-front and to model practice that is contextual and relationship-based. This is in contrast to a current United Kingdom practice background of largely statutory de-politicized, individualistic Social Work (Houston, 2016; Lee, 2014; Parton, 2014) and increasingly, within policy related to Social Work education, (Department of Education, 2015). This paper is written in the first person which is appropriate to the methodology of auto ethnography as auto ethnography employs narrative to illuminate the wider meanings contained within subjective experience.

Introduction

This is a challenging time in the U.K, for Social Work practice and Social Work education. We are experiencing a practice background that is fashioned and shaped by an ideology that manages to pass as 'just how it is'. As Lee (2135: 2014) comments; 'all Western social work is caged tightly within a neo-liberal framework'. Lee cites Mirowski to illuminate the invisibility of neoliberalism and its drivers; 'neoliberalism as a worldview has sunk its roots deep into everyday life, almost to the point of passing as the 'ideology of no ideology' (2137: 2014). Against a backdrop of 'austerity' and cutbacks (Jordan & Drakeford, 2012), statutory Social Work has become a residual service which responds to only the most in need, where need and risk are often conflated, (Webb, 2006) and where a distinct absence of preventative and transformative work prevails (Ferguson, 2008; Parton, 2014). Social Work is subject to a drive to put as many functions that can be made so, into the marketplace – a key feature of neoliberalism, (Turbett, 2014). Service provision that can be perceived as holistic and includes work that is preventative (for example, within children's services) and also long-term (for example, within adult mental health) has been eroded via the introduction of individualistic, fractured, output-driven, and revolving –door services, (Lee, 2014).

This complex backdrop produces competing tensions for Social Workers and educators. Within a contracted and audited practice landscape, Social Workers may experience a dissonance between the values of the profession and the day to day realities of 'managing' service users within accompanying market based values. However, traditional Social Work education emphasises the importance of the relationship and person centred practice, (Murphy, Duggan and Joseph, (2013). Social Workers may

experience tensions and conflict if they lack the time to 'hold' the service user and to practice in a holistic manner with the compassion and humanity required (Belling et al. (2011); Beresford et al. (2008); Rogowski (2012) . Indeed within a culture, where the service user is positioned as an agent who is autonomous, responsible and able to make appropriate choices, this may not be perceived as a desirable priority, Houston (2016). Ferguson (2008 quoted in Fenton, 2014, p.326) says; 'neo-liberal social work ...undermines not only radical or structural approaches, but also 'traditional' relationship-based social work'.

In practice, Social Workers have expressed feeling demoralised and burnt out, leaving the workforce before reaching double figures in practice – and so Social Work faces ongoing retention issues, (Webb & Carpenter (2012), Baginsky (2013). Governmental response, is to view Social Work education as wanting by not providing resilient, fit for purpose workers (Narey, 2014). Government initiatives to resolve this, such as the roll out of Step up to Social Work and Frontline (Clifton et al. 2012) appear to be buying in to neo liberal 'common sense' solutions of providing practice ready workers who are primarily agency based and trained and can respond in an individualised manner to child protection work administered in an increasingly authoritarian manner (Parton, 2014). Worryingly for Social Work educators, who still support transformative Social Work values, research by Fenton (2014) illuminates how younger Social Workers are 'buying in' to neoliberal belief and practices. Fenton's work is in alignment with previous research carried out by Sheedy (2013) as can be gleaned within this quote:

> '… many social work students, who become the newer workers of tomorrow, have little knowledge of politics or 'more worryingly, no interest in politics' Sheedy (2013 cited in Fenton 2014, p 326).

Additionally, Fenton refers to Sheedy's fear that a focus on helping people in an individualised manner will lead to a disregard of the wider practice context. Attending to the concern raised by Fenton, is further complicated when the working practices faced by educators within Higher Education Institutions, increasingly mirror those experienced by practitioners. Educators engage with students within a market-led environment of business models and approaches, to provide a standardised, quality-assured education. Leathwood, (2005, cited in Bellinger & Kagawa, 2012) points out, this can 'drive teaching towards a formulaic approach'. Bellinger & Kagawa also draw attention to how Hooks fore-warned the dangers of a reductionist approach:

> At this historical moment, there is a crisis of engagement within universities, for when knowledge becomes commoditized, then much authentic learning ceases' (Hooks, 1989 cited in Bellinger & Kagawa, 2012).

As a Social Work educator, I negotiate many tensions which reflect the competing interests arising from Social Work professional values, government policy, my HEI and local employing agencies. I have to contribute to the delivery of Social Workers within a market driven higher educational framework which increasingly seeks to impose simple comparatability and common standards of practice. Arguably leading to the production of newly qualified social workers who 'simply go along with new service designs without asking too many questions' (Lorenz (2005) cited by Fenton, 2014, p.327) within a market driven higher education framework which seeks to increasingly impose a simple comparability with common standards, across all programmes irrespective of diversity, Maringe & Foskett (2010). However, as an educator, I have to question whether we 'train' students in readiness to adopt a role markedly in contrast from the values espoused by the profession?

This raises questions for social work educators as they seek to resolve issues related to a belief that social work is situated within a political sphere, and as such students should be made aware of the ideological context of practice so as to engage in transformative practice which challenges by questioning rather than accepting the status quo.

Whilst these contextual tensions permeate, and inform, my educational practice, I am also motivated to ensure space exists to deliver authentic transformative learning which fulfils the programme's '….responsibility to ensure that neoliberal hegemony and consequent underpinning assumptions are absolutely exposed to students, perhaps for the first time' (Fenton, 2014, p.333).

Literature Review:
Immersive Module
Delivery of teaching via the vehicle of an 'immersive module' lies under an umbrella term for shortened, intensive courses.

Intensive teaching models, otherwise known as 'accelerated', 'time-shortened', 'block format', 'compressed' courses or 'intensive modes of delivery', have been defined in various ways. 'Block Teaching' is where a daily schedule has been organised into large blocks of time (more than sixty minutes) to 'allow flexibility for a diversity of instructional activities'. 'Intensive' or 'block-mode' teaching is where course materials are delivered over a shorter period of time compared to standard courses by means of compressed teaching formats. (Karaksha et al. 2013, p. 5213).

Davies, (2006) provides a succinct review of intensive teaching formats and suggests that in general terms critiques of intensive learning may suggest that course abbreviation can result in '… cramming, loss of opportunities for active discussion and superficial treatment of content' (Davies, 2006, p16). Karweit, (1984 cited in Davies 2006 p.13) and Wlodkowski, (2003, cited in Davies 2006, p.13) suggest that whilst time is an important factor to consider when constructing and delivering shortened and intensive courses, the correlation between length of time and course outcomes is difficult to establish.

Research from Finger and Penny (2001) and a survey of immersive models, by Zelinna Pablo (2005, cited within Davies 2006 p.8) both found in most studies no significant difference in respect of student learning outcome between traditional and immersive modes of educational delivery across a range of academic disciplines. Davies (2006) suggests whilst the evidence suggests learning outcomes between different modes of teaching may be comparable there is a problem in that it is not clear what is being measured in these studies. Whilst a valid point, from the perspective of this paper the preoccupation with measuring an elusive concept such as 'learning' diverts attention from the experiential nature of 'learning', which may exist outside of a measurable market driven approach to higher education, and is, arguably, of equal importance in terms of understanding learning as a cognitive and existential experience rather than merely a learning outcome.

Double/Triple Loop Learning
By way of a definition all learning necessitates learning from our experiences. At its most simplest, single-loop learning (Argyris, & Schön, 1978) may be constructed as that which we have already learned works well. In single loop learning, students learn from feedback. Within a context of single loop learning, a student may have previously received feedback from their first assessment, and then realise the need to employ critical analysis.

A student may move into double loop learning if they experience a lack of success from the usual strategies previously adopted and are thus prompted to work differently. If the student moves through differing strategies in a circular process, constantly re-evaluating outcomes and engaging with complexity, they are moving into double loop learning. Importantly, this process may be demanding and uncomfortable. Responding to challenges and engaging in re-consideration may be troubling. Within a Social Work context it will demand an examination of values and a challenging of assumptions.

This is a crucial activity and skill set for Social Work students to acquire. We can consider double-loop learning to be in synergy with the notions of critical reflection utilised broadly within Social Work education (see the regulatory 'Standards of Proficiency', (H.C.P.C, (2012) whereby, students are required to situate their motivations and behaviours within a wider context. However, in critical reflection if the governing variables, deeper beliefs and conceptual frameworks which impact upon personal perception are not exposed and examined, critical reflection may not be a successful tool for transformative learning. Therefore students need to engage in triple loop learning.

Triple–loop learning demands that students question assumptions at every level, including how they learn in the first place, which frameworks they employ and draw upon; which ideologies fashion and shape current thinking; where the sites of influence are. Triple-loop learning demands that the self is in a constant process of interaction with all sources of learning and perceptions within any given situation.

An aim of the University of Plymouth's Curriculum Enrichment Project (CEP) is for teaching and learning as suggested by the conditions of an immersive module to encourage double-loop learning. However, I suggest that the specific construction of the Social Work immersive module, facilitates and makes the triple-loop learning loop explicit.

Auto ethnography
Using the method of auto ethnography, practitioners use narrative (or whatever expressive format holds personal resonance and relevance) to generate data related to a specific 'trigger' moment/interaction/event pertinent to practice. Having created this layer of subjective data, practitioners return and work back into it to contextualise and look for meaningful connections that may or may not be generalisable. Auto ethnography goes beyond the expectations of the measureable and invites practitioners to take this surface layer of observations '…into realms of memory, context, imagination, and the shared experience of relationship.' (Harrison, 2014, p IX). Auto ethnography is not a modernist, positivist method that searches for a 'truth', one that exists 'out there' waiting to be found, assuming the correct mode of inquiry is applied. Rather, auto ethnography carries differing aims of broadening awareness to increase understandings to create a repository to draw from when considering which form of action to take. In this way, auto ethnography provokes questioning and acts as a provocateur to help practitioners arrive at a place of increased awareness and understanding.

Description of observation
Teaching via immersive module, has occurred within my university on a limited basis and the institution is keen to embed a wider implementation of this mode of teaching delivery. The academic year (2015/16) saw the introduction of a Curriculum Enrichment Project (CEP). The stated ambition of which is, to provide '… excellent learning and stimulating student experience' (University of Plymouth, 2013). The immersive module conforms with a stated priority to enable all level 4, first year under- graduate students to complete and pass a module before the Christmas break in Semester 1. Therefore, the immersive module is delivered at entry point following a week long induction and as such, it is the initial module that the students engage with. It is the only module undertaken by students during a 4 week time period and so this module fits with the above definition of 'intensive' or 'block-mode' teaching provided by Karaksha et al (2013). Teaching is delivered in various blocks of time but is intensive which also fits within the 'block teaching' aspect of definition by Karaksha et al. To accompany the specific modular teaching, students meet once weekly in small groups for a 'Study Group'. This follows the traditional small group tutor model.

Following, four intensive weeks of study, students have a reading week and after this they submit their first summative assessment.

The projected benefits of the immersive module aspect within the strategy of the University of Plymouth's Curriculum Enrichment Project (CEP) are greater student engagement with learning, active learning and research experience opportunities, and improved student retention.

The Social Work programme had been chosen as one of the university's pilots to deliver the immersive module and so it is a new form of practice for me. I wanted to track and record the experiences of conceptualisation, design and delivery at all points. For this auto ethnographic piece of research, I drew from my narratives, hence the writing within this paper is reflective of a subjective textual method. This reflects the importance of narrative and how the relationship in all its complexity forms the basis of Social Work decision making – something a techno-rational approach tends to overlook, (Fish, Munro & Bairstow, 2009).

I felt fearful of the responsibility of taking Year 1 just 'in the door' students to the point where they would be able to produce a rigorous degree level assessment. Four weeks presents as a short period of time to undertake this task.

I began a process of utilising auto ethnography to chart and guide my own practice and to steer students towards specific goals related to their learning. As the literature review suggests, a critique of delivery within an intensive mode is that learning may remain at surface level (Davies, 2006). To offset issues such as these the module was constructed to provide the necessary scaffolding to model critical analysis

with opportunities to propel students towards double/triple loop learning. Pivotal to auto ethnographic practice is being able to 'see' the position you occupy as an individual and where this fits into wider structures on a moment by moment basis. Taking this on board, the immersive module reflects this within its organisation, teaching practices and assessment. Extending this mode of operandi to the organisation of the immersive module its tight, coherent structure of teaching and learning, was clearly explained to students on day 1, with the aim for students to 'see' and place themselves within the framework. Teaching takes place over 3 days. Week 1: contains an initial introductory session where I talk students through the module, giving information about what is expected from them in terms of self-directed learning; the giving of attention; engagement and receiving modelling relating to being a Social Worker (which demands we turn up to see service users on time and we give our time in terms of listening). I did not realise at the time, how this session also served to position me, as educator as 'safe' container for learning and I will return to this theme later when I discuss the facilitation of specific forms of relationality within an immersive module. Other sessions in week 1, include specialist learning –to-learn sessions - free-ing yourself up to write expressively and the rudiments of traditional academic writing (albeit in first person). Students are informed within the introductory session that the module demands the active giving of their attention within the initial transmissive lectures and that these cannot be avoided and are best framed as internalising the subject specific discipline required in order to reproduce Social Work knowledge within assessment and later in practice. I use the metaphor of learning to play the piano whereby composition takes place after mastering the scales. My auto ethnographic notes highlight containing student anxieties related to transmissive learning by presenting the whole structure of the module in visual form and showing students how and where the transmissive sessions sit in relation to it. Students could see how transmissive learning (in Lecture form) largely occurs within the first 2 weeks, and is off-set by interactive activities. Transmissive learning becomes minimal within weeks 3 and 4 as we move onto analysis and application utilising opportunities afforded by 'real-life' authentic conversations with Social Workers from many aspects of Social Work and multi-modal learning such as discourse analysis of film. Students also engage in a discursive session with members of the University service users and carers group, as part of making the module as applied and contextual as possible.

In order to encourage students to reach for and inhabit positions of complexity and achieve double/triple loop learning, the process of learning and assessment must mirror and model this. Assessment is part of the learning process and therefore, assessment tasks need to incorporate this form of practice and demonstrate the required levels of critical thinking and analysis.

As the immersive module is constructed with an aim of achieving double/triple loop learning via auto ethnographic practice, the assessment tasks reflect these aims. I ask students to look at themselves and their motivations as soon as they arrive at University. In induction week, they are tasked with the following: Think about your own autobiography and consider the knowledge and understanding you brought with you, prior to attending day 1.
Giving this to students on Day 1, positions assessment as part of a wider process of learning, and not a mere bolt-on at the end of the module.

In brief; the assessment tasks are as follows:

The assessment is in two parts – Part (A) is marked as Pass/Fail and (B) is marked out of a 100%. To achieve a pass, students must pass Part (A) and must achieve a minimum of 40% for Part (B).

Part A
Profile: developing the professional self through personal reflection.
Reflect on your own autobiography thinking about the knowledge and understanding you brought with you, prior to attending day 1.
How will you continue to draw upon this to support the development of your professional self? How does your submission reflect your beginning knowledge of what Social Work is?

This part of the assessment can be multi-modal (i.e. can be a drawing; a collage; a poem; a piece of music) or can be via traditional essay format (which should not exceed 500 words). Please note, multi-modal submission is not marked as a piece of art-work, rather, the art-form used should act as an

effective 'carrier' to relay considered ideas which relate to the marking criteria for part (A). A short commentary must accompany the piece.

Part B
An essay: Explore what Social Work currently is in the UK, the context in which it takes place and how Social work could be.

How do you think you will fit in to the current Social Work landscape?
Your writing must demonstrate your understanding of the contested nature of Social Work. (2,000 words).

Looking at the assessment tasks, we can see that students are introduced to writing and owning their material (all writing must be in first person). They cannot follow prescriptive templates, rather they must make their own choices and illuminate the thinking behind these. The Part A profile cannot be a linear C.V, rather a student must choose moment(s)/interactions/events that they consider to be pivotal to their own learning. The task is a beginning introduction to working auto ethnographically. As in all autobiographical writing, this form of writing, involves recognition of the inter-dependence of the self (Morgan, David (1998). The student must use the individual as a starting point but cannot remain in this position as the teaching and marking criteria locates the self in the social, cultural and political. The task requires the student to make choices relating to their own material, this encourages the student to examine their personal standpoint and professional entry point. Students are informed that anything and everything that has happened which has led up to the student being on the course, holds potential relevance – be it a joyous event, a seemingly mundane observation, a chance conversation, the impact of a billboard – this forms data to work back into and mine for wider illuminations. What matters beyond the recognition and selection made by the student are the demonstrable abilities of analysis. Whatever the personal markers are, the student must succinctly tell the reader how the chosen moments have fashioned / influenced / shaped how the student perceives Social Work and their positioning within it. Beginning and ending with the self is a partial perspective. The student must also explicitly acknowledge the wider structural forces and impacts which have influenced their perception of events. The content of the transmissive teaching material encourages the abilities of students to recognise the wider structural impacts, but importantly to facilitate the aim of encouraging students to occupy an active positioning and to consolidate their learning; students receive guided study questions following each session to complete within their own time.

To encourage students to move from surface to deep learning, students are informed that questions matter far more than answers and that minimal description is required and maximum analysis is expected (and for assessment, this is obviously, reflected within the marking criteria). From day one, students are exposed to this, as I model information – giving, which is wrapped around analysis. The traditional essay element of the assessment, asks specific sub-questions which demand the students move beyond information-giving i.e. when exploring what social work is, students cannot merely provide a condensed history of Social work, they must employ analysis – students must justify their choices of information within frameworks relating to how could Social Work be. If a student believes all is well within current UK Social Work, s/he will need to both assert and justify these claims, if not, they will be seamlessly moved into critique, as the next step is suggesting alternatives.

To encourage dialogic, questioning learning, the module contains two film sessions where we watch a movie together. Students are briefed beforehand about the content so that they are prepared for the potential for discomfort and they are requested to view the movie from a particular perspective, that of a service user, partner or family member or professional. We take a break and resume to discuss the content of the film beginning with the different perspectives contained within the movie then moving beyond these parameters, to include our own individual responses and finally we work to extract wider ideological impacts. And so, within the movie sessions, students are provided with a safe space to initially pass comments related to characters' motivations and behaviours whilst being subtly challenged to examine their own assumption-making and furthermore, to 'look' at the context which shapes our meaning-making. Finally, the weekly Study Group session is a safe space where a small number of students can reinforce the meta-cognitive processes needed to both question the self and to situate the

self within the wider context. These activities all forms part of a process of inter-weaving learning and assessment.

And so the module subscribes to providing students with an immersion into Social Work (the big picture) whilst simultaneously, giving students opportunity to move back and forth from micro to macro and to see where the self is situated within wider processes, which again mirrors robust auto ethnographic practice.

Findings

I will now illuminate how auto ethnographic based teaching within the immersive format encourages triple loop learning. I can demonstrate movement within pedagogic practice by referring back to the previous comparable teaching and assessment. Students who completed the first Year 1 assessment were required to produce a standard academic essay relating to 'What is Social Work' and a 'profile' related to knowledge of self. For the essay, students were permitted to remain within single loop learning as the learning outcomes facilitated the reproduction of 'known' formats i.e. produce an essay where knowledge is framed as information, with each student providing a prescriptive one-size fits - all essay. Therefore, if the information was accurate, students could produce a descriptive essay with minimal analysis and pass. Students who may have recently either left school or an Access course, will be familiar with this way of working with and presenting knowledge. Therefore it can be considered that such a task may not be especially challenging for students nor markers, hence we can consider that students are not required to employ double/triple loop learning in order to pass.

Arising from this, lies the potential of this crucial skill being delivered in drip-feed fashion rather than being the explicit aim from day one. In this scenario, accompanying academic skills such as academic referencing may perhaps be given more prominence. The previous assessment was perhaps used primarily as a vehicle to introduce students to academic skills such as how to find information and how to academically reference. An implication of this way of thinking may be, that the Year 1 period is framed as 'Learning to Learn' despite an obvious fact that that students will have had years of learning to learn. This also carries an implication that critical thinking and analysis will be imparted to students later on in bolt-on fashion rather than being attributed threshold concept status.

My findings supported my contention that critical thinking and analysis can be introduced from day 1. The immersive module facilitated this and permitted students to 'play' with critical thinking and analysis. In order for this to happen and to avoid 'over-loading' students, academic protocols and convention were positioned as the bolt-on, for students to acquire as they progress throughout Year 1. As previously stated, double loop learning occurs when the student moves through differing strategies constantly re-evaluating outcomes and engaging with complexity. My auto ethnographic notes reveal how challenging I found delivering key concepts in a manner to keep students engaged whilst not 'dumbing – down' the material. I also put much effort into encouraging students to see that they are entering into a relationship with the material they are being presented with; that it demands the pulling apart of texts and visuals; applying it to themselves; to social work and to wider society. The first lecture established this, as the verb 'contest' was discussed at length, whilst we looked at definitions of Social Work.

This thread was constantly picked up within teaching to ensure time was spent as discursively as possible, within lectures; when I responded to student comments; practitioner sessions when we responded to current practice perspectives and when we pulled apart two movies to look for all the illuminations pertinent to Social Work.

To be more specific, a challenge lay in making the ideology of neo-liberalism visible and accessible for students to recognise and talk about and so I spoke about the tights I was wearing that day which had been purchased very cheaply from the children's department within a large chainstore. This example, opened up the spaces required to discuss a myriad of related issues such as economic production within the global marketplace; the high cost to humanity of cheap goods, the potential erosion of worker protection within such conditions; the role of the state; the rise of obesity and who benefits from these conditions. It may be considered that Year 1 students just in the door do not need to know about neo-liberal ideology, however; my contention is that it may not be considered transparent to ask students to

write an assessment task about what Social Work is, without providing this level of awareness and understanding.

As educators, the onus lies with us to provide assessment that is demanding of this. My findings suggest double-loop learning, which generates altered/new connections and re-calibrates our understandings of self when necessary, may be facilitated where an assessment asks for the following: elements of creativity; where the student must use themselves as a starting point so that they cannot draw upon standardised thinking and responses (a blue-print assessment) but rather must make and own their own choices.

A criticism of shortened, intensive courses is that educators may have to strive hard to embody and facilitate required levels of reflection and analysis. My findings support how a thoughtfully constructed immersive module does not necessarily '… stress convenience over substance and rigor' Wolfe (1998 cited in Davies 2006 p.12). Davies makes a distinction between subjects and suggests the format of intensive teaching is more suited to courses, which prioritise skill acquisition. Obviously, Social Work teaching demands skill acquisition but for a values based profession, even something seemingly straightforward such as communication training demands engagement with a process of wider contextualisation, to illustrate, it is only recently that communication skills with older adults managing dementia has achieved any prominence within a curriculum does this not demand the asking of how and why questions? Again, the adoption of an auto ethnographical approach will serve to do this.

My data reveals how the immersive module provided unexpected challenges and opportunities in regards to creating and managing differing forms of relationality within the classroom. The construction and delivery of the immersive module opened up a spectrum of differing spaces for an educator to choose to occupy. Aside from conveying the necessary academic outcomes to students which may include: provision of key knowledge for an introduction to Social Work; facilitation of critical analytical abilities and guiding students to develop skills such as locating resources, other relational practices are also conveyed. To elucidate, within a 4 week time-frame, an immersive module delivered at the start of a programme, also has to deliver desirable outcomes which relate specifically to relationality, such as: maximising student engagement at individual and cohort levels (this must acknowledge the diversity of students in terms of academic exposure and prowess; disability; and stresses in terms of starting a new, challenging course of professional study with an acknowledgement that some students may have left home for the first time). I had not entirely expected the time and degree of effort that this would take. In actuality, these demands necessitated engagement in a circular process of relational practice from the outset, by this I mean undertaking actions which involved anticipating needs and asking for and listening to feedback in order to provide the most appropriate responses. As it is the students first contact with University teaching (pre-supposing they are not repeating students nor students who have already studied at this level) and it is a short (4 week) module, I strove to incorporate an awareness of student needs not just at curricular level but also including emotional and embodied needs. Hence, the module has a very discernible structure, which changes week by week and as such facilitates/incorporates differing modalities. Student emotional needs were anticipated by the inclusion of assessment friendly strategies- ways of keeping students on task in a structured and contained manner such as via the provision of guided study questions.

The list of demands, which lie within the immersive module, in terms of relationship, based practice within the classroom present as both daunting and rich in opportunity. In terms of relationality, I have professional skills in relationship- based practice to draw from (Trevithick, 2003). Drawing upon these, I worked to anticipate how best I could provide and maintain a strong spine of coherence to students and so I positioned myself as the designer, and primary educator on the module. Again, striving for a constant awareness of how you are positioned and how you position yourself within wider social structures is a strength of working auto ethnographically. Responding to student need via the frequent asking of verbal feedback and formal written feedback (mid-way and the end of teaching) brought me to an understanding of the need to incorporate intra-psychic knowledge into my teaching, especially relating to the importance of presenting as an effective 'container' in order to produce a productive 'holding' environment. By way of brief explanation:

'Containing anxiety involves being open and receptive to the thoughts and feelings of others—becoming a 'container'—so that these can be transformed into something more manageable' Hinshelwood, (1991 cited by Trevithick 2003, p.171).

As part of alleviating student anxiety, I presented as being well prepared and was able to evidence this by presenting a clear outline of the module structure (containment) and providing very clear boundaries to provide safety rather than ad hoc contingent response. I arrived early (where possible) to set – up and answer student queries and was available for e-mail support which entails a level of safe distancing – the student has to consider what their concerns actually are, rather than the educator offering unsustainable open-door walk-in invitation.

Therefore, the timing of an intensive module at the start of undergraduate training delivered primarily by one educator, extended my role to incorporate that of a nurturing, boundaried 'care- taker' who absorbs communicated feelings, transforming these for the student into illuminations with accompanying management strategies.

I also encouraged students to recognise and manage anxieties in a dialogic fashion via the adoption of the auto ethnographic form of critical reflection. Many students find the start of social work training disorientating and stressful, especially if they are away from home for the first time. As previously stated, guided study questions are provided after each teaching session on the immersive module. These relate to the assessment and as stated earlier, one part of this has an auto ethnographic basis. Within this, students are given opportunities to have their thoughts and opinions validated via the assessment mode. However, students must be authorial and with this comes responsibility – I am not telling them what they must include in a prescriptive manner and they cannot hide behind the work of another (i.e. 3rd person writing) rather, they must make choices based upon their own lives and individual perspectives relating to the relevance and appropriateness of material offered for assessment. As part of the holding role as educator, I need to ensure students engage in a process which may be revelatory, as safely as possible and so I make students aware of where, when and how I have availability and I also stress how they are not required to engage with distressing material – they can make choices and auto ethnography privileges a moment as much as an event in its entirety. Providing the assessment in multi modal form permits students to actually 'see' their production as an object - as a safe container to look into which is revealing of sets of relationships, for anything we produce - a piece of text/an image implies a relationship between producer and receiver, for example; within every photograph is a discernible relationship between sitter and taker – has the subject given consent; how much does the taker work to convey that this is an image without contrivance. The relationships present within an object - an image/text are only invisible if you choose to not acknowledge and see. Also, looking at how much to safely reveal, encourages students to look at how we ask service users to reveal themselves…

I did not realise how the relational practice afforded by utilising an immersive mode of module delivery also enhanced double and triple loop learning. Because the mode of delivery inadvertently created a safe, 'holding' environment for students, the increase of dialogic layers as each week passes, served to consolidate the development of trust formation in an accelerated manner. Feedback from colleagues refers to how cohesive the whole cohort present and how the students presented within subsequent modules as confident and able to ask questions in front of their peers. The module stresses the relational despite students working individually as post modern subjects with choices… learning encompasses how the concept of choice may exist as a panacea/be illusionary within a climate of harsh capitalism. For example, a social worker working within a Community Mental Health Team, discussed how assessment within mental health appears to offer much but within a climate of harsh cost cutting, actually offers little, so a service user is told that they have had an assessment but what does that actually mean? How does it translate into choice when services are non-existent? The session is dialogic and so we all engage in a process of illuminating understandings - a shared process that is re-visited within subsequent sessions when students asked for clarifications and offer new interpretations based upon their own perspectives. All knowledges, from educators, other service users; practitioners; research; so on, and myself was framed as partial, biased and subject to contestation. The illusion of objective knowledge was imploded as students were inculcated to learning about knowledge as produced within relationship and as such, students were encouraged to question whose interests are

served within relationship. Is the carer- caree relationship always an altruistic one (as discussed via analysis of the film 'Iris' (2001); is 'bad' parenting wholly based within notions of individual deficit of the parent (debated in relation to the film 'Ladybird Ladybird' (1994). And I was positioned as a constant parental figure for students symbolically, stating the existence and strength of relationship (remember, on the immersive module, students are not moving from module to module, rather they are being contained and led towards a series of destinations, culminating in receipt of feedback following the marking of their first assessment).

So, what is actually modelled is educator – as- supervisor with supervisees overseeing their progress and their work within a dialogic relationship but one that has clearly marked out parameters of power - I am not an expert but I have accumulated expertise hence I assume the position of educator; I assist but I do not be-friend; I do not aim for amelioration of power differences because to aim to do so would deny the power I exercise as marker of submitted work but I do aim for students; invited service users and practitioners, and myself, to all learn from the process in order to make it as productive a conduit as possible.

By deliberately fore-fronting relational practice within the classroom, I was also able to provide a contrast and resistance to the rampant individuality I witness within managerialist ways of working. My notes reveal my personal frustrations whilst trying to seek support, which relate to being an educator managing dyslexia/dyspraxia. I am subject to practices where I am positioned as an individual who should be able to engage in self-help and is not demonstrating desired capabilities by not doing so. Working auto ethnographically, I can see how this relates to current U.K governmental policy and the placing of emphasis upon the individual to take responsibility for the self and thus, perhaps we can extrapolate that government – the state, is not acting as a 'holding' container to alleviate the anxieties of subjects. Leading on from this, as an educator, I make choices to model a certain range of behaviours to students. I suggest auto ethnographic practice assists with both situating these choices and providing a hermeneutic evaluatory mechanism, one that adopts a more rigorous analysis than that of focusing upon individual deficit.

Initial conclusions and implications for future practice
My observations suggests that future research into student experience within shortened and intensive courses should adopt a broader remit, for example, focusing upon a narrow correlation such as between length of time and learning outcomes, whilst time is an important factor to consider, the correlation between length of time and course outcomes is difficult to establish (Karweit, 1984, cited in Davies, 2006, p.13; and Wlodkowski, 2003, cited in Davies, 2006, p.13) and perhaps, in seeking to measure this, we may miss other significant occurrences. Taking an auto ethnographic stance, I am eager to further my understanding of surprising findings such as how the formatting of teaching within compressed periods of time creates differing forms of relationships within the classroom, which may be advantageous for modeling specific aims/encouraging specific forms of learning.

The immersive module is exclusive with no competing distractions for students. Situating auto ethnographic teaching activities and practice within these parameters has proved to be a fertile pedagogic accelerator. We know from student feedback that students experience feeling safe and 'contained' as my per auto ethnographic observations. One hundred per cent of feedback responses were situated within 'Highly satisfied' or 'Satisfied' with regards to module structure and organization; related support and perceived level of learning.

Via its structure and exclusivity, the immersive module offers students opportunity to quickly delve deeply. The immersive module affords the intense and concerted contact with students to facilitate this. Students have moved past the usual outcomes, which may relate to abbreviated courses such as skill acquisition into territories related to discursive, conceptual learning. The adoption of a conscious auto ethnographic approach for working with students in combination with the module assessment have cultivated layers of dialogic work within the class-room leading to the troubling of assumption, changing of world views, and acknowledging stand points and transformative learning. This is evidenced within subsequent verbal engagement with students and feedback from the teaching staff engaged in delivering later modules to the cohort. However, a caveat to this is the raising of conceptual awareness via auto ethnographic practice does not simultaneously raise the abilities of students to produce writing

in a mode which models acceptable academic convention – issues around this belong to another discussion altogether.

To respond to wider professional and stake holder demands beyond the university within Social Work education, we know there is a pressing need to facilitate students towards engagement in triple loop learning within training and throughout their practice careers. The practice of critical reflection is seen as the conduit for this and as such is placed as a threshold concept within the professions of teaching, Social Work and many health professions. Engaging in critical reflection should act to encourage practitioners to remain within complexity, however increasingly we are learning that it does not fully achieve this with reflective practice being perceived as an activity to measure individual capability and deficit (Toros & Medar, 2015).

It is tempting to make conclusions between this dilution and the movement from deep to surface practice described by Howe (1996) and the rampant individualism outlined by Houston (2016). An initial intensive immersive mode of delivery of a module in conjunction with the adoption of an auto ethnographic approach to learning and assessment offers a robust alternative to traditional forms of module delivery in terms of enabling students to grasp an a foothold onto the double /triple loop learning which is a requisite of effective critical thinking. Students are required to generate personal material and interrogate assumption making from day 1, (familiar terrain for auto ethnographic practice). Auto ethnography facilitates the opening up of discursive spaces and is resistant of simplistic conclusions; the methodology illuminates the task of examination of self within a framework of meaningful connection-making, far more broadly and less ambiguously than the remit of reflection.

However, Ecclestone (1999) cited by Morrow (2009, p.20) suggests that encouraging students to reflect on 'what I think' or 'how I learn and think' does not fit well with outcome-based assessment in Higher Education. The demands of healthcare education and some Social Work courses which tend to be increasingly situated within Health and Social Care Schools, are such that the need to ensure students achieve task-based competencies, tend to direct teaching and learning towards that which can be observed and measured (Getz et al. (2008). Habermas (1978) cited by Morrow (2009, p. 14) alerts us to the need to situate a separate strand of critical reflection drawing from social theory that appears to follow triple loop learning:

'Critical reflective knowing is neither behavioural nor technical, nor truth establishing nor captured by a discipline. It critiques all other forms of knowledge, and in so doing, it moves beyond merely reproducing what is'

As an adoption of an auto ethnographic approach to teaching and assessment has demonstrated differing relational practices within the classroom alongside initial movement from surface to depth via an unraveling of assumption, interrogation of material and creative problem solving, I am drawn to research by Aronson and Smith (2011) who identify how creative and strategic relationship -building can counter-point managerialism within a social work practice landscape. Under the auspices of neo-liberal ideology, they describe how relational practice is carried out against a background of competing identities and values, in which practitioners need to be nimbly engage in analysis in order to know where and when power is exercised within organisations, how to act in order to achieve social justice ideals and importantly, how to maintain a sense of preferred self. My findings demonstrate that educators can use auto ethnography to equip students to engage with this task. The method also acts as a tool to illuminate and explore the additional 'amplified' areas of relational practice, which may be specific to module delivery within an immersive format. The immersive module offers an educator opportunity to attend to these and to resist neoliberal hegemony by using the time, space and accompanying concentrated student contact to work to provide the illuminations necessary for transformative learning. This is despite the fact that delivery via an immersive module is inherently commodifiable, as it holds modular credit and a transferable exchange value.

References

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. (1978) Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective, Reading, Mass: Addison Wesley.

Aronson, J; Smith, K (2011). Identity Work and Critical Social Service Management: Balancing on a Tightrope? British Journal of Social Work (2011)41, 432-448.

Baginsky M. (2013). Retaining Experienced Social Workers in Children's Services: The challenge facing local authorities in England. London: Department for Education.

Banks, S (2012). (4th ed.)Ethics and Values in Social Work. Palgrave Macmillan.

Belling, R; Whittock,M; McLaren, S; Burns,T; Catty,J; Rees Jones, I; Rose, R; Wykes, T and the ECHO Group (2011). Achieving Continuity of Care: Facilitators and Barriers in Community Mental Health Teams. Implementation Science,2011.

http://implementationscience.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1748-5908-6-23

Bellinger, A; Kagawa, F (2012). Learning Beyond Compliance: A comparative analysis of two cohorts undertaking a first year social work module. Journal of Pedagogic Development. Vol. 2, Issue 1, March 2012.

Available at: http://www.beds.ac.uk/jpd/volume-2-issue-1/learning-beyond-compliance-a-comparative-analysis-of-two-cohorts-undertaking-a-first-year-social-work-module. (Accessed 19 June 2016).

Beresford, P; Croft, S and Adshead, L. (2008) 'We Don't See Her as a Social Worker': A Service User Case Study of the Importance of the Social Worker's Relationship and Humanity. British Journal of Social Work (2008) 38 (7): 1388-1407.

British Association of Social Workers (2012). Code of Ethics. Available at: https://www.basw.co.uk/codeofethics/

(Accessed 12 June 2016).

Clifton, J. (ed.) MacAlister, J; Crehan, L and Olsen, A (2012). Frontline: Improving the Children's Social Work Profession, London, IPPR. Available at: http://www.ippr.org/publications/frontline-improving-the-childrens-social-work-profession. (Accessed: 12 June, 2016).

Davies, Martin W. (2006), Intensive teaching formats: a review, Issues in Educational Research, vol. 16. Available at: http://www.iier.org.au/iier16/davies.html

(Accessed: 16 June 2016).

Department of Education (2015). Policy paper. 2010 to 2015 government policy: children's social workers. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-childrens-social-workers/2010-to-2015-government-policy-childrens-social-workers#appendix-2-step-up-to-social-work (Accessed 19 June 2016).

Ecclestone, K. (1999) Empowering or ensnaring? The implications of outcome-based assessment in higher education, Higher Education Quarterly, 53 (1), 29-48.

Fenton, J (2014) Can social work education meet the neoliberal challenge head on? Critical and Radical Social Work. Vol 2. No 3. 321–35

Ferguson, I. (2008) Reclaiming Social Work: Challenging Neo-liberalism and Promoting Social Justice, London: Sage

Finger, G. & Penney, A. (2001). Investigating modes of delivery in teacher education: A review of modes of delivery. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Fremantle, Western Australia.

Fish, S; Munro, J; Bairstow, S (2009). Learning together to safeguard children: developng a mult-agency systems approach for case reviews. Children's and Families Services S.C.I.E Guide 24. Available at: http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide24/files/guide24.pdf

(Accessed 12 June 2016).

Getz, L., Kirkengen, A. & Hetlevik I. (2008) Too much doing and too little thinking in medical science! Editorial, Scandinavian Journal of Primary Health Care, 26, 65-66.

Gilbert, T. (2001). 'Reflective practice and clinical supervision: meticulous rituals of the confessional' Journal of Advanced Nursing 36, (2) 199-205

Habermas, J. (1978) Knowledge and Human Interests (second edition) (London: Heinemann).

Harrison, D.W (2014) Foreward in Witkin, S.L. (ed). Narrating social work through autoethnography. Columbia University Press. New York, 2014.

Health and Care Professions Council.(2012). Standards of Proficiency. Social Workers in England. Available at: http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10003b08standardsofproficiency-socialworkersinengland.pdf

(Accessed on: 16 June 2016).

Hinshelwood, R. D. (1991). A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought. London, Free Association Books.

Hooks, B. (1989) 'Toward a revolutionary feminist pedagogy' in Talking Back: Thinking Feminist – Thinking Black. London: Sheba Press, pp. 49-54.

Houston, S (2016). Beyond individualism: Social Work and Social Identity. British Journal of Social Work (2016), 46, 532-548.

Howe, D (1996) (Ch. 5) Surface and depth in social work practice, in Social Theory, Social Change and Social Work, Nigel Parton (ed) Routledge.

Iris (2001). Directed by Richard Eyre (Film). BBC Films, Fox Iris Productions, Intermedia Mirage Enterprises.

Jordan, B and Drakeford, M (2012), Social Work and Social Policy under Austerity. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Karaksha, A; Anoopkumar-Dukie, S; Grant, G; Davey, A.K; Niru Nirthanan, S; Arora, D; Hope, D; Bernaitis, N; McFarland, A; Hall, S; Haywood, A; Holani, C; Grant, L; Chess-Williams, R; McDermott, C. (2013). Benefits of Intensive Mode Teaching To Improve Student Performance. 2013 Conference 18th-20th November, Seville, Spain. Available at: http://www98.griffith.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/handle/10072/59795/90003_1.pdf;jsessionid=EA55 2C5C419E42ECC22EF73606EFA838

(Accessed: 12 June, 2016).

Karweit, N. (1984). Time-on-task reconsidered: Synthesis of research on time and learning. Educational Leadership, 41, 32-35.

Kolb D.A. (1984) Experiential Learning experience as a source of learning and development, New Jersey: Prentice Hall

Ladybird, Ladybird (1994). Directed by Ken Loach (Film). Samuel Goldwyn Company.

Lee, C. (2014). Critical Commentary. Conservative Comforts: Some Philosophical Crumbs for Social Work. British Journal of Social Work (2014) 44, 2135-2144

Lorenz, W, 2005, Social work and a new social order – challenging neo-liberalism's erosion of solidarity, Social Work & Society, 3, 1, 93-101

Maringe, F; Foskett, N (eds). (2010). Globalization and Internationalization in Higher Education Theoretical, Strategic and Management Perspectives. Bloomsbury.

Mirowski P. (2013). Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown. London: Verso; 2013.

Morgan, David (1998) *'Sociological Imaginations and imagining sociologies: bodies, auto/biographies and other mysteries'* Sociology 32(4): 647-63 (p655).

Morrow, E (2009). Teaching critical reflection in healthcare professional education. Available at: https://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/learningteaching/kli/research/hern/hern-j1/ElizabethMorrow-hernjvol1.pdf

(Accessed: 16 June 2016).

Murphy, D, Duggan, M and Joseph, S (2013). Relationship-Based Social Work and Its Compatibility with the Person-Centred Approach: Principled versus Instrumental Perspectives. British Journal of Social Work (2013) 43 (4): 703-719.

Narey, Sir M. (2014) 'Making the education of social workers consistently effective', available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/ file/278741/Social_worker_education_report.PDF. (Accessed: 12 June 2016).

Parton, N. (2014). Social Work, Child Protection and Politics: Some Critical and Constructive Reflections British Journal of Social Work (2014) 44 (7): 2042-2056.

Rogowski (S) (2012). Social Work with Children and Families: Challenges and Possibilities in the Neo-Liberal World. British Journal of Social Work (2012) 42 (5); 921-940.

Steier, F. (1991) Reflexivity and methodology: An ecological constructionism, in: F. Steier (ed) Research and Reflexivity (London: Sage).

Toros, K; Medar, M (2015). Social Work Students' Thoughts on Self-Reflection: A Qualitative Study Based on Reflective Journaling.

International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 5, No. 3; March 2015

Trevethick, P (2003). Effective relationship-based practice: a theoretical exploration. Journal of Social Work Practice, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2003.

Turbett, C (2014). Doing Radical Social Work. London Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

University of Plymouth (2013). The Curriculum Enrichment Project (CEP) Summary Document. Internal report, Unpublished. Available at:

https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/curriculum-enrichment-project

(Accessed 12 June, 2016).

Webb, S. A. (2006). Social Work in a Risk Society: Social and Political Perspectives. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Webb, C; Carpenter, J. (2012) 'What Can Be Done to Promote the Retention of Social Workers? A Systematic Review of Interventions'. British Journal of Social Work 42, 1235-1255.

Wlodkowski, R. J. (2003). Accelerated learning in colleges and universities. In R. J. Wlodkowski & C. Kasworm (Eds.), Accelerated learning for adults: The promise
and practice of intensive educational formats (Vol. 97, pp. 5-15).

Wolfe, A. (1998). How a for-profit university can be invaluable to the traditional liberal arts. Chronicle of Higher Education, December (4), B4-B5.

Yip, K (2006). Self-reflection in Reflective Practice: A Note of Caution. British Journal of Social Work (July 2006) 36 (5): 777-788.

Functional Language & Literacy in Practice: A Higher Education Music Context

Michael Galeazzi, Monash University, Victoria

Anthony Shannon, Australian Institute of Music, New South Wales

Zofia Krawczyk-Bernotas, Australian Institute of Music, New South Wales

Contact: michaelgaleazzi@mac.com

Abstract

Currently most Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses do not specifically address functional literacy skills. A student could potentially pass the course, yet still be functionally illiterate. This paper is an attempt to consider what language and literacy issues might mean in practice in the context of Australian music higher education through investigating the role of reflective practice in music performance. A graduating music performance class at the Australian Institute of Music is employed as a case study to unpack the role of functional literacy in this context. Here, aligning cognitive processes with course development may avail opportunities for literacy skills to develop, but it still remains a question as to where such opportunities could exist within the broader education field. Regardless, the aim is to support content understanding by focusing on the nature and practices of academic reading and writing in all education environments.

1. Structure and purpose

The purpose of this paper is to broaden an understanding of literacy in music education beyond notions of music notation and musicianship [17, 2]. Here music literacy is aligned to more recent ideas of 'decision making in musical practice and rehearsals' [14]. First, a functional literacy context is introduced to consider the concerns regarding literacy standards in Australian higher education. Second, literacy is unpacked within a higher music education case study. In doing so attention is drawn to:

- the wide range of literacy skills that are associated with music performance;
- the need to identify and address these skills in music education;
- and the importance of these (non musical) literacy skills to life long learning and career longevity.

Third, the discussion and comments sections examine the important relationship between cognitive development, course structure and literacy outcomes (as a graduate attribute).

2. Introduction

The term 'functional literacy' can be traced back to 1956 [8]. It was later embedded in music education [4], though here we are suggesting its place in the total undergraduate music experience as part of the scholarship of integration [6]. Current media claims about low levels of literacy and numeracy, such as university graduates being unable to read the label on a medicine bottle [5], may be hard to swallow, but there are deeper issues at stake. Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) are complex notions that