

Articles

Mark Readman | Jenny Moon

Graduated scenarios

Graduated scenarios: Modelling critical reflective thinking in creative disciplines

Mark Readman

Bournemouth University

Mark Readman is principal academic in media education in the Centre for Excellence in Media Practice at Bournemouth University, and editor of the *Media Education Research Journal*. His research is all underpinned by an interest in rhetoric and discourse and how these produce ‘truths’ about the social world. Much of his work, which has been published, and presented internationally, has examined the concept of ‘creativity’ as a discursive construction. As an editor of a collection of essays about representations of teaching and learning on-screen, he has also examined how myths about education are produced in film and on television.

Contact: Faculty of Media and Communication, Bournemouth University, Poole BH12 5BB, UK.

E-mail: mreadman@bournemouth.ac.uk

Jenny Moon

Bournemouth University

Jenny Moon is a visiting fellow in the Centre for Excellence in Media Practice at Bournemouth University, and national teaching fellow. She has worked in educational development since 1998, and before that has worked in the Health Service. The focus of

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her interest is the process of human learning and she has explored this in a number of books. She runs workshops in many universities in the United Kingdom and abroad on reflective learning, the use of learning journals, critical thinking, learning outcomes in programme development, the uses of story in higher education, oral storytelling and academic assertiveness.

Contact: Centre for Excellence in Media Practice, Bournemouth University, Poole BH12 5BB, UK.

E-mail: jenny@cemp.ac.uk

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Abstract

This article describes the development and implementation of Jenny Moon's 'Graduated scenarios' (2004, 2001, 2009) in the disciplinary context of media production. Graduated scenarios have previously been used to model different levels of critical thinking and reflection and have been based on situations and experiences that can be related to by a wide range of people. Our development of them in a specific creative disciplinary context, for use by students within that context, represents an evolution of the process, but we also consider the possible reception of such models in the context of debates around academic literacies and the degree to which they may be seen and used as contributing to an orthodoxy of expression. We acknowledge that this experiment in writing and pedagogy may be perceived as providing 'exemplars of standards', but argue that it actually models differing depths of thinking, and also opens up discussion about orthodoxies of academic writing. Our four models of different levels of critical reflective writing are provided as appendices, and may be used or adapted as necessary. The

production of such graduated accounts is ‘effortful work’, but the process can help us (academics) to better understand our own, as well as facilitating learners’, concepts of depth and ‘good practice’.

Keywords

graduated scenarios

media production

creative pedagogy

critical ~~reflection~~ thinking

reflection

exegesis

academic literacies

A starting point: How students think, talk and write about their creative practice

This project was motivated initially by the observation that students on ‘creative courses’ (our experience is with scriptwriting, filmmaking and media production) often find it difficult to engage analytically and conceptually with their own creative work. There is usually a requirement in such courses, which involve some kind of production or practice, to produce a piece of writing (or exegetical work in another form, such as an oral presentation, or video or audio essay) about the aims, intentions and success of such work (see [Buckingham et al. 2000](#)), and it often tends to be characterized by a failure to (1) adopt a sufficiently deep critical reflective mode in relation to the production process and (2) attain critical distance from the final artefact; we might say that a simultaneous ‘engagement and disengagement’ is required. This is not a problem restricted to

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undergraduates – we have observed similar difficulties with postgraduate students who have been resistant to analysing their own practical work, and who produce descriptive accounts of the production process, rather than a critical account of their thinking. There is some literature that explores the relationship between practice and theory for ‘creative students’, which suggests that there is a perceived division for them between practice-based activity and ‘academic’ work (see, e.g., [Orr and Bloxham \[2013\]](#)), and Lockheart provides a compelling critique of the ways in which academic writing is positioned and practised in the creative arts ([2018](#)). It is worth making a distinction here, though, between students’ writing about their *discipline* (often called ‘contextual’ or ‘complementary’ studies) and students’ writing about *their own creative practice*; the exegetical mode (i.e., the mode in which students elaborate on their own processes) presents particular challenges given its hybridity. It is a hybrid mode because it is a fusion of at least three elements: description of process, reflection and theory. The status and value of such reflective, critical writing about students’/researchers’ own creative work is a live debate in the field of practice-based research; Nelson, for example, suggests that ‘in most instances, further elaboration and documentation afford additional ways of articulating and evidencing the research inquiry’ ([2013](#): 11), whereas Candlin asks why the ‘written research’ is privileged in the academy: ‘[...] artwork has been, and is still successfully judged outside of an explicit relation to text, so why does the practice-based PhD destabilise what are established and educationally viable modes of judgement within art departments?’ ([Candlin 2000, n.pag.](#)). Candlin’s argument appeals to a notion that creative practice can be said to ‘speak for itself’ (see also [Frayling \[1994\]](#) for a discussion of this), but we suggest that whether in written or verbal form (the ‘crit’, for

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example), there is always a requirement in an academic context for some form of account to be given of a creative work and, therefore, our modelling of different depths of such accounts has some utility. The metaphor of ‘speaking’ is apposite, because our project was designed to model different modes of thinking in order to enable students to find their own critical *voices*. This point is crucial; these graduated examples of critical reflective writing provide opportunities for students to question the orthodoxies of academic writing and find their own ways of finding and expressing that which is worth saying – to understand the difference between ‘good practice’ and ‘inadequate practice’.

We realize that the discussion above provides only a sketch of some of the tensions between creative practice and exegetical work about that practice, and also that we refer freely across disciplines that sit within the category of ‘creative practice’. Nevertheless, this project was designed primarily as a response to a particular issue and a way of generating dialogue and understanding about different modes of thinking. We developed, then, a set of four examples of writing, which model different levels of critical, reflective engagement with a piece of creative media work. They are intended to be used by students to generate discussion about what might constitute critical reflection and to provide examples of how ‘depth’ might be articulated. ‘Depth’, we argue, is not a universal or essential quality, but a relative one (see [Laming \[2004\]](#) for an extended discussion of comparable human judgements) and, therefore, our graduated scenarios provide necessary points of comparison in order to develop understanding.

Moon argues that there are many concepts in pedagogy that are difficult to communicate to learners, highlighting ‘critical thinking’, ‘critical reflection’ and ‘reflection’ as particularly troublesome. We tell our students that these things are

important (and they are often key in attaining higher grades), but we struggle to explain exactly what these activities look like in practice and how students might do them, and do them better. As Moon says: ‘it is commonly said by teachers that they can recognise good or poor reflective writing when they see it, but they cannot explain effectively in words what it is or how to do it’ (Moon 2009: 58). Drawing on Moon’s work in which graduated scenarios are used in order to model different depths of reflection and critical thinking (Moon 2009), the approach was applied in the creation of four different critical responses to the same piece of production work – a short screenplay that one of us wrote several years ago, and an outline of which has been used as an example of screenwriting practice in a book for teachers (Readman 2003). We suggest that this kind of modelling not only helps students to understand the kind of thinking that is required for critical reflective analyses, but also can be used to stimulate new kinds of discussion and learning about the purposes and meanings of media production work, the relationships between practice and theory, the modes of articulation of these and the relationships between student practitioners and their own work. Our four models of different levels of critical reflective writing are provided in appendices and may be used or adapted as necessary; the remainder of the article discusses how they were developed, and we consider, finally, some of the ideological issues with modelling modes of academic thinking and writing and reflect upon this work in the context of ‘academic literacies’.

Background to graduated scenarios

Graduated scenarios were initially developed by Jenny Moon from her work on reflective learning (Moon 2004, 2006) and the method was subsequently modified and applied to critical thinking (Moon 2008). Moon’s work in this field dates from the late 1990s and

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exemplifies a consistent engagement with thinking, learning and the representations of thinking and learning. She recalls, from early workshops, that teachers experienced difficulties with their learners because ‘much of what was produced as reflective writing was descriptive and lacked depth and this seemed to limit the quality of the learning that could result from this reflection’ (Moon 2009: 58). She identified the concept of depth as crucial, drawing on the work of, for example, Van Manen (1977), Mezirow (1981) and Judy Wedman and Marilyn Martin (1986) who explored Van Manen’s different levels of reflectivity through the journals of student teachers. Another key concept was that of epistemological development, that is, how learners develop conceptions of their own knowledge and how they evaluate their beliefs about knowing. Marcia Baxter Magolda’s work was key here (1992, 2004) in which she traced the developmental journeys of learners and produced an epistemological taxonomy that included ‘absolute knowing’ (an assumption that knowledge is certain), ‘transitional knowing’ (an awareness that knowledge is not absolute in some areas), ‘independent knowing’ (an awareness and acceptance of the validity of different perspectives) and ‘contextual knowing’ (an understanding of the need to identify criteria from which to make judgements) (Baxter Magolda 2004: 34–38). Hatton and Smith’s (1995) work was also significant and their framework for critical reflection also comprised four elements or modes. Their continuum, from superficial to deep reflective writing, included ‘descriptive writing’, ‘descriptive reflection’, dialogic reflection’ and ‘critical reflection’ that began to map out the different levels, although as Moon says, their work was intended as an assessment tool, and not written in a learner-accessible way, which is how her idea for the graduated scenarios emerged. The graduated scenarios *illustrate* the different levels of thinking –

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they are underpinned by the theory, but do not make the theory explicit, or make it a barrier to understanding.

Both reflective learning and critical thinking are problematic concepts; they are constructed terms that describe pedagogically and professionally valued forms of thinking; they both resist easy definition, but are assumed to be evident when present; they are difficult to discuss in abstract terms; they are not absolute, but always relative. The graduated scenario method, then, is built on this notion of relativity, of comparing one thing with another in order to identify differences; there are incremental degrees of depth between the four different scenarios which can be identified by learners and this understanding can then be carried into their own work. When the scenarios are implemented with groups of learners, they are encouraged to discuss the material and thereby recognize multiple perspectives and learn the differences in quality.

The principles underpinning our graduated scenarios for this particular project are rooted in all of this work on epistemological development – principles that are explored in depth in [Moon \(2008\)](#). A key point is that:

fully developed critical thinking involves the making of a judgement, and involves an inherent recognition that knowledge is contestable. It follows from this that fully developed critical thinking is logically not possible until the learner can function – at least some of the time – at the contextual knowing pole of the epistemological continuum.

([Moon 2008](#): 112)

Moon's generic framework for reflection/critical thinking was developed, and continues to be developed, [iteratively](#):

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The framework is a tool under development. It needs to be used and can be modified in use to enable it to work better. It also needs to be tested against what others consider to be the main features of critical thinking.

(Moon 2008: 119)

We offer the four accounts in the appendices in this spirit – as a pedagogic resource that can be (and should be) modified and adapted in the light of experience and further thought. They were produced in a way that was both inductive and deductive; inductive because they were influenced by the many examples of student writing that we had encountered during years of practice, and deductive because the level of each account was pinned to Moon’s generic framework. We now discuss, in more detail, the method of writing the four graduated accounts.

Creating graduated scenarios for creative practice

The production of graduated scenarios represents a bridge between critical thinking and pedagogy, and between theory and practice. Moon has written a range of these scenarios, including ‘A first attempt at singing’; ‘A discussion about learning’ and ‘An incident on a walk’ (2008), and ‘The park’ for this journal (2009) all of which take ‘relatable situations’ that can be used and understood by those in different disciplinary contexts because they draw content from everyday experience. She suggests, however, that ‘[t]he subject matter for writing exercises [...] could be either within or outside of the discipline studied’ (2005: 24). We have discussed, over the years, the possible benefits of developing discipline-specific scenarios and agreed that, although there is a danger of such scenarios being perceived to be models of *writing*, rather than models of *thinking*, learners might engage more productively with the activity, if the disciplinary context were congruent with the students’ own. This project, then, was an experimentation with

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and development of Moon's non-discipline-specific scenarios that, to our knowledge, had not been done before in the disciplinary context of creative practice.

The four scenarios were written as if the author were a student of screenwriting: the first was a superficial, uncritical, account of a short screenplay; the second began to acknowledge doubt and to ask questions; the third was more critical; the fourth was 'fully critical'. The use of a screenplay as a focus was both calculated and serendipitous; serendipitous because we already had an example that one of us had written (see [Readman \[2003\]](#)), and calculated because it embodied many of the elements of creative practice that provided disciplinary anchorage – story, a strong visual dimension and a notional audience. It was important to provide an example that was within the sphere of knowledge of students, but that was safely removed from their own work. Similarly, the four different accounts by an 'unknown student' make honest critical engagement possible, which is often inhibited in a peer-review or 'crit' situation (see [Orr and Bloxham \[2013\]](#) and [Blair \[2006\]](#), for example). We suggest that thinking, understanding and reflecting can be facilitated, deepened and accelerated through the use of such examples.

Each account was driven by Moon's 'framework for critical thinking and its representations' ([2008](#): 198–201); the first was 'descriptive writing with little evidence of critical thinking', the second was 'descriptive text that moves towards critical thinking', the third 'critical thinking 1' and the fourth 'critical thinking 2'. As we have mentioned, we were mindful of not wanting to simply provide examples of writing about creative work that students could adopt and treat rather like a 'writing frame' (a pedagogic technique that has its roots in schools – e.g. [Lewis and Wray \[2002\]](#)), but, rather, to

provide examples of different levels of articulating thinking about creative work. It is a subtle distinction, but an important one, and we will return to this when we relate the project to the field of ‘academic literacies’.

We found that writing these ‘fictional’ critical reflections required an imaginative leap into character – it entailed a kind of ventriloquism as we wrote as if we were students embodying different epistemological stages. This kind of writing has something in common with the creative non-fiction method employed by, for example, Peter [Clough \(2002\)](#) and Ross [Adamson \(2020\)](#) in that we all activate an imaginative process based on research and experience that leads to stories or accounts; we all produce synthetic accounts of how people think, feel and express themselves. The difference, however, lies in the purpose; Clough and Adamson seek to illuminate experience, to reveal the fine grain of life in order to reach some kind of ‘truth’. Our purpose is slightly different – our accounts are also drawn from reality (although based on student work, rather than research interviews) and synthesized, but they are primarily pedagogic; they do not illuminate experience, but, instead, different levels of depth of *thinking* and, as such, have a heuristic function.

We now examine the process of writing the accounts in order to explicate the method. The tables below show elements of the generic framework matched with examples from our written accounts. For reasons of economy we provide only an illustration of the first and fourth accounts, but this has the benefit of showing the contrast between ‘descriptive writing with little evidence of critical thinking’, and ‘critical thinking’.

[Account 1](#) (see [Appendix 1](#)).

From the framework for critical thinking and its representations (Moon 2008: 198)	Examples from Account 1
<i>The text is descriptive and it contains little questioning or deepening of any issue. It may provide a narrative account which is from one point of view, in which generally one point at a time is made. Ideas tend to be linked by the sequence of the account rather than by meaning and there may be no overall structure and focus.</i>	'As a short screenplay it has to do quite a lot of work quite quickly – I've had to establish the characters, their relationship and the central narrative in quite an economical way and because it's a "short" I've had to make John become addicted quite quickly and make him get ill quite quickly too'.
<i>There is no real argument and not much comparison.</i>	'Another influence on the screenplay is the H. G. Wells story "The New Accelerator" in which the drug that the scientist creates is basically the same – it accelerates the metabolism of the user so that the world seems to grind to a halt'.
<i>Any introduction to the issue to be examined may tend to miss the point of the issue and pick up the surface characteristics of it – such as words used, rather than the meaning of them. It is taken at face value.</i>	'In the original story, Dr John Faustus (I used the name "John Foster" as a modern reference to this character from history) has reached the limits of knowledge and so sells his soul to the devil in order to increase his abilities (superhero stories often have this element in them – particularly the villains)'.
<i>Assumptions are likely to be left unexamined and probably unnoticed.</i>	'[...] as a genre work it is definitely "sci-fi", by which I mean it shows currently impossible things through the means of technology'.
<i>The text may refer to past experiences or opinions, but just as direct comment with no analysis and all in the context of this single viewpoint.</i>	'[...] a friend of mine knew someone who did this kind of job for an environmental agency and he said that lots of the guys in the lab used the facilities to cook up recreational drugs'.
<i>There may be references to emotional reactions but they are not explored and not related to any conclusions that may be drawn.</i>	'Overall I think the screenplay works quite well...'
<i>There may be ideas or external information, but these are not considered in depth, questioned or integrated.</i>	'My screenplay, Fast Forward is what's called a "Faustian pact" story, like a lot of science fiction. It's about what happens when human beings try to play "god" and then get punished'.

<i>There is little attempt to persist in focusing on particular issues. Most points are made with similar weight.</i>	‘This is a classic story because it has stood the test of time. But in “The New Accelerator” the two characters are Edwardian gentlemen and I have updated the setting so that my main characters are part of the rave culture who use drugs habitually. I’ve also introduced a love element which brings about conflict between the characters and causes John to over-use his new drug in order to spy on his friend and the object of his desire’.
<i>A conclusion may either not be properly drawn, or it is drawn but it is not justified by the text. It may be opinion and unrelated to any reasoning in the text.</i>	‘Most people who’ve read it say that it’s a good script and that they’d like to see it made into a film’.

Account 4 (see [Appendix 4](#)).

From the framework for critical thinking and its representations (Moon 2008 : 200–01)	Examples from Account 4
<i>There is an introduction of the issue, an examination of the wording (e.g. meanings and assumptions) or context of it, as appropriate. It may be reinterpreted so that it can be more clearly analysed.</i>	‘A “critical reflective analysis” of one’s own work is a challenge for a creative practitioner; the requirement to adopt critical distance is a different mode from the “productive/creative” mode and, therefore, entails a recalibration of one’s “values”’.
<i>The context, purpose for or limitations of the current thinking may be mentioned.</i>	‘It also, by definition, requires one to become “distant” from something that one has been very close too, and to attain this distance may require more time than is possible within the constraints of an academic programme’.
<i>The selection of the evidence for examination is appropriate and sufficiently wide-ranging.</i>	‘The structure of the story conforms to Booker’s (2004) description of tragedy...’ ‘As an example of the science fiction genre it is more successful and I find Altman’s (1999) distinction between “semantic” and “syntactic” dimensions in genre useful here...’
<i>The evidence is examined in a systematic manner that is well structured in relation to the task or issue. There is an</i>	‘I will discuss my screenplay, Fast Forward, from a range of perspectives – structural, generic, ethical – and ultimately arrive at some form of assessment of its success’.

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<i>appropriate balance between discussion of evidence and deliberation towards the response. There is good ‘signposting’ within the writing.</i>	‘Having invoked the ethical dimension, it is worth commenting on issues of gender for a moment...’
<i>The account shows deep reflection, and it incorporates the recognition that the frame of reference or context within which the issue is viewed, could change and affect the conclusion.</i>	‘I have, so far, been discussing my “story” as if it exists outside of a particular medium, but of course it is bound up in the form of the screenplay’.
<i>A metacognitive stance is taken (i.e. there is critical awareness of the processes of critical thinking in themselves).</i>	‘[...] perhaps, unwittingly, I have expressed a conservative message here – that to strive to be “post human” must result in some kind of punishment’.
<i>The account may recognize that the issue exists in a historical or social context that may be influential on the response to the task. In other words, multiple perspectives are recognized and taken account of.</i>	‘[...] it is worth commenting on issues of gender for a moment; science fiction is often criticised for being a masculine genre and, with the benefit of “critical distance” I can see that I have produced a story which is not only conservative in its world-view, but also in terms of its representation of male relationships...’
<i>There may be evidence of creativity in the processes of thinking and reasoning or in the range or nature of evidence used in the critical thinking.</i>	‘The “homosocial” [...] scene at the end seems to confirm that “Sarah” is responsible for the conflict between John and Peter, and the fantasies of desire invoked through pornography and the “tableau vivant” at the end all reduce Sarah’s status in the story to that of an object or “currency”’.
<i>Self-questioning and possibly self-challenge is evident.</i>	‘This piece of work is riddled with flaws, but through it I have learned to be critical of one of my “creative impulses” (which I have hitherto indulged), namely an obsession with “altered states”. Despite its appeal for me, I think I will need to explore other modes, subjects and stories in order to develop a greater degree of sophistication as a writer and to demonstrate that I have some kind of professional flexibility and aptitude’.
<i>There is a recognition of any influences on thinking and judgement such as the timing of the response, emotion, contextual matters, prior experience,</i>	‘I have attempted this through some rather heavy-handed symbolism and pop cultural references, but even so I think there is something “poetic” about the final montage sequence in which the protagonist shares the same space, but not the

<i>personal interest in the outcome, etc.</i>	same time, with the rest of humanity’.
<i>The conclusion effectively draws together the ideas developed in the text as evidence and makes a judgement in response to the topic introduced or given, recognizing any particular limitations of the judgement.</i>	‘Unlike a short story, or even a play, this has meant attempting to convey character through action, rather than dialogue. I realise that this screenplay is unlikely ever to be realised as a production so it has to be more than merely a “blueprint” for a future film. And as an industry calling card it has to demonstrate that I am able to write like a screenwriter – observing the industrial requirements, but also injecting some kind of “creative flair”’.

The examples selected here illustrate the combination of deductive and inductive processes mentioned above; the generic framework provides the characteristics of depth through a set of statements, and these statements are then animated into the graduated accounts through a process of vocalization. The utterances in the accounts are calibrated according to the generic framework and the voices have been synthesized from countless examples of student work that we have read. The stylistic use of contractions in Account 1, for example (‘I’ve’; ‘it’s’) is not in itself an index of superficial thinking, but has been used here to produce a tone of voice which has little patience for details, or the desire to pursue an argument. The fluency and lexical sophistication of the fourth account, conversely, produces a tone of voice that is congruent with reflection, and systematic interrogation of assumptions. ‘Depth’, that difficult-to-explain concept, is being dramatized here and positioned in a comparative relationship with something that is ‘less deep’ and, therefore, its characteristics are made accessible and tangible. This is what makes the graduated scenarios a valuable pedagogic tool, and we next discuss, briefly, their application.

The applications of graduated scenarios

Our aim in this article is to explain and demonstrate the production of a set of graduated scenarios that pertain to a particular disciplinary context; the method, as we have stated above, draws on creative non-fiction, and deductive and inductive processes. We do not offer a systematic evaluation of the implementation of graduated scenarios here, but it is worth outlining how they can be used and reporting on our own initial experiences of using them.

The pedagogic use of these graduated accounts usually entails small group work in two stages, in the first of which the accounts are read sequentially. After reading each account learners are asked to discuss how critical and/or reflective the account is. After reading the final account they are asked to identify the key shifts that make the fourth account more critical/reflective than the first. They may not use terms such as ‘metacognition’, but we have often heard learners using terms that gesture in this direction – commenting on one of the voices ‘questioning [his] own assumptions’, for example. There is, inevitably, discussion, disagreement and negotiation. Some interesting things emerge from the discussion; some students, on one occasion, noticed that the ‘student’ in the final account ([Appendix 4](#)) was most prepared to acknowledge flaws in the film script and to reflect upon how s/he might have improved it, and they admitted that they would be reluctant to do this as it was too ‘risky’ and they might jeopardize their grade. Another, attempting to pin down the difference between the third and fourth accounts, liked the fact that one posed questions without necessarily providing answers, which led to a discussion about the relationship between style and depth. The exercise also prompted a lively discussion about whether or not it was appropriate to use the first-person mode of address in a piece of academic writing, which generated some further

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development of the concept of reflection; some students were very uncomfortable about the use of 'I' and 'my' in the accounts, arguing that they couldn't be 'properly critical' because they weren't 'objective'. This then prompted discussion about the indicators of critical distance and whether or not the formality of the third-person mode of address was a 'performance' of objectivity. This was a rich debate and one that could be developed further through the use of these accounts; we came close to (without invoking his name) exploring a kind of Gadamerian ([Gadamer \[1975\] 2004](#)) stance, from which true understanding (of oneself and others) was made possible only through an honest reflection on and articulation of one's biases, weaknesses and personality. This constituted the beginning of a critique of dominant academic modes of address (which we discuss in the final section below). One significant observation about the final account ([Appendix 4](#)) was its inclusion of a consideration of the ethics of representation; there was an appreciation that this account was more sensitive to the wider contexts for creative work, and more aware of responsibilities to both oneself and the audience, but this was countered by questions regarding the relevance of such considerations by those who considered the aesthetic dimension to take priority.

In a second stage, learners are asked to represent in some way (any medium may be used for this) the shifts between the accounts and to explain the images or diagrams that they had produced. This process has generated some kind of consensus about the qualities of shallowness and depth in critically reflective writing, although there was, on one occasion, much discussion about the relationship between assertiveness and 'critical authority'. In both stages, the aim is to generate discussion and debate about how this elusive thing called critical reflection might be manifested and, crucially, to facilitate

through this comparative exercise greater understanding of relative degrees of depth and how they might be judged.

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We have also used the accounts with colleagues in order to refine them and in order to explore and develop the criteria in the framework. One colleague, in response to an early set of drafts, for example, commented on the ‘apologetic’ tone in the fourth account, which led to a discussion about whether being tentative and modest were characteristic of critical thinking, or mere performative proxies. Such engagement in professional debate about quality, standards, depth and articulation is always valuable. Moon describes the application of graduated scenarios as a ‘story-based problem solving activity’ and, as such, it ‘promotes learning that is hard to inculcate in other ways’ (2009: 63).

Some reflections on the use of graduated scenarios in the context of academic literacies

We have realized that by transposing the principles of graduated scenarios into a disciplinary context the stakes in the exercise change; they no longer only model different levels of thinking, but they seem to model different levels of academic writing. As we made clear at the start of this article, our intention was to explore an issue, not to produce an instrumental solution, not, in other words, to simply ‘enable student writers to meet the demands of writing in the university’ (Lillis and Scott 2007: 6). The wider context for this work, then, is the debate about academic literacies and the degree to which we should critique the ideological underpinning of such apparently neutral notions as ‘writing skills’ (see, e.g., Lea [1999], Jones et al. [1999] and Lea and Street [1998]); there is a danger

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that our different critical accounts are perceived to be the only way in which critical analysis or critical reflection can be done, which was not our intention.

Theresa Lillis draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism as a method of drawing out the inherent interplay of different voices in students' work and uses this to critique the 'monologic' responses to their work, which is formalized in institutional feedback. The effect of such feedback, she argues, is to produce conformity and constriction; students learn what can/cannot be said in academic writing, and the permitted ways of saying it – she suggests that 'we would be advised to reconsider the kind of unity that is privileged in academia' (Lillis 2003: 205). We suggest, finally, that the graduated scenarios presented here may be used in a way that is congruent with the project outlined by Lillis – a project that moves from critique to design, which seeks to design a pedagogy driven by critique. We believe that these scenarios could contribute to such a pedagogy in two ways: firstly, they embody different voices and, therefore, express the tension in academic writing between an orthodox, unitary 'monologism', and the usual suppressed 'dialogism'; secondly, if used to stimulate discussion about the purpose and depth of such writing, there will inevitably be critical engagement that goes beyond the instrumental confines of 'academic literacy'. We believe that depth, reflection and critical engagement are important pedagogically, but we do not believe that these can only be achieved via the conventional forms of academic writing and, indeed, that these scenarios can open up debate about alternatives. To reiterate, these scenarios model ways of thinking rather than ways of writing, and although they could be used superficially to exemplify different qualities of writing, we suspect that they would be difficult to replicate. It is possible that they might be seen as instructive and authoritative,

particularly the final account ([Appendix 4](#)), which was designed to model the deepest level of critical engagement, but one of the characteristics of critical reflection which emerges through the four graduated scenarios is the emergence of a questioning voice, through which an internal dialogue is made external, and this voice will be that of the learner. All of these accounts are dialogic in a Bakhtinian sense, in that they represent the tensions between different discourses and voices; even the first account ([Appendix 1](#)) invokes the discourse of classical story types (the ‘Faustian pact’ paradigm) which is what is notionally required in a piece of ‘academic work’, but this competes with the anecdotal, experiential mode.

The value of them, then, in a pedagogic context is to open up the ways in which these discourses compete with each other and to discuss how understanding, authenticity and insight may be achieved through thought and expression. In the context of creative disciplines they can also raise questions about what needs to be said, for what reason, how and for whom.

Moon says, ‘the development of a set of scenarios involves effortful work, though the materials can be used again and again’ ([2009](#): 63); we offer these as an open source resource, which includes the design framework, and invite colleagues and learners to use them, modify them, produce their own and develop new frameworks with new criteria as appropriate.

[Appendix 1: Critical reflective analysis of the screenplay *Fast –Forward – Account 1*](#)

My screenplay, *Fast Forward* is what’s called a ‘Faustian pact’ story, like a lot of science fiction. It’s about what happens when human beings try to play ‘god’ and then get

punished. In the original story, Dr John Faustus (I used the name 'John Foster' as a modern reference to this character from history) has reached the limits of knowledge and so sells his soul to the devil in order to increase his abilities (superhero stories often have this element in them – particularly the villains).

John Foster in *Fast Forward* works in a laboratory doing fairly boring work – a friend of mine knew someone who did this kind of job for an environmental agency and he said that lots of the guys in the lab used the facilities to cook up recreational drugs. This was the genesis of my idea – a scientist who is underachieving and who uses his abilities for the wrong reasons. Another influence on the screenplay is the H. G. Wells story 'The New Accelerator' in which the drug that the scientist creates is basically the same – it accelerates the metabolism of the user so that the world seems to grind to a halt. This is a classic story because it has stood the test of time. But in 'The New Accelerator' the two characters are Edwardian gentlemen and I have updated the setting so that my main characters are part of the rave culture who use drugs habitually. I've also introduced a love element that brings about conflict between the characters and causes John to over-use his new drug in order to spy on his friend and the object of his desire. It is this dramatic element that brings about the downfall of John Foster – he takes so much of the drug that he can't go back and, therefore, has to keep taking it for the rest of his life, just like drug addiction in real life.

Overall I think the screenplay works quite well – there is definitely a sense of the Faustian pact, and as a genre work it is definitely 'sci-fi', by which I mean it shows currently impossible things through the means of technology. As a short screenplay it has to do quite a lot of work quite quickly – I've had to establish the characters, their

relationship and the central narrative in quite an economical way and because it's a 'short' I've had to make John become addicted quite quickly and make him get ill quite quickly too. However, I've used the scientific image of the 'lab rat' to justify this – because the rat gets sick in the lab it tells us that John will also get sick. Most people who've read it say that it's a good script and that they'd like to see it made into a film.

Appendix 2: Critical reflective analysis of the screenplay *Fast Forward* – Account 2

My screenplay, *Fast Forward*, was written as a 'sci-fi short', that is, a short science fiction film. It fits the genre very well, as it 'explores the potential consequences of scientific and other innovations, and has been called a "literature of ideas"' (Wikipedia).

My aim was to bring an old story (H. G. Wells' 'The New Accelerator') up to date and I have done this by retaining the same narrative structure but transposing it into a modern setting. Actually it's probably more true to say that I have adapted the original by introducing some new elements and giving it a bleaker ending, rather like Terry Gilliam adapted *La Jetée* into *12 Monkeys*. I have also used a 'Faustian pact' structure in which the main character's attempt to go beyond the limits of humanity is inevitably punished; John Foster (there is an obvious reference here to 'John Faustus' in Christopher Marlowe's play) becomes addicted to the power that the drug gives him but ultimately becomes physically dependent on it so that the power is reversed. In this way my story is also a metaphor for addiction more generally – people use drugs for pleasure, then they get hooked and then they need them just to function normally.

The screenplay is just over ten pages long, which should equate to ten minutes of screen time. This means that I have had to move the story along quite quickly – to

compress the three act structure (Field 1994) in a much shorter space. The first plot point is the introduction of the drug, which later enables John to spy on Peter and Sarah. The confrontation between John and Peter builds up to a climax when Peter has to condemn his friend to a solitary surreal existence in order to save his life. If this were a full-length screenplay, I would be able to develop these in more detail. John's journey from initial use of the drug to full-blown addiction probably happens too quickly – in the script there are only three occasions on which he uses the drug without Peter and yet this is enough to get him to the point of no return.

Overall I think this is a successful piece of work – the younger characters and contemporary setting will be more appealing to a modern audience than a straightforward adaptation of the H. G. Wells story, and the introduction of a 'love interest' creates universal appeal. The 'short film' is a well-established 'calling card' to get into the industry and I hope that my script shows enough ability to create characters, write dialogue and tell a story so that I could either get funding to make this myself or get further professional writing assignments.

[Appendix 3: Critical reflective analysis of the screenplay *Fast Forward* – Account 3](#)

I have limited space here to analyse my screenplay, *Fast Forward*, but I will be able to make critical comments under some key headings, which are mythic structure, the sci-fi genre, the nature of the screenplay and the function of the screenplay in a professional context. My intentions with this work were both 'artistic' and 'professional', in other words, I wanted to develop my skills as a storyteller, and also produce a 'calling card' that might open doors in the industry. I will conclude that this piece of work, like the

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scientific invention in the story, could be described as a ‘failed experiment’, but that, nevertheless, it is possible to learn from it and apply these lessons in future. In doing so, this account will be both ‘critical’ and ‘reflective’.

Underlying this discussion is the question: ‘is this a successful screenplay?’ – the answer to which will depend upon the criteria for success. Usually these will entail whether or not the story is satisfying, whether or not the characters are convincing, whether the dialogue is ‘realistic’, but purposeful, and whether it manages to be ‘visual’ whilst existing as words on a page.

I have clearly used the mythic structure of the ‘Faustian pact’ in which a protagonist is transgressive in some way and ultimately pays the price for this transgression. There is some satisfaction for an audience in this mythic structure, as it restores some form of order at the end. However, it is important to look at the precise way in which that order is restored and how it might be ‘foreshadowed’ in the story. My protagonist is a thrill-seeker who pursues the excitement of ‘speed drugs’, but that desirable altered state becomes his punishment when he is condemned to live it forever – as his namesake Dr Faustus says: ‘he that loves pleasure must for pleasure fall’ (Marlowe). There is also some symbolic foreshadowing of John’s ultimate plight in, for example, the butterfly in the garden, the posed figures in pornography, and *The Incredible Shrinking Man* playing on Peter’s TV. But would an audience pick up on these elements if a film were made from this script?

It is no surprise that the science fiction genre often includes this mythic structure – *Frankenstein* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* are early examples of scientists who dare to ‘play God’ and science creates ample opportunities for this kind of transgression to take

place. But it is also the iconography of the laboratory and the jargon of chemical names that locate this story firmly within the sci-fi genre. As such it is probably possible to ‘short cut’ particular story elements, as the audience is likely to understand the conventions of the genre.

One challenge with such a short piece of work is to produce empathy with the protagonist – the audience doesn’t necessarily have to like him, but they do have to understand why he acts as he does. In this story it is desire, inhibition and jealousy that all operate as ‘relatable characteristics’, but perhaps John’s motivation to self-medicate, to spy and to self-destruct, based on flimsy evidence, are all rather unconvincing. Good casting and a persuasive performance would undoubtedly help, but the script has to stand on its own merits.

Ultimately, then, as I mentioned earlier, *Fast Forward* feels like a ‘failed experiment’ – it works as a genre exercise, but does it work as realistic portrayal of human behaviour? And does it work as a screenplay? My work in future needs to develop these dimensions within genre constraints.

[Appendix 4: Critical reflective analysis of the screenplay *Fast Forward* – Account 4](#)

A ‘critical reflective analysis’ of one’s own work is a challenge for a creative practitioner; the requirement to adopt critical distance is a different mode from the ‘productive/creative’ mode and, therefore, entails a recalibration of one’s ‘values’. It also, by definition, requires one to become ‘distant’ from something that one has been very close too, and to attain this distance may require more time than is possible within the constraints of an academic programme. It is also worth mentioning that aspiring

screenwriters need to be the most convincing advocates of their own work; to be asked to identify its flaws feels somehow alien and self-destructive. What is needed though is a conscious adoption of a critical, yet constructive stance in relation to a piece of work in which I have invested time, craft and emotion and, therefore, despite my misgivings and anxieties, I will discuss my screenplay, *Fast Forward*, from a range of perspectives – structural, generic, ethical – and ultimately arrive at some form of assessment of its success.

The structure of the story conforms to Booker's (2004) description of tragedy, in which a hero is tempted into a course of action which is dark or forbidden, ultimately paying the price for this. Booker discusses the German legend of Faust, the Greek myth of Icarus, *Macbeth*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and even *Lolita*. Like the protagonists in these stories, John Foster dares to go beyond what is permitted and, particularly like Dr Jekyll, becomes a slave to his own drug. However, there is a problem with my story in this context; my protagonist's downfall is not a direct result of scientific or exploratory zeal, but rather a result of his need to spy on the object of his desire. This now seems like an expedient device, rather than something driven by the essence of the character and, consequently, it undermines the 'mythic coherence' of the story. Perhaps, in a more developed version of this story, I would be able to ensure that the protagonist's actions always stem from some consistent emotional core.

As an example of the science fiction genre it is more successful and I find Altman's (1999) distinction between 'semantic' and 'syntactic' dimensions in genre useful here. According to the semantic model my story has many of the characteristic attributes – the iconography of the laboratory, technology and special effects, for

example. But syntactically too, I could argue that the story articulates some of the deeper concerns that characterize the sci-fi genre, such as the relationships between human beings and technology, and perhaps, unwittingly, I have expressed a conservative message here – that to strive to be ‘post human’ must result in some kind of punishment.

Having invoked the ethical dimension, it is worth commenting on issues of gender for a moment; science fiction is often criticized for being a masculine genre and, with the benefit of ‘critical distance’ I can see that I have produced a story that is not only conservative in its world-view, but also in terms of its representation of male relationships, in which the sole female character is merely a cipher – something with no identity of her own, but a ‘contested prize’ for the male characters. The ‘homosocial’ (Sedgwick 1985) scene at the end seems to confirm that ‘Sarah’ is responsible for the conflict between John and Peter, and the fantasies of desire invoked through pornography and the ‘tableau vivant’ at the end all reduce Sarah’s status in the story to that of an object or ‘currency’.

I have, so far, been discussing my ‘story’ as if it exists outside of a particular medium, but of course it is bound up in the form of the screenplay. Maras (2009) insists that we need to consider the specifics of the ‘object-status’ of screenwriting and the screenplay. This is a complex argument, but the implications for me are to consider how the industry standard model has determined not just the format and structure of my script, but also my understanding of how a story for the screen should be manifested. Unlike a short story, or even a play, this has meant attempting to convey character through action, rather than dialogue. I realize that this screenplay is unlikely ever to be realized as a production so it has to be more than merely a ‘blueprint’ for a future film. And as an

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industry calling card it has to demonstrate that I am able to write like a screenwriter – observing the industrial requirements, but also injecting some kind of ‘creative flair’. I have attempted this through some rather heavy-handed symbolism and pop cultural references, but even so I think there is something ‘poetic’ about the final montage sequence in which the protagonist shares the same space, but not the same time, with the rest of humanity.

This piece of work is riddled with flaws, but through it I have learned to be critical of one of my ‘creative impulses’ (which I have hitherto indulged), namely an obsession with ‘altered states’. Despite its appeal for me, I think I will need to explore other modes, subjects and stories in order to develop a greater degree of sophistication as a writer and to demonstrate that I have some kind of professional flexibility and aptitude.

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