Title: The use of haiku poetry as a tool for critical reflection

Abstract:

Critical reflection is an integral part of social work education and practice, yet it is widely understood to be hard to learn, teach and assess. We introduced the use of poetry in the form of haikus to three different qualifying social work student groups to trial a creative way of getting students to engage in critical reflection. 96 students took part in the reflection activity and twenty-three of the students agreed to take part in the research element, which used a mixed-methods approach to explore the value of haikus in critical reflection. Following the thematic networks analysis process, we identified one global theme: that haikus were a useful tool for developing critical reflection. There were three organising themes identified: the need to create a safe learning environment to support engagement; that taking part provoked reactions; and the activity held important elements that aided the development of critical reflection.

Keywords: Critical reflection, Haiku, poetry, creative learning methods

Introduction

Social work is a profession where critical reflection is at the heart of practice and is a key skill woven into practice standards (Social Work England, 2020). It forms a key component of the Social Work Professional Capability Framework, {an overarching framework for social work education and development in England} because reflection supports social

workers to challenge themselves and others, and maintain "professional curiosity, creativity and self-awareness" (Professional Capabilities Framework, Domain 6, The British Association of Social Workers, 2018). Reflection on practise is not only relevant to UK practise, as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2021) note the need for social workers to engage in critical self-reflection and a recent International Federation of Social Work (IFSW 2018) project noted the particular importance of reflective practice for new social workers in practice.

Maslow (1968) argued that our habits can be useful as mental/heuristic short cuts, but can also be a hindrance, as they impede adaptation in a changing world, can hamper our creativity, and lead us to lazy thinking. The need to slow down our thinking process is important so that heuristic thinking is not relied upon and purposeful thinking processes are applied, it could be argued this is transformative learning. Mezirow (2000, p. 5) argued that transformative learning allows for a change of in our "frame of reference", and this transformation occurs when we reflect critically "on the assumptions upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based" (2000, p. 7).

Critical reflection is seen as a skill that can be learned, and according to Dewey, (2005) requires both practical engagement and questioning the social context in which the resulting impressions are formed. Critical reflection is a purposeful process (Gray, 2007) that can be used to explore one's thoughts, actions, and behaviours in relation to an event (Mezirow, 1994) and can be applied to a wide range of situations (Fook & Gardner, 2007). Schön (1984) was a key advocate for critical reflection in practice, and theorised how professionals think 'in' and 'on' action to draw upon their implicit knowledge and learn from experiences. To reflect 'on' action is to reflect after the event, to consider what happened, analyse and

evaluate it and is vital in social work practice, otherwise decision making can become stagnant. Critical reflection is therefore a skill that all social work students need to develop (Kinsella, 2010; Maclean, 2016; Rogers, 2000; Sicora, 2010).

Rai (2006) discusses the challenges for students to develop reflective writing and encourages social work educators to reflect on how to develop this core practice skill. To support this type of learning, traditionally, social work students are predominantly taught to apply structured reflective models (Bruce, 2013), yet Fook and Askeland (2007) note that educators need to be aware that the more traditional questioning forms of critical reflection models may not suit all students. Moreover, although these can be effective, when it comes to learning styles, one size does not necessarily fit all, as people have different preferences in the way they learn (Race, 2015). It is, therefore, useful to present learning materials in different formats (for example poetry) to address different learning styles (Ginns, 2005).

The Use of Poetry in Critical Reflection

A Scottish project on the use of poetry to promote social workers' critical reflection around mental wellbeing, started as a response to an increase in work pressures in the social work arena (Critchley and Roesch-Marsh, 2020; Social Workers' Union, n.d.) and therefore it is worth considering if certain forms of poetry might aid the development of critical reflection on practice. Poetry can help students to reflect (Threlfall, 2013) and Ramsey (2018) strongly argues that using poetic forms to support the development of reflective practice has some core strengths beyond that of the more traditional reflective methods. For example, it can interrupt set ways of perceiving the world and give space to help escape the constraints of cause and effect. Moreover, Ramsey (2018, p. 95) argues that reflection requires us to engage in "mindful practices" that gives us space to think and poetic writing promotes those practices. Poetry has the potential to move a student from being the passive recipient of given-knowledge, using structured methods, towards being a self-actualised thinker using a

deeper, meaningful, method and arguably using creative techniques for reflection could help to overcome barriers to learning and instead assist us to be more "attending, perceiving, learning, and thinking" (Maslow, 1968, p. 203).

The use of poetry to help explore narratives in health and social care is not unusual and there are numerous examples of it being used to understand lived experiences of service users such as Fenge et al. (2018), who used poetic inquiry to explore the lived experiences of homeless people. Poetry can help challenge our assumptions and offer up a "previously unconsidered course of action" (Ramsey, 2018, p. 99) and has been advocated for use in social work practice, to "illuminate some truth of the client's perspective" and therefore, develop practice (Furman et al., 2012, p. 13) as well as being used to support students' reflection (Cowin, 2012; Furman et al., 2008; Gair, 2012; Savishinsky, 2007).

Poetry (including the haiku form) has been used as a tool in therapy for helping people to make sense of their experiences (Collins et al., 2006) and within social work practice as a tool to reflect on experiences (Furman et al., 2008; Murphy & Jenkinson, 2021). Tsang (2014) drawing on the work of Furman (2006, 2008, 2012) suggests there is a congruence between writing poems and social work practice and further argues that experienced social workers share some characteristics with poets and may find engaging in poetry writing could help them explore the feelings of those they support. Poetry is useful as a form of reflexivity for social workers, both in relation to creating a poem to support one's own reflection and practice and to support social work students develop their reflective skills as exemplified by Taiwo's (2014) poem on gender fluidity, Alvarez's (2020) poems in the pandemic, Dyche's "poem about reflecting upon the observations of a social worker and their patients titled

'After Hours' ((2004, p. 388) and Gold's (2013, p. 852) works using relational poetry as an inquiry into practice. For example, their poem titled 'A space for Stories':

> …Yet there's room here, I tell myself,
> for letting the stories fall
> and just letting them be.
> *It sounds cliché but the space for pain is underrated.*

One form of poetry is the haiku, which is prescriptive, using very few words in 3 lines, with the first and last having 5 syllables and the middle 7 (maximum of 17 syllables). When using this form there is a need for careful thought when choosing the words to convey meaning (Terrell, 2012). The haiku as a form of poetry enables the juxtaposition of the rational and the emotional and has the ability "to explore both the dark and light side of our experiences" (Grisoni et al. 2007, p. 353). This makes it potentially useful for critical reflection within social work, as much of a social worker's experiences have an emotional component with both positive and negatives elements and understanding our emotions can increase our awareness of our preconceptions (Herland, 2022). Moreover, Ingram (2013, p. 1000) emphasised that for critical reflection to take place there needs to be both "technical reflection" on what was done and could be changed and also "practical reflection" which stresses reflecting on self-awareness and experience.

The haiku form has been found to be a helpful tool to support students to process emotional issues related to clinical healthcare practice (Biley & Champney-Smith, 2003) and to explore feelings after hearing poignant lived experiences stories (Baldie et al., 2016). Haikus have been used with nurses and midwives to promote resilience (McDonald et al., 2013), and to promote reflective thinking (Jack & Illingworth, 2019). They have been effectively used with

students to reflect on the experiences of the lives of nursing home residents (Savishinsky, 2007), to explore students learning in clinical practice (Terrell, 2012) and develop mindfulness (Nugent et al., 2011). Savishinsky (2007, p.56) used haikus to teach about aging and noted that a key benefit of the haiku form was that it challenged "writers to condense the intensity of their experiences into a single evocative image or moment". Gair (2012) used it specifically to support the development of empathy with social work students. Both found that it helped students to gain different perspectives. However, there is a potential challenge to using poetry as a tool because the willingness to engage in such an activity might be impacted by people's perceptions of poetry, perhaps based on school experiences or even personality, as it is suggested that poetry is preferred by those who have the 'extrovert' personality type (Kroger, Otto; Thiesen, 1988). Moreover, Jack and Illingworth (2019) found that using poetry can take away from the sequential nature of the reflective process as suggested by Dewey (2005). However, they also argue that the contemplation offered through a more creative approach which focuses on the experience rather than the need for improvement might be beneficial for students in developing their skill of reflection (Jack & Illingworth, 2019).

Developing reflective skills, in a non-assessed and non-time critical environment (i.e., in an effective learning environment which offers time and thinking space) enables professionals to develop and flex these skills as reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1984) thereby honing them to be used in time critical situations (Holmes, 2012). Although our study is not the first to use haikus in education or to reflect on circumstances, to our knowledge there have been no specific studies with social work students on using the haiku structure to develop critical reflection. Consequently, our study sought to explore students' experiences

of reflecting on their practice using haikus. This study considered the following research questions:

1. How can using a haiku structure, aid students to further develop their critical reflection?

2. What, if any, are the personal barriers to engaging in this form of critical reflection?

Method

Context of the Research Activity

A reflective poetry activity was run in in person in class in 2021-22 with social work students, as part of their taught units to reflect upon the learning from a practice experience. We chose haiku because this poetry format, as previous studies have shown, is one with which beginners can easily engage (Biley & Champney-Smith, 2003) and is perceived as simple, because it only has 3 lines with a set number of syllables. The authors were curious to explore the students' experience of reflecting in this less "traditional way". Ethical approval was gained for this study through the (add post review).

Recruitment

The poetry activity formed part of the overall learning activities for the units. This session was delivered across four student groups (Bachelor of Arts (BA) /Master of Art's (MA) Degree and Post Graduate Diploma (PGDip)). Prior to each session, the participant information sheet was shared with the whole student group. At the start of the session, the students were briefed on the poetry activity as part of their formal learning. They were also informed that should they choose to do so; they could take part in the research element after completing the activity. It was emphasised that participation in the research element was voluntary. Those that chose to partake in the research were given a consent form prior to receiving the survey and opportunity to ask questions.

The Activity

The activity had been run successfully with a group of students the year before and had been designed by the first author as a way to support students to reflect on their experiences. The activity was 1 hour in length, with a 15-minute introduction.

In the introduction students were asked to follow the standard haiku syllabic rules but were reassured that this should not be the main focus, and not to worry if they could not meet it. The expectation was not that they would become experts at writing haikus, but would develop their critically reflective practice, so we only used a rudimentary form of haiku. It is important to demystify poetry, as many people have had poor education experiences related to poetry writing (Collins et al., 2006). Therefore, unlike other authors (Biley & Champney-Smith, 2003; Gold, 2012; Jack & Tetley, 2016; Savishinsky, 2007) the focus was on the practice and reflection, not perfecting the form. Therefore, we did not include a detailed background to the form, but instead, provided simple instructions concerning the structure (5-7-5 syllables) as part of a short briefing to students to familiarize students with the nature and intent of haiku, which included personal examples to show the structure of this poetic form. The following were suggested as possible topics to use: Me, as a social worker; Me and conflict; Me and emotion; Me and reflection; Me and my assumptions; My unconscious bias; Me and my 'driver' style; Me the rescuer. Another difference from the work of Biley and Champney-Smith (2003) and Savishinsky (2007) is that we did not use group work, but opted for individual work as this was intended as a possible tool for students to use whilst on individual practice placements. The students were given 30 minutes to compose their haiku(s) and share anonymously on a class Padlet, followed by a 15 minute debrief and discussion around the themes in the haikus and their experiences of using this as a tool for reflection.

There was no assessed element to this activity as the focus was offering students alternative ways to reflect on their practice without any pressure that assessment would bring. It was observed that although all students shared at least one haiku on the Padlet, some chose not to share all their examples, and some students had struggled with keeping to the 5,7,5 haiku form. For those who wanted to learn more about the haiku form, articles were shared on the virtual learning environment to be accessed later.

After the activity, the study questionnaire was emailed to the students, together with the original participant information sheet. The questionnaire was qualitative in format, asked for limited demographic data: age and gender, and was a mixture of open and closed questions (see supplementary material 1). It focussed on the students' experiences of engaging in the activity: likes, dislikes and barriers. As part of the questionnaire students were given the opportunity to consent to have their poems shared in any publications resulting from the study. Those who gave consent were asked if they wished to use a pseudonym or be identified as the author of the poem. Students were also asked if they wished to take part in a follow up focus group.

Data Collection

Data was collected across four student groups, all studying for their social work qualifications. All the students in each year group (N = 96) were asked if they wished to participate in the research as well as the activity and 23 agreed. Sixteen were studying for their PGDip (part of the Step Up to Social Work), three were on the Social Work MA programme (year one), and four (3 from 20/22, 1 from 21/22) were from the BA Social Work programme (year 2). 73 students engaged in the reflective activity in class but chose not to take part in the research. When asking students to engage in research, lecturer/researchers

find the need to find that fine balance between making sure students do not feel that they have to engage in research, with seeking enough participants for meaningful data collection. Students can be a vulnerable group due to power differentials (Cleary et al., 2014) and this was particularly important to us, as anti-oppressive social work practitioners. Therefore, students were not asked why they did not engage in the research. It is possible, though given the intensive nature of the course, that students faced multiple assignment deadlines were unwilling to give time to completing a question which had no direct benefit on their studies i.e. were strategic in prioritising their time but could either see the benefit of engaging in the activity in class environment or engaged because it was an expectation within the seminar.

One follow-up online focus group of 1 hour in length was run via MS Teams with three students (1 BA from each group and 1 MA), to explore the participant's experiences in more depth and what they felt might improve the reflective activity. The data from the focus group was recorded through written notes with the permission of the participants.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to ascertain the participants' feelings in relation to undertaking the activity. Thematic Analysis was undertaken using an adaption of the thematic networks process which seeks to identify one global theme, related organising themes and associated basic themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). This method starts with a coding framework, for which we used the questionnaire themes. (Table 1).

Table 1

Both researchers went through questionnaires and notes from the focus groups separately and coded the data under the questionnaire themes. They met to resolve any differences of opinion. Through this analysis, basic themes, organising themes, and a global theme were identified. Pseudonyms have been used.

Results

23 students completed the questionnaires (4 male and 19 female). The age range was between 27 and 54 years with a mean age of 38 years. 19 were from the two MA level programmes (16 from the PGDip, 3 from the MA) and 4 (out of 63) from the BA. Due to the small number of participants, no data analysis was undertaken to look for any links between gender/age and usefulness of the activity. Over 95% of participants stated that they enjoyed the activity. All the participants noted that the activity helped their reflection, and over 91% said that using this method gave them deeper insight into their situation. Only 30% had written poetry before. 87% chose to share their poem with other students via the anonymous Padlet. 60% noted they would use poetry as a means of reflection in the future (the collected poems from the students who agreed to share, can be found in supplementary material 1). Table 2 gives a summary of the quantitative data.

Table 2

The qualitative data includes the responses of the 23 people who participated in the questionnaire, and the sub-group of three students who participated in a focus group. Following the thematic networks process (Attride-Stirling, 2001) we identified one global theme arising from the data, this being that haikus were a useful tool for developing critical reflection. This global theme was supported by three organising themes: the need for a safe

learning environment; that engaging in the activity provoked reactions and the distinct elements that aided the development of critical reflection. The organising themes were then analysed further into associated basic themes (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Required Safe Learning Environment

It was evident from the feedback that the anonymity of the online interactive posting platform (Padlet) enabled the public sharing of the poems: as one participant noted: "I felt comfortable to do this because it was anonymised and other people were sharing theirs" (Lucy, BA). What was interesting was that some participants mentioned that for them, the sharing of the poems also helped them to engage with the shared experience of the challenges faced being on a social work course. There was a sense of camaraderie amongst students: "We are all in the same boat" (Cassie, PGDip), but as can be seen from the poetry examples (Table 3 and the supplementary material) students also shared their feelings of uncertainty and worries around becoming a social worker. It should be highlighted, that as a part of the safe learning environment, the concept of positive group dynamics was raised. This appeared to be founded in how supportive the groups were perceived to be, as well as how supportive the researcher was when leading the exercise. As a participant noted: this was a "reassuring group and lecturer - the workshop, up to this point, has made me feel at ease in the group" (Charles, PGDip), with another participant writing: it was a "very supportive and non-judgemental group" (Jenny, MA). However, this was not everyone's experience, "I felt like some people saw it as a bit of a joke which I found slightly off putting" (John, PGDip) and

here John's comment emphasizes the need for a supportive environment but despite feeling this John still engaged and was willing to share his poem (Table 3).

The feedback on how to develop this activity, was potentially the need for more time to complete it, however, it was also noted that there was an advantage in making the activity time sensitive: "Maybe more time? But I feel that the short window forces you to make quick decisions" (Daisy, PGDip).

On another quite practical note, one change we made in teaching from session one to session two was to provide a link to a free syllable checker, when it became clear that, for some, breaking down words into syllables added stress and/or frustration in completing this activity. The feedback from one student highlights the disadvantage of not having it in place from the beginning: "I would have started with the online tracker so I could have focused on creativity and reflection from the start" (Claire, MA).

Provoked reactions

A range of emotional responses were identified in the analysis (Figure 1), and Figure 2 uses a word cloud to show the responses, with 'enjoyable' being the most used phrase, followed by 'frustrate', 'emotional', 'challenging' and 'interesting'.

Figure 2

The data showed that many participants had a sense of surprise that they were able to produce poems as a form of critical reflection and one participant stated: "I was amazed I could write a haiku at all" (Edward, PGDip). It appeared that the notion of engaging in writing poetry initially sparked a sense of nervousness or trepidation in many, for example: "I was nervous initially as anything creative tends to make me anxious. I assume I am not very 'artsy'" (Carrie, PGDip). This is interesting and demonstrates how personal beliefs, in this case not being creative, and previous experiences can impact how someone feels about a task, but also that in the right environment these barriers can be overcome: "once I relaxed and began to just focus on thinking on words it became easier and I started to enjoy it" (Carrie, PGDip). However, not only did students gain in confidence as the activity continued, they acknowledged that the task became enjoyable and for one there was a sense of pride:

> "the experience was positive, I felt nervous at the start, but it did come quite naturally and I really liked what I produced" (Daisy, PGDip).

For some, engaging in writing haikus led to feeling a sense of well-being and enjoyment, with those participants noting that it was quite therapeutic and calming and 60% saying they would use poetry as a means of reflection again. Moreover, for some it was a step towards personal growth, with one participant stating: it "helped to be able to have ownership over difficult feelings" (Luke, PGDip). Others, however, experienced personal barriers to creativity for example, a sense of unease and challenge was raised around engaging in this activity. Participants noted a challenge with how to start writing a haiku, "it was hard to get started, pick the theme" (Joan, PGDip), and another said they felt a sense of pressure and vulnerability in engaging in this:

"I found the idea of poetry quite intimidating to start with. Poetry is not something I had ever considered myself good at, so felt a little scary initially. I hated poetry writing at school" (Lucy, BA).

The previous experience of poetry was a barrier, however, as with the challenging of beliefs around creativity as the activity developed the participant's feelings changed:

"Once I started putting pen to paper and getting some words down I felt surprised that it was coming together... I felt surprised and pleased once I had written the first poem…and then I felt more confident to write another" (Lucy, BA).

One participant wrote that the process took them out of their comfort zone: "It was totally alien to me and it felt very uncomfortable" (Claire, MA). However, each of these participants also shared a sense of overcoming these difficulties and realising the benefits, for example:

"Challenged, that said it helped me focus and forced me to unpick to a far deeper level than I would have done otherwise" (Claire, MA).

This was not true for all though, with one participant commenting: "I'm not a very poetic person, [I] struggle to construct meaningful haikus" (Taylor, PGDip).

Another barrier was the discomfort of having to share a haiku at the end with the rest of the group, particularly in relation to being seen to do it well:

"sharing publicly straightaway (albeit anonymously) adds pressure to make it be good in a short space of time, to fit in with the rest of the group" (Marley, PGDip).

"it made me feel a bit vulnerable and worry that mine wouldn't be very good" (Maise, PGDip).

However, for some, although an uncomfortable process for them, it was a part of their personal development journey:

"I didn't actually find it comfortable sharing, but I felt like I should as it is all part of my learning process at university. I need to push myself sometimes" (Sara, PGDip).

A number of participants suggested that they found that translating their ideas into the structure of writing a haiku to be difficult: "my brain hurt" (Bryony, PGDip) and restrictive, as one noted:

"it was difficult as trying to write out the syllables and then keep changing what I was writing made me panic and not compose something" (Mary, MA)

Although the students were given suggested topics, the poems predominantly focussed on the students' own feelings about becoming a social worker or their studies or their experiences on placement – see examples in Table 3. (All the haiku examples that participants gave permission to share can be found in supplementary material).

Table 3

From these shared examples it is noticeable that not all students were able to work within the construct of the form, and although further thought may have allowed them to meet the structure, it still took them through a process of reflection on action. Not all the students created poems on the themes they were asked to, and one student instead used it to share their frustrations with the experience:

> Can't write a haiku.
>
> Where are the words that I need?
>
> Pour me more coffee.
>
> (Edward, PGDip).

However, the examples evidence the critical reflection that came through using this medium and also the pride that many felt in their creations through their willingness to include within the survey and one student even went as far as describing what their poem was about (Table 3).

However, other participants shared that set structure encouraged them to think carefully and more deeply about what they wanted to include or exclude within the poem to make their point, and therefore supported critical reflection and creativity:

> "the activity felt a bit restrictive (such a short poem), however, it was very good to encourage me to be more precise" (Belle, PGDip).

Although, some participants found the process and structure of writing the haiku hard, in the end, it helped them overcome the barriers to creativity and deeper reflection. There were a few who remained 'blocked' or overwhelmed. One participant felt, "panicked. Frustrated as I cannot find the words, I want to describe things" (Bryony, PGDip). With another stating: "I couldn't get a poem on paper" (Mary, MA), however for this participant, this did not leave

them with a sense they had gained nothing from the activity, but instead gained value from both the process and reading others' poems:

> "Even though I did not manage to write a poem the process behind it did help. It made me drill a specific area to write about…It was really lovely to read others' poems though and their reflections as I could relate to them" (Mary, MA).

Elements to aid the development of critical reflection

There were a number of different elements of the activity that appeared to support the participants in developing a deeper level of critical reflection, as seen in the data gathered. Participants fed back that the activity made them think differently, gave them a safe emotional space and the process and structure helped engage them in critical reflection on social work practice in a way that they had not done before as the following examples show:

> "[I] found writing a poem extremely useful. I found that it made me think about my situation in a different way. I wrote a few different poems" (Lucy, BA).

> "[It] got me thinking on my feet more than I would usually do. I would say it created a deeper sense of critical thinking" (Ruth, BA).

> "It helped me explore the essence of the notion (in my case collaboration) and what it means to me" (Claire, MA).

It also helped to identify emotions, "the activity challenged me to be precise and really think about my feelings" (Sara, BA). It allowed participants to express feelings in a way that was

meaningful for them: "I felt it was a great way to express subconscious feelings" (Jenny, MA) and another writing:

"it allowed me a slightly different way of expressing my apprehensions and nerves – a safe space to admit these feelings" (Carrie, PGDip).

This emphasises the strengths that using poetry can bring to supporting the emotional component of the reflective process.

This activity also generated focus through the process of writing haikus to help develop reflection. It would seem that this method, forced or encouraged participants (dependent on their perspectives), due to the limited syllable allowance, to work and rework the wording, which in turn, helped them explore their scenario more carefully and critically. One participant commented: "having to carefully choose words made me think deeper than I have usually done" (Rachel, MA) and another noted:

"because of the word restrictions, you had to really think deeply about what you would like to say. For me that helped to refine my thinking which I think had a bigger impact on what I felt" (Sara, BA).

When asked how the students critically reflect, the answers offered an array of responses, including talking to a friend, using supervision, using a reflective model, using a set of specific questions, or writing. Not one participant noted any specific creative tool. It was clear from the data, that using haikus as a tool for critical reflection supported participants to be more creative, giving them "a chance to think creatively about the experience" (Luke,

PGDip). Overall, using haikus to support critical reflection helped engage some of the participants in a different mode of thinking when engaging in such activities by asking them to reflect in ways that they would not do normally, for example:

> "I found this activity really helpful in enabling me to think and reflect in a different way than a structural model. It made me think laterally" (Lucy, BA).

> "I loved it. I found it a really clever way of dragging out things about self you may not thought about before" (Sara, BA).

Furthermore, two focus group participants shared that they had found the method so useful that they used the activity in their practice on placement to support them to reflect on challenging situations such as: attending court for shared care arrangements and to help them manage their feelings:

> "I found myself recently, and my head's just full – why don't I write a poem about it – it helps to pull the words buzzing around my head out – in a nice, ordered line". (Lucy, BA)

> "it is personal, internal and about filtering the day, focussing my internal reflection, what is actually resonating with me, how does this make sense to me – it is a brain dump, the outer ring of being able to let go is part of that" (Claire, MA).

Discussion

The research sought to answer whether using haikus could aid students to further develop their critical reflection. This study found that the use of haikus did support a significant number of students in developing their critical reflection through the enhancement of their critical thinking skills. The findings showed that the use of haikus to support critical reflection was mainly seen as a positive activity, and enabled participants to explore and reflect upon their practice experience, in a way they would not have normally done. It therefore offers an alternative tool to everyday reflection on practise.

Creating haikus supported people to engage in a different way of thinking, which could be hypothesised as a strength of this tool because it could help the person delve deeper and influence their meaning-making of that experience. It invited the participants to be creative in their approach to critical reflection, thus enhancing their depth of critical thinking, such that many of the participants engaged in a different mode of thinking. The themes in our study have been found in previous studies, for example, Threlfall (2013) found using poetry as a reflective tool was both enjoyable and frustrating, and Biley and Champney-Smith (2003), evidenced that participants found the process of creating haikus a rewarding experience.

This leads to the second research question on what, if any, are the personal barriers to engaging in this form of critical reflection? It was clear that some resistance was because of previous experiences of 'doing poetry' at school. However, there was also other barriers, frustration and discomfort were felt by participants. According to Taha et al. (2015), using creative teaching approaches can push people into the learning zone, stretching them to think in a different way than previously. Moreover, Dewey (2005) notes the process of critically reflecting can be uncomfortable in and of itself, and we need to be willing to endure this as

we have to be willing to accept things not on face value but to change our thinking on deeper and potentially disquieting level. The form assisted some to enter deep critical reflection and uncovered aspects of their own feelings or views which they had not considered before. However, for many this discomfort was not a barrier for engagement. The experience for some of our participants showed that the students started out feeling hesitant and apprehensive, and then as the activity progressed gained confidence and felt that they had been able to critically reflect more deeply.

Writing poetry can help people to explore feelings (Tsang, 2014; Baldie et al., 2016) and the activity did allow students to express their feelings about practice situations and Ingram (2013) argues that social workers are often not explicitly given the permission to explore the vital emotional components of their practice. Therefore, embedding activities such as this which do encourage students to explore that emotional component, in social work education may help to encourage the use of creative methods in practice.

The ethical implications which can be drawn from this research, is that, first and foremost the students did not feel that they had to complete the research part of the activity, therefore, the learning environment does not appear to be oppressive, and this is shown in the low take up. In regard to the lower numbers of participants, there is a risk of bias in the findings, it may be possible that the participants who engaged in the research may have had a positive or evocative experience from the activity and further motivated to engage in the research element.

Activity Strengths and Limitations

The restrictive structure of the poem helped the participants to reflect more deeply, perhaps because the process of writing a haiku and its restrictions to create its form, generates a conscious effort to explore the experience/belief. This effort comes from having to choose the correct words, within the correct number of syllables, in order to represent the meaning as authentically as possible. With very few syllables per line, it focuses and refocuses the mind, the thinking and the emotions, to build the end product: a haiku. However, one key thing that surprised us was how the process of getting the correct number of syllables detracted from the creative process. This was only eased when we provided access to an online syllable counter tool. Similar to the findings of Biley and Champney-Smith (2003), we found that students questioned their ability to write a haiku, but we did not find that they questioned the relevance to their professional practise. Like Threlfall (2013), our study found that poetry aids reflection because it was necessary to consider word order, and in addition the syllable counting meant that students had to reflect on their word choice.

Interestingly, Biley & Champney-Smith (2003), suggest that haikus are a "non-threatening form of poetry", yet from the experience of our participants this was not the case, and many found the concept of "poetry" in and of itself daunting. However, similar to the findings of Biley and Champney-Smith (2003), we observed (in the classroom) cynicism by some as to whether writing a haiku would be useful to aid reflection, and some people were reluctant to engage in poetry. Creating a safe learning environment and allowing the haikus to be posted anonymously helped many overcome some of their reticence towards using this reflective tool. A further unexpected benefit from the anonymous posting was that it helped us, as educators, to gauge where the students were emotionally, as many wrote about themselves as a student social worker, and this gave us an insight and deeper understanding of the cohort and their needs. Another benefit was that when the students read each other's haikus, they

discussed how they suddenly realised they were not alone in their feelings, and that others felt similarly to them e.g., nervous about starting placement.

Research Limitations and strengths

The strengths of this research are that the majority of the students who participated in the study were suitably proud of their achievements and agreed that their poems could be used in this paper (supplementary material 1) and that all 23 participants stated that the use of haiku, had given them deeper insights into their practice.

One limitation of the research is the low numbers of students who agreed to participate in the research, which could be due to students not wanting to use their time to complete a research questionnaire when they are balancing so many other commitments. The limited engagement with the focus groups could also be down to students' prioritisation of their time commitments or that they did not see the value in it. Another limitation of this study, in that far fewer students from the Masters' Degree (N=19) and Bachelor of Arts Degree (N=4) chose to take part. There could be a number of reasons for this, including the way that the activity was integrated into their teaching practice (as they only had one facilitator – and the Post Graduate Diploma Students had two), or the maturity level of the students. The results could also be impacted as those who chose to engage with the research were more positive about it, leading to bias. These drawbacks would need to be addressed in future research on this tool.

In terms of further research, investigation would be useful to explore the barriers to using such creative reflective tools in practice as 95% said the activity gave deeper insight, yet 30% of participants were not willing to use haiku as part of their future reflective practice.

Practice Development

In terms of improving the activity, participants felt that there should be a little more time set aside for it. Unlike other studies (Biley & Champney-Smith, 2003; Savishinsky, 2007) who offered the students the opportunity to recite their poems aloud, we instead gave them the opportunity to share anonymously via a Padlet wall which we hoped would further develop a safe learning environment and support writing and sharing their haikus, and this proved to be the case. This aligns to findings from an IFSW (2018, p. 2) project where intervision, was found to be helpful "in supporting new workers to reflect on their practice".

Another, perhaps in hindsight obvious, improvement could be for us as educators to critically reflect more on how to support students to overcome the personal barriers they face when taking part in such a creative activity. We had to critically reflect on what we had been doing which is why we made an adaptation early on with the introduction of a syllable counter. We also brought in the use of humour to help put the students at ease about the challenges of critical reflection and the challenges of writing a haiku. For example, we used the poem by the John Cooper Clarke (n.d.) about how hard it is to write haiku's:

> HAIKU
> To-con-vey one's mood
> In sev-en-teen syll-able-s
> Is ve-ry dif-fic

We also invited social work students and qualified social workers, who have used haiku to critically reflect, to talk about they hated it, love it, the challenges of using it and how they

now use it to reflect on a regular basis. Therefore, offering alternative voices surrounding this activity and in some way going toward demystifying the use of poetry.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we found that the use of poetry, specifically in the structured haiku form, did support many students deepen their critical reflection on practice. Social work teaching practice has traditionally supported students to develop their critically reflective skills through the use of structured models and reflective journals, and although these methods clearly have benefits, they do not appeal to every student. As a person-centred, strengths-based profession, we advocate the idea that in addition to teaching students more traditional question-focussed models of reflection to support their critical reflection on social work practice, using a variety of creative tools can enhance the students' reflective practice, emphasise the importance of exploring emotions and add a level of depth. It is worth further exploration of the potential barriers to bringing in creative tools for critical reflection.

Tables and Figures list

Tables

Figures

References

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