

Writing & the teacher

Collection: The Subject & pedagogy

Learning outcomes

A activities like this are inherently unpredictable, and for that reason learning outcomes can only be obliquely suggested. We suggest that temporary distraction from the conscious tasks of planning may open up awareness of underlying personal themes that bear on the individual's insight and effectiveness as a teacher. Imaginative writing of this kind may thus lead to insight into blockages and inhibitions in the way of exploiting one's capacity to the full. On a more positive note, the task of re-imagining enables re-framing of the normal and the conventional in ways that elicit creative pedagogic thinking.

There is an underlying hypothesis that the quality of the student experience may be closely related to the quality of the staff experience. Your own fulfilment as a learner may therefore be a pre-condition of what your students can learn from you.

Overview

Students write; academics write. If they are literary or language scholars they write books and articles. If they are in creative writing they write novels, stories, poems. The suggestion here is that we might sometimes use the medium of writing (so fundamental to our subjects) in a different way. To use its imaginative modality as a medium for thinking about teaching, and surfacing the dilemmas of professional life.

Our argument ... is that the operation of the artistic imagination through the writing of fiction can be understood, precisely, as a mode of critical reflection upon and re-interpretation of, experience. (Richard Winter, Alyson Buck, and Paula Sobiechowska, Professional experience and the Investigative Imagination: The Art of Reflective Writing. London: Routledge 1999: 15.)



1 | This resource is part of a set of professional development resources for Higher Education English (including English Literature, English Language & Creative Writing) called 'The Pool'. The resources were developed by the English Subject Centre in 2011 as part of a JISC/HEA Open Educational Resources (OER) Project.

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So the object of this resource is to enable teachers and supporters of learning to explore the way in which their values and experience inform their minute-to-minute pedagogic decisions. The method proposes not only to help participants capture the fine grain of pedagogic experience, but to reflect on how professional knowledge is activated in serial reality. What prompts the spur of the moment decisions that we have to take? How do personal experience, 'evidence-informed' pedagogic knowledge, our sense of our own professional identity, or our own fantasies and fears influence the way we react in the here and now of the pedagogic encounter?

The resource is based on the premise that both reading and writing are active rather than passive processes that require those involved to think about perspectives, reframing and representation. To carry out structured writing tasks is to engage in a process of re-symbolization and to use metaphor and parable as equipment for reflection. Imaginative writing can be used, therefore, as a tool for thinking and learning even by those who have not formally studied language, literature, or creative writing. By making the familiar strange, metaphoric prompting can be a road to surprising insight.

In order to promote learning in others we, as teachers, need to experience new learning processes ourselves. To assist learning in others we have not only to be learners ourselves but also to be critically aware of that process with all its pleasures and discomforts, achievements and mistakes. In approaching teaching dilemmas in a different way through imaginative writing, you may be able both to experience an unfamiliar learning process and use that experience to generate new insights into your teaching. An emphasis on the 'student experience' does not oblige teachers to lose nourishing contact with their own reflective learning: students actually benefit when their teachers and mentors are in touch with the sources of their own learning. Nor should we be sentimental about this process. It is also the case that teachers may at times feel more ambivalence both towards their subject and towards their students than the more campfire revival aspects proponents of 'learning and teaching' tend to imply. Writing may provide a way of making space for and talking to negative feelings rather than simply sweeping them aside or letting them corrode all your dealings with students and colleagues.



Activities within this resource

- Writing tasks: group activity
 - Metaphors: group activity
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Resources in the *Subject and Pedagogy* Collection

- Subject and pedagogy: introduction to the collection
- Working with the English subject benchmark statement: resource overview
 - Using the English subject benchmark: group activity
 - Using the English subject benchmark: individual activity
- Working with the Creative Writing subject benchmark statement: resource overview
 - Using the Creative Writing subject benchmark: group activity
 - Using the Creative Writing subject benchmark: individual activity
- **Writing and the teacher: resource overview (* you are here)**
 - Writing tasks: group activity
 - Metaphors: group activity
- Hearing yourself teach: resource overview
 - Keeping a teaching journal: individual activity
- Working with threshold concepts: resource overview
 - Crossing the line: individual activity
 - Crossing the line: group activity



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