Taking Risks With Their Hearts: Risk And Emotion In Innovative Forms Of Assessment

Tania Leiman
Flinders University, tania.leiman@flinders.edu.au

Elizabeth Abery
Flinders University, elizabeth.abery@flinders.edu.au

Eileen M. Willis Dr
Flinders University Australia, eileen.willis@flinders.edu.au

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Abstract

Research involving student and tutor responses to a 'pedagogy of the heart' approach in a first year university health science topic revealed anxiety, insecurity and perceptions of unpredictability in relation to an innovative arts-based assignment designed to elicit and assess experiential or imaginal knowledge. Using the lens of contemporary theories of risk, and explicitly considering the role of emotion in assessment, this paper identifies both the effectiveness of and challenges encountered in this form of assessment. It also explores the relationships between risk and emotion, and between risk and assessment, particularly for young people in the higher education context. By comparing the risks involved with the benefits to be gained, the efficacy of adopting such a pedagogical approach is reviewed.

Keywords

pedagogy, pedagogy of the heart, imaginal, transformative, emotion, assessment, risk, young people, higher education, risks of assessment

Cover Page Footnote

Tania Leiman is a Senior Lecturer in Law and Director of First Year Studies at Flinders Law School, South Australia. Elizabeth Abery is a Lecturer in Social Health Sciences at Flinders Prevention, Promotion & Primary Health Care, School of Medicine, at Flinders University, South Australia Eileen Willis is Deputy Executive Dean, Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences, Flinders University, South Australia.

Introduction

This paper uses the relationship between assessment, risk and emotion as a lens through which to consider some of the challenges in employing transformative pedagogies in contemporary higher education. We begin by briefly examining contemporary theories of risk (Beck 1992; Giddens 1990), then drawing on Beck's work, we ask how this notion of risk affects young people, specifically in the higher-education context. We outline our pedagogy, *Education of the Heart,* with its goals of deepening students' empathy and strengthening connections with realities of future professional practice. We report on our research exploring both student and tutor responses to this pedagogical approach in a first-year health-science topic on health policy, which included a novel arts-based assessment. Our research was conducted using two focus groups, one initially with students to test their understanding of the pedagogy and the assessment exercises, then one with teaching staff to gain their insights into the difficulties that emerged from analysis of the student focus groups. Our findings using a thematic account of student and tutor responses highlighted particular issues in relation to the arts-based assessment. Students perceived arts-based assessment as unpredictable and risky, especially in a contemporary social and cultural environment where they are held responsible for forging their futures. For staff, risks included concerns about their capacity to assess creative work and concerns that students may be disclosing their own "troubles" in their arts-based portrayals of the lived experience of illness. Finally, in light of the benefits of our pedagogical approach and using the lens of risk theories discussed earlier, we consider whether taking such risks is justified.

Theorising Risk

Contemporary sociology has moved away from privileging classical forms of social disadvantage based on class, gender and race to positing "risk" as the major factor in inequality and life chances (Giddens 1990; France 2010; Mitchell, Crawshaw, Bunton & Green 2010). This is best outlined in Ulrich Beck's *Risk Society* (1992). Central to Beck's argument is the idea that as society moves to increase its wealth through industrialisation, science and technology, it also generates new and increased risks. These new risks arise not from nature, but instead are human-generated and increasingly individualised.

In outlining the impact of a culture of risk on the self, Beck suggests that the risks of modernisation emerging as a result of science and technology affect both the social and the individual through a process of *individualisation* or *institutionalised individualism* (Beck 1992). This can be clearly seen in the area of gender relations and feminism, where, for example, contemporary public policy in most western capitalist economies has produced the need for women to engage more fully in the labour market while simultaneously attending to family. This dilemma has produced a set of political struggles within the public arena of the state and in the private individualised domain of the family around childcare and the division of labour over housework; these struggles challenge the once-clear binary differences in gender roles. The solutions to these dilemmas have generated new risks: increased rates of divorce; difficulties in achieving a work-life balance; the need for women to have a well-paid occupation; and the feminisation of old-age poverty. The generation of these new social problems has created new risks for individuals to navigate across their life course (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995).

Beck's (1992) notion of individualism is not about unrivalled personal freedom. He acknowledges that we are free from past social and cultural norms (such as those governing gender expectations),

as these do not fit the requirements of hyper-capitalist economies. However, he is clear that new social expectations have replaced past norms. Beck argues that we are now more deeply caught up in the economy, the welfare state and the labour market because our fate within these social institutions is our own responsibility. For example, failure in the labour market is now seen as a risk to be borne and managed by each individual, not the result of lack of market regulation or a depressed economy. In his terms, we have a precarious freedom: free to make our own way as individuals in a world unrestricted by community pressures linked to class or gender norms, whilst simultaneously made more dependent on the market and the economy (Beck 1992; Beck-Gernsheim & Beck 1995). For Beck, these changes lead to cultural transformations of society and to transformations of the self, characterised by an acute sense of our own responsibility to forge our own destiny (Beck-Gernsheim & Beck 1995). Giddens makes a similar point when he suggests we experience an ontological insecurity in the face of contemporary forms of risk (Giddens 1999).

Risk, Responsibility and Young People

Theorising risk in this way gives rise to two issues in relation to young people and their responses to and responsibility for managing risk. The first is Beck's (1992) persuasive argument that most individuals now feel more fully culpable in managing their own biography. Indeed, France (2009) and Spencer (2013) suggest that navigating the risks of modernity is the new transitional ritual for young people, replacing the once-shared rituals of pre- and early industrial society. Navigating this course includes very personal practices such as managing diet and exercise. It also extends to obtaining the necessary qualifications and experience, and achieving a career in the labour market. Regulating and governing approaches to all of these issues is part of learning to manage risk for young people as they engage in the rituals of becoming an adult. Responsibility requires constant self-monitoring. Students at university have already begun this path; they have acquired the necessary academic grades to gain a place at university, and are balancing study, work and social and family responsibilities as they forge their identity. To jeopardise any of this is regarded as risky and irresponsible, potentially exposing the young person to criticism and negative judgement from themselves and others. Whilst we acknowledge that mature-aged students with the same goals and aspirations share these same risk factors, we take as our primary focus in this article young people in their late teens to early 20s who comprise the largest cohort of university students.

The second issue that arises from Beck's (1992) and Giddens's (1990) claims is that our knowledge of the fallibility of science, or *reflexive scientisation*, is now compromised. A key characteristic of the "risk society" is a deeply held scepticism towards science and the claims of experts. In the university sector, we can no longer assume young people trust teaching staff in the way previous generations may have done, and as so eloquently described by Parson (1952). Indeed, the very stuff of academic knowledge in the health and policy arena, with its strong focus on continuous evidence-based practice, points explicitly to the fallibility of knowledge. Continuous research for evidence-based knowledge would be unnecessary if what is known now is ultimate truth or fact. Academic critique and the fallibility of all knowledge risks feeding student scepticism.

Given the above account of modernity, it is not unreasonable to assume that young people have a heightened sense of risk and uncertainty, and that this uncertainty is psychologically stressful as they negotiate their way through a future that "imposes the threat of self-annihilation on their lives" (Austin 2009, p.453). One important unresolved debate is to what extent young people are active and autonomous, or passive and dependent in the face of this "risk society". Austin challenges the idea that young people have a heightened sense of risk or are crippled by strong

feelings of ontological insecurity. Cebulla (2009, p.39), however, provides a more compelling argument, suggesting that young people are expected to be "deliberative decision-takers who opt, decide and revise their actions repeatedly in the light of newly emerging evidence". He argues that this arises, first, from their need to transition from school to university, adolescence to adulthood and student to career, and, second, from the very risks built into modernity. These include the transitions from industrial to post-industrial society that include the new social risks emerging in the labour market: flexible working hours, the rise in female labour participation, reduced unionisation, increased casualisation and the advancing role of technology. While these developments produce new opportunities, young people are now regarded as personally more responsible for achieving their own positive outcomes. As Cebulla (2009, p.52) writes, "[S]ocio-economic uncertainties undermine young people's ability to construct and predict their lives purposefully, intentionally and, most importantly, reliably." Forging a career through university is one socially acceptable way of dealing with and managing this risk. Seeking to study high-status degrees or obtaining a place in highly competitive courses, thus enabling access to more-desirable future employment outcomes, may be perceived as further minimising these long-term risks.

Risk, Assessment, Cognition and Emotion

Students must learn to manage a variety of risks within the university environment, with assessment of their learning perhaps being one of the most threatening, anxiety-provoking and precarious, given that passage through the system requires successful accomplishment of these assessment exercises. Given the issues identified above, students seek wherever possible to manage and minimise risks in assessment – an exercise requiring both cognition and emotion. As our pedagogy, *Education of the Heart*, explicitly seeks to integrate emotion and cognition, two points are particularly salient here: first, managing any risk is never a purely a cognitive affair; and second, assessment is nearly always an emotional affair.

Whilst risk may be managed through the logic of rational argument, working on the available evidence and past experience, students also receive considerable "guidance from affect", both their own and, inevitably, others'. As Hillson and Murray-Webster (2005, p.4) note, drawing on the work of Slovic (2000), "[h]owever much people may like to believe that in work situations they behave logically, analysing problems and making decisions in a rational way, the reality is that emotions are always present, influencing behaviour and actions" – whether it be a life decision or the management of an assignment exercise. Although there is "no broad consensus" as to the meaning of the term "risk" in psychological and neuroscience literature (Hillson & Murray-Webster 2006), there is an increasing recognition of the role of affect (or emotion) in the way individuals manage risk and a realisation that fear, anxiety and danger arising from past experience with individuals or institutions, or the anticipation of future misfortune, affects our decision-making (Taylor-Gooby & Zinn 2006). Hillson and Murray-Webster (2006, p.2) define risk as "uncertainty that matters, since uncertainty without consequence poses no risk".

As Wilson has noted, "[w]hether we like it or not assessment defines the curriculum for students" (2009, p.11). It is recognised that "[e]motional responses are part of everyone's experiences of being assessed" (Falchikov & Boud 2007, p.144). Given this, plus the realities of stress associated with being judged on the quality of one's work, Ramsden (2003, p.204) suggests that teachers and tutors should "[d]o everything…to lessen the anxiety raised by assessments" and "[b]e suspicious of the objectivity and accuracy of all measures of student ability and conscious that human judgement is the most important element in every indicator of achievement". Ramsden also notes that when designing the assessment process, assessors should specifically consider anxiety that the

assessment might cause students. These are valuable guidelines for assessment tasks commonly encountered, such as those that require critical and intellectual functioning. For these reasons, most university health and counselling websites include information for students on how to manage study, particularly exam stress.

Our *Education of the Heart* approach, however, seeks to develop and then assess students' ability to convey their emotional understanding of the lived experience of another. This adds a level of risk beyond that of the usual uncertainty and emotion implicit in all assessment. A key question for us to determine is: should we take into account the risks inherent in an *Education of the Heart* approach?

Education of the Heart

Theorising the pedagogy

Education of the Heart takes as its fundamental pedagogical premise that education includes the heart as well as critical and cognitive faculties. The knowledge presented should speak to the soul as well as the intellect (Heron & Reason 2008; MacDonald 1981; Willis 2002). Jack Mezirow (2000) referred to this form of education as "transformative", but other theorists have given it alternative names: imaginal, mythopoetic and experiential knowing (Bradbeer 1998). Learning is made meaningful when it engages the individual at every level of their being. This assumes that knowledge has four facets: factual, critical, practical and experiential (Heron & Reason 1996/7, p.3). Experiential knowledge requires the student to engage emotionally in the learning; to understand the experience from the stance of the other, be it the patient, pupil or client; and to be open to the potential for transformation. The first three facets are usually well catered for in tertiary education, but rarely is experiential knowledge *(reference to be inserted post review)*.

It is important here to make two points about the links between emotion, risk and cognition. First, *Education of the Heart* is not a pedagogy specifically designed to foster emotional intelligence, to shape emotional labour or to ensure emotional engagement. Rather, the pedagogy seeks to engage the whole person, arguing that emotional responses provide some insight into this wholeness, and a mirror into how the person has dealt with the material at a deep level. Second, human intelligence involves both cognition and emotion for the generation of knowledge. As Dai and Sternberg (2002, p.xii) note, "emotions alter, channel, or otherwise direct cognition in significant ways, leading to an understanding of knowledge that is developmental and socially and culturally embedded".

This means that *Education of the Heart* (or any similar pedagogy or knowledge that speaks to the soul) must also be grounded in the students' socio-political and cultural milieu, in the evidence-based knowledge of their chosen profession, and in the ethics of discipline practice. Its starting point is the foundational myths or beliefs that have formed that culture and provide meaning: traditional, religious, secular and humanistic. Rather than seeking to reiterate these myths, the pedagogy instead presumes that they motivate students in their choice of profession, and then seeks to bridge the positivist, the critical and the practical with the imaginal, using art, drama, story, film and other creative activities as a method of instruction and assessment. Arts-based approaches allow this imaginal knowledge to be organised so that the ontological questions are raised for consideration. Our pedagogy seeks to direct the student to integrate the evidence with the critical and practical, but also to enter into the lived experience of the client or colleague so that they understand how these forms of knowledge shape human selves.

The pedagogy in practice

Health Practitioner Practice 2 is a core first-year health-science topic hosting a diverse student cohort enrolled in degree programs including nursing, medical science, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, paramedic science, the teaching of health and physical education, health management, disability, health promotion, life sciences, environmental health and nutrition. In 2011/2012, when the current research was carried out, over 400 students were enrolled; this has increased annually to approximately 600 students in 2014. Degree programs such as paramedic science, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and nutrition are popular choices with limited places, and an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank [ATAR] entrance score greater than 90 (out of 100) is required. Over one-third of students enrolled in the topic have not been accepted into their degree of choice and are following alternative pathways in an attempt to be accepted into their course of preference. These pathways require the attainment of a high grade-point average (GPA) equating to a minimum distinction average across first-year topics undertaken, including Health Practitioner Practice 2.

The topic takes a "sociology of health policy" approach with a strong focus on the population groups potentially encountered in the students' future professional practice. Population groups explored include those at risk of institutionalisation or victims of failures in de-institutionalisation (the frail elderly, those with mental illness or disability and Indigenous Australians); those affected by major contemporary public-health issues (obesity, nutrition and physical exercise, alcohol and other drugs and sexual health) and those who risk falling victim to the medicalisation of deviance or everyday life. Student exposure to these groups and understanding of the consequences of being part of these groups may be limited, and in many cases based on their own personal experiences or the social construction of their world.

The pedagogical underpinning of the topic offers a balance between exploring the structured principles of evidence-based practice and the impact of health policy, and encouraging an *Education of the Heart (reference to be inserted post review)* or evocative knowledge to elicit an understanding of the lived experience of the population groups. The topic format includes lectures, designated readings and workshops with class sizes of approximately 25 students of mixed degree-program cohorts, where popular films are used as the impetus for exploring the "lived experience" of various population-health groups. Traditional quizzes based on lecture and reading content and the writing of a systematic literature review to support evidence-based practice are included to support evidence-based knowledge, but the arts-based assignment and tutorial format support the pedagogy of the heart.

The topic follows the classic lecture-tutorial format, but the tutorials are organised as workshops of two hours. This allows us to use films, drama and other art forms to convey to students in dramatic form the "lived experience" of population groups. Management of the tutorial discussions is crucial to the pedagogical approach. The tutors' role is in facilitating this discussion so that it moves slowly from the reflective "what does this illness feel like?" to "what is the policy?", "what is the evidence?" and, finally, "what is my scope of practice?". This requires an integrated approach to classroom processes, and initial and continuing training in the pedagogy for teaching staff.

The arts-based assignment is a novel approach to academic assessment, and its evaluation is the focus of this paper. The assessment seeks to elicit imaginal knowledge by asking students to produce an artistic piece that visually portrays the lived experience (physical or emotional) of one

of the population groups covered or those who care for them (professionally or personally). This piece is supported by a 750-word written reflection to provide theoretical support to the artwork, with explicit links to policy and sociological theory. Suggested artistic media include paintings, poems, posters and audio/visual productions. Production of the artistic piece requires students to elicit an emotional or evocative response to the theoretical concepts presented throughout the topic. The written reflection allows the tutor to assess application of discipline knowledge, independently of talent as an artist in the conventional sense. While care in presentation of the artwork is expected, skill as an artist is not a pre-requisite. High grades are possible where little artistic talent is demonstrated. The assignment criteria stresses that the purpose of the artwork is not to display artistic ability but to clearly convey and evoke the emotions and lived experience of the chosen population group with the written reflection, and the students are provided the opportunity to articulate the intention of their artwork whilst making clear links to sociological themes and theories drawn from the lecture and reading content of the topic. While many of these students clearly engage emotionally with the material being covered in the topic, their portrayal of this imaginal or experiential "knowing of the heart" through an assessment piece must then be interpreted by another (their tutor) for the purpose of assigning a grade. It has become apparent during the course of our research that this is a risky process indeed – for both students and assessors. This assessment piece is weighted at 30% of the topic grade, so for students, in particular those needing or wanting to maintain a high GPA, the stakes are high.

Evaluating the Pedagogy: Research Methodology

Research with students

In 2011, following the conclusion of the semester, submission of final grades and the granting of ethics approval from the institution, students who had been elected as class representatives in each of the 19 classes (17 internal, and two external) were invited to participate in a focus group facilitated by *Author X,* who works in another school, and who is familiar with the pedagogy but does not teach in the topic. We employed the focus-group method, rather than individual interviews, as students had already done the usual individualised topic evaluation. We wanted to know what issues students would raise, and how other students in the group would respond to these issues. Focus-group discussion allows group members to express their views, values and opinions and for other members of the group to affirm or elaborate on them. Focus-group discussions also allow unexpected issues to emerge, and for the researcher to get a quick picture of how widespread these views might be (Patton 2002).

Prior to the focus group, participants were sent an email asking them to read an article written by *Z* (2010). This paper outlined the pedagogical intention behind *Education of the Heart* and the related assessment. Twelve students attended this 90-minute focus-group session conducted by *X*. The discussion was audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim. Students were asked to reflect on the particular pedagogical approach used in the topic, and specifically on:

1. the value of films as a mechanism for conveying the lived experience of the patient or population group under discussion;
2. the use of arts-based forms of assessment as a mechanism for illuminating education of the heart; and
3. how the knowledge gained from the film and arts-based activities resonated with theoretical information presented in readings and lectures to inform or change existing perceptions of future professional practice.

When analysing the focus-group transcript, we were surprised by an apparent contradiction: students agreed that the pedagogy successfully conveyed the lived experience of patients and valued this, particularly the use of film as a teaching tool, but they were highly ambivalent about the arts-based assessment. While on the one hand they enjoyed the assessment exercise because it was novel and challenging and allowed them to express their ideas creatively, they also indicated they were highly anxious about it, because they felt they were less able to predict their likely grade compared with grades for other, more traditional forms of assessment. Although other important information on the relationship between the arts-based activities and the theoretical information emerged in this focus group, the major preoccupation for these students was assessment anxiety, attributed to the uncertainty of predicting expectations and results. As a consequence of the outcomes of this focus group, we moved to interview the teaching staff on their perceptions of the pedagogy, and particularly the arts-based assessment exercise.

This second focus group was conducted in 2012 with 10 tutors who had taught in the topic in 2011. *Authors Z and Y* were involved in coordinating and teaching the topic at the time of research, but did not participate in the focus groups to eliminate any conflict of interest and to allow participants to feel comfortable participating with anonymity. Existing institutional ethics approval was extended to include tutors. All tutors agreed to participate, with *author X* again facilitating the focus group discussion lasting approximately 120 minutes. The discussion was audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim. Tutors were asked to reflect on the particular pedagogical approach used in the topic. Similar semi-structured questions to those used for student participants were used; however, stronger focus was placed on tutorial management and assessment criteria. A thematic analysis of student and tutor focus group transcripts was initially conducted by *author Y. Authors Z and X* then reviewed and verified the identified themes (Patton 2002). Analysis of the data suggested that both students and tutors enjoyed the approach. Key positive outcomes for students included gaining a greater understanding of the "lived experience" of population groups; development of new knowledge, awareness, understanding and compassion; and a clearer perception of future professional practice. Tutors viewed the pedagogy as a means of engaging students in an evocative portrayal of the lived experiences of various health population groups, and a means to incorporate theory and policy, with practical implications. However, despite such positive responses, staff also reflected a sense of insecurity about assessment using the arts-based assignment, arising largely from perceptions of unpredictability. Responses from tutors acting as assessors mirrored those from students being assessed. This led us to examine the findings of our research though a lens of risk, emotion and uncertainty in assessment.

Positive Implications of the Pedagogy

The *Education of the Heart* pedagogy exposes first-year students to some aspects of the lived experience at the same time as they are reading the clinical evidence and the policy imperatives that are intended to shape institutional and societal responses to people who are ill. Students have an opportunity to deepen their existing caring values and beliefs, gain an insight into the ideas behind their beliefs and begin to understand what is appropriate and possible in the real world of future professional practice. Our research has shown that the use of arts-based assessment allows students to experience what Mezirow (1978) termed perspective transformation *(insert reference when accepted)*. It allows students to think beyond the theory of their practice to its reality:

> *It brings you into the – you know this is real life and these are real people –*
> *[I] know I'm not just doing academic writing for academics – I go out in the*

> *world and look after sick people who don't care about [whether] we're*
> *using the right word in the right place and your syntax and what have you,*
> *and I think it kind of bridges that gap between you as a student, the people*
> *you're going to be working with and the process of getting to that place*
> (Student focus group participant 2011).

Drawing on their own emotional responses, students were able to immerse themselves in potential situations, recognising the impact those situations had not only on individual population groups (such as those who are disabled, aged, Indigenous or suffering from mental illness) and how they dealt with their illness or situation, but also how "it affects every part of their life" (Student focus group participant 2011*)* and all those around them: families, friends and health-care professionals. Some students, previously unaware of the overall impact and consequences of living with illness or adverse circumstances, reflected: "Oh my God, this is what people are living through – it's awful" (Student focus group participant 2011). Using arts-based assessment offered them an opportunity to display this new knowledge in a novel medium:

> *…I really liked that it wasn't an essay because with the essays I have to*
> *reference every blinking sentence. This one, it actually gave me a licence to*
> *portray how I was feeling and get my message across. So, yeah, I really*
> *liked it* (Student focus group participant 2011).

As a result of the insight gained into the lived experience, students identified existing knowledge, personal beliefs and values and pre-conceptions that had been changed or questioned, leading to new knowledge, understanding and compassion. Glimpsing some of the challenges and frustrations experienced by others, they felt less judgemental:

> *There tends to be a feeling of "Yes, it's difficult, but why don't they make the*
> *best of it and get on with it?" And then you look at all the stumbling*
> *blocks…it's not surprising that there's a level of despondency* (Student focus
> group participant 2011).

Many students acknowledged the differences between their own circumstances and the population group they chose to portray in the artistic piece: "You sort of understand that it's difficult for these people; you begin to learn how every single little thing we take for granted…is really difficult" (Student focus group participant 2011).

Seeing theoretical concepts being worked out in practice allowed students to gain a greater understanding of the patient's perspective:

> *It's one thing to know in a lecture that there's a disparity between different*
> *groups but…looking at it with a different perspective…because you're trying*
> *to put yourself in that situation and…you can look up a policy but you can't*
> *dial up a feeling* (Student focus group participant 2011).

By coming to "see" the social, cultural and political barriers that some population groups experience, students could move beyond empathy, and recognise additional impediments to health access and implementation erected by social determinants of health, such as inequalities in gender, class or ethnicity. These outcomes suggest that *Education of the Heart* was successful in achieving its goals of deepening students' empathy, and strengthening their connections with future professional practice.

Responding to Risks Identified by Students

Whilst students understood and engaged with the intent of the topic, and enjoyed the arts-based assessment, many were not comfortable with the pedagogical approach. Arts-based forms were assumed to favour those with creative talent, and despite being less enjoyable, essays or exams were perceived as more predictable, and were therefore often preferred. The four themes that emerged highlight the risks students saw in the pedagogical approach.

Emotionally risky

Students overwhelmingly enjoyed the pedagogical approach and the arts-based assessment task, and felt that it gave them a unique insight, but identified the emotional challenges it involved as risky. Although the focus group identified that for many, this form of assessment was an exciting change from formal essay-writing, for some, being required to submit an artistic piece exploring emotions and evocative knowledge brought fear and uncertainty: "challenging; it was out of my comfort zone and it felt like I had to work for it" (Student focus group participant 2011).

Others did not enjoy the process at all:

> *I found it really difficult…I'm not creative; I would be doing arts if I was – I'm just – I'm not creative at all, so, yeah, "make a poster" – oh, great* (Student focus group participant 2011).

Requiring students to submit a written reflection outlining explicit links to policy and sociological theory was seen as balancing out some of the challenges:

> *Although I didn't really like the creative part of it and I found it difficult to kind of make something, I did like how you could explain it afterwards because that's how I feel like I could bring my own opinion out* (Student focus group participant 2011).

What educational benefit justifies taking these emotional risks? Meaning-making and meaning-full learning requires effective engagement. These are emotions that matter. Education without emotional engagement or education of the heart is counter to most pedagogical approaches. If the aim of this pedagogical approach is to bring ontological questions to the fore, thus giving opportunity for the birth of new knowledge, understanding and compassion (and it is!), then students must face the challenge of wrestling with their own, sometimes unexpected, emotional responses. Encouraging students to use artistic pieces to portray perceptions of the lived experience of others allows them to be shaped by these imaginal forms of knowledge in ways that formal written communication tasks may not do, and provides a unique insight and window to the soul in ways that more traditional forms of assessment may not do.

Unfamiliar and risky

Students also found the practicalities of the assessment exercise challenging. They felt a lack of clarity about what they were expected to do to successfully complete the arts-based assessment, and so found it an unfamiliar and risky task. Assignment instructions directed students to choose

from a range of artistic approaches to explore and display the themes and experiences that had been covered in designated weeks of the topic. Nevertheless, some students wanted more clarity from assessors about what was expected:

> *I think from what I understand it was…because there's a marking sheet and a list of things you have to include in every assignment, you just go through [saying] "Right, I've done that, I've done that, done that" – but because this was "you should be creative and we're not going to tell you how to be creative", we had to be creative because you had to come up with all of that for yourself. But I think – and I did struggle* (Student focus group participant 2011).

Others questioned the value of this approach:

> *I was just a complete loss about what I was really supposed to do…I'm not sure I did feel that there was a benefit…. I think maybe I would have [done] just as well, if not better, to have written an essay* (Student focus group participant 2011).

This risk is much harder to justify, particularly in light of Ramsden's rules for assessment design (2003, p. 204). By identifying such structural risks, our research has been the impetus for changes to the assessment process, addressed through the provision of better guidelines, clearer marking rubrics available in advance, use of past examples of student work in class and purchasing excellent past submissions from previous students for permanent display in the teaching space. Whilst these are considerable improvements, such structural changes cannot address deeper emotional risks.

Unpredictable and risky

Students felt they could not predict the grade they were likely to receive for the arts-based assignment, and so regarded assessment outcomes as risky and unpredictable. The importance of, and anxieties connected with, achieving high results resonated in focus-group responses. Formal academic input and outcomes such as essay-writing and exams were perceived as having more value and acceptance than the evocative arts-based production assignment because these standard forms of assessment provide more structure and it is easier to understand expectations: "you can't fake it with an essay" (Student focus group participant 2011) and greater knowledge was assumed to be gained from essay-writing. Students indicated they saw formal written assessment as a more accepted format:

> *Like, you don't really know but it's, like, you can research for an essay, you can put the work in and you know whether you've done well or not, whereas something like this has really – you've got no clue* (Student focus group participant 2011).

Many students enrolled in this topic are high achievers or seek to achieve a high GPA in order to transfer into other degrees of their choice:

> *I have to get a GPA of five and higher so I have to maintain that. And I really love[d] the assignment, and as soon as I looked at the weightage that the assignment had, I started panicking* (Student focus group participant 2011).

An ongoing challenge here is to allow students the opportunity to deepen their orientation to care through *Education of the Heart* whilst also ensuring that they feel confident that this medium of assessment will still support result-driven academic expectations and demands. As a result of our research findings, students now undertake an in-class exercise in which they are first provided with examples of work submitted in previous years, and then the assessment rubric used by assessors, which they use in small groups to assess the artistic work by reference to the criteria. After class discussion, students are then provided with the written reflection that originally accompanied the piece, and use the rubric again to explore how and why their feedback may have changed.

Risks of being misunderstood

Students felt vulnerable and at risk of having the emotions they portrayed in the arts-based assignment judged, misunderstood or misinterpreted by assessors. While students enjoyed the opportunity of being able to express their own emotions through the evocative arts-based assignment, they worried that the assessor would not interpret their work as they intended and that they would not achieve a high grade:

> *...seemed perhaps unfair that it didn't perhaps come out the way I meant it to, but all the right, ideas were there, and I felt like I made my point but the person marking it didn't quite get that. And if it's words – they're words and they're there* (Student focus group participant 2011).

Concerns were raised that the assessor would not share or understand the message students were attempting to portray:

> *...it's hard, though – if you're trying to get a point across to the person...that's hard because it doesn't mean putting any less effort in, and it doesn't mean that you don't get it* (Student focus group participant 2011).

Inclusion of the written reflection supporting the artwork alleviated some of this apprehension, but the issue remained a problematic one of conflicting agendas:

> *The artwork is supposed to show that we felt it, but the written statement is really the part of it that's being marked maybe or not – I don't know. I feel like I was to worry about the artwork, and I think maybe that's what a lot of other people were feeling as well, when it's not really about that* (Student focus group participant 2011).

What benefits in the design of the assessment task justify us placing students at risk in this way? Emotional responses to assessment are not unexpected, and reactions will vary (Falchikov & Boud 2007). The nature of this assessment task may throw the student's sense of self as a learner (Harlen & Deakin-Crick, cited in Broadfoot 2007) into sharp relief. This is indeed risky. In our own defence, however, we would argue that if it is to be meaningful, learning should engage the student at every level of their being. Hence the risk may be inevitable. Certainly, education for transformation is highly risky.

Implications for Future Practice: Responding to Risks Identified by Staff

As with the students, the tutors embraced and enjoyed their involvement with this pedagogical approach, many acknowledging this pedagogy as "a pleasant change from traditional forms of teaching" (Tutor focus group participant 2012) in other topics or disciplines. However, they experienced anxiety in their role as assessors, and were very aware of student anxiety regarding grades. The following emerged as risks identified by staff in adopting the pedagogical approach.

Risks as assessors

Assessors felt that they were at risk of being seduced by artwork of exceptionally high quality even though the written reflection accompanying it demonstrating links to policy and sociological theory may have been of much lower quality. Several commented on this difficulty:

> *The challenge was to ensure that there was an explicit link of the artwork to the criteria – that I wasn't swayed by the images – that the student was focused on the lived experience criteria* (Tutor focus group participant 2012).

A marking process in which interpretation could be influenced by individual values and experiences was seen by assessors as potentially inequitable. Conscious of disparate levels of artistic ability amongst students and differing individual artistic preferences amongst assessors, tutors identified these variations as creating this risk, especially as students were not enrolled in a creative-arts course, nor were staff art practitioners. The range and standard of artwork caused complexities: tutors felt they had "difficulty in being able to gain uniformity across all the students in terms of assessment" (Tutor focus group participant 2012). Where pieces appeared to display low levels of artistic skill, assessors relied heavily on the supporting written reflection to guide them in identifying key points students were trying to make. Tutors valued the input of their colleagues and the use of structured marking guides when grading. These responses confirmed for us and the whole teaching team the necessity for including the supporting written theoretical statement, as it was regarded as crucial in assisting both validity and uniformity of marking. Many tutors suggested that it was imperative that the creative work and the written reflection be considered collectively rather than individually to determine if assignment objectives were being met.

What emerged as clearly important was the importance of an ongoing responsibility to ensure tutors gain a solid understanding of the pedagogical approach, and receive clear training and guidance to ensure consistency across the marking and grading process:

> *…fairly ambiguous with the assignments… I found that, really, "What do you really want here?"…I think if there's a little bit more of a reason behind the teaching methods explained – just brief – it kind of gives you an idea of what you can get out of it* (Student focus group participant 2011).

Student responses highlight the importance of having an assessment that is not only valuable to the student's learning experience and educational transformation, but also easily interpreted by the student to enable achieving the mark to which they aspire. It cannot, however, be discounted that if the person providing guidance and marking the assessment does not have a clear understanding of the pedagogy, transformation may not occur and students' aspirations may not be met. An environment of increasing student numbers, with more sessional staff involved as tutors and fewer

professional places available for graduates, is likely to pose significant challenges for the future sustainability of the pedagogical approach. Without clear understanding and commitment to the pedagogy, or sufficient staff training and support, future changes in key staff and significant tutor turnover have the potential to compromise the imaginal essence of the pedagogy and the powerful impact of the arts-based assessment, in turn increasing the risks to students. As a result of the outcomes of this research, all tutors are provided with an information session specifically relating to the *Education of the Heart* pedagogical approach and theory before the start of the semester; moreover, along with a moderating session after the submission of the assignment, a tutor-training session is offered prior to assignment submission to ensure that tutors are familiar with the assignment criteria and expectations.

Risks of disclosure

Students choose which of several themes or experiences covered in the topic will form the basis for their arts-based assessment. Students are instructed to portray the lived experience (physical or emotional) of one of the population groups covered or those who care for them (professionally or personally), and are specifically cautioned against self-disclosure. Nevertheless, assessors were concerned that the arts-based assessment carried the risk that, rather than using it to explore the lived experience of the population groups being studied, some students were in fact making disclosures about their own conditions such as depression, suicidal ideations or anorexia. As students often explored sensitive issues, particularly in the area of mental health, tutors both in class and when acting as assessors were challenged by the need to determine whether a student was portraying an image of the issue as experienced by patients or clients or whether there was an element of self-disclosure, in which case their duty of care was questioned:

> *…where she was talking about suicide…then what is my responsibility to that student? Or is it them taking on board this issue and "this is how I'm going to portray it", so that was my difficulty: is the student trying to tell me something that I'm missing or are they just picking mental health…?* (Tutor focus group participant 2012).

Another tutor noted the difficulty in assessing a piece of work that was not of a high standard but where the student was disclosing personal mental-health issues and feared that a negative grade may further affect the student's well-being:

> *He wrote this poem about his depression and about how he'd lost his job and how he was failing at uni and how everything was slipping away and he was basically losing everything, and then he'd actually done a really crap job with it and I had to give him a really bad mark.... "I'm having to give you a really bad mark this is going to make you feel even worse"* (Tutor focus group participant 2012).

In light of the above, assessors were concerned about the appropriate response to make to students they suspected of making such disclosures, and the risks that choosing either to respond or not to respond entailed. In view of the instructions given and the freedom of choice the students have in completing the assessment task, the extent of student vulnerability and the boundaries of responsibility are potentially ambiguous concepts here, as the level of autonomy involved suggests that students making self-disclosures are choosing to do so despite the assessment instructions rather than because of them. Nevertheless, these disclosures raise very significant legal issues in relation to duties of care potentially owed by institution and teaching staff to the students. Whilst

it is very important to acknowledge and seek to minimise these by providing explicit support to staff and students where necessary, any consideration of these issues in more depth is beyond the scope of this paper. Although not yet explored in this topic, one pedagogical response to this could be to incorporate Jung's concept of the "wounded healer" (Nouwen, 1979), well known in professional practice. This may be fertile ground for further research.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have outlined the risks of using a pedagogy that focuses on assessment and classroom approaches that engage the heart. We have identified that our *Education of the Heart* approach carries particular and increased risks for contemporary young students, given the repositioning of "risk" as a major organising factor of modernity, with individuals now more accountable for their own life histories. Responsibility for navigating transitions from adolescence to adulthood, and from school to the labour market, is increasingly now seen as situated with the individual, rather than as related to class position, gender or the realities of the economy. For these reasons, students and their teachers seek predictability in learning outcomes. Education that seeks to transform or deepen an individual's awareness is viewed as carrying the risk of disrupting a student's life plan simply because the content or outcome of that learning journey may not be predictable. Arts-based forms of assessment are indeed risky, not simply because students feel they are less familiar than a standard essay or literature review and they are therefore uncertain of exactly how to get them "right", but also because tutors themselves may lack the skills or training to grasp the pedagogy.

Despite the various risks we have identified as associated our *Education of the Heart* (or any similar pedagogy or knowledge that speaks to the soul), it is important to remember that all assessment is risky to some degree, and most forms of assessment create some emotional tensions in the candidate. Much of this is functional, helping to ensure that students plan for the task. However, the difference in students' perception of unpredictability of outcomes for an exam, as compared with that involved in creating an artwork that portrays the lived experience of a person with a disability or illness, is significant. Exams are perceived to have right answers, whereas artworks must evoke. This risk emerges at the point when the tutor assigns the mark. If the artistic work does not evoke emotions in the heart of the tutor, the student may not achieve the desired mark. This lack of predictability can be compensated for by requiring students to also submit written commentaries that describe what they have created, and explain the relationship of this creative piece to sociological and health-policy theory. The process of this assessment depends on the tutor understanding the pedagogy and not being seduced by the artistic forms. There is a contradiction here. If a student produces a piece of art so well executed that it evokes the suffering or caring of a particular population group, surely it should be assessed as successful? At the risk of being unfair, it is nonetheless necessary to look beyond artistic talent to also take into account the student's written explanation.

The day-to-day teaching of this topic focuses on the lived experience of clients, patients and vulnerable populations, not the student as a novice professional. However, one of the risks emerging is that the arts-based assessment provides opportunity for self-expression in which students portray their own suffering. This is understandable, given that health professionals themselves are not immune from illness, and that early adulthood is a time of significant and painful transitions. However, one of the key objectives of the topic is to instil in students a sense of empathy and understanding for clients. Crucial in this is a capacity to separate their own difficulties from that of their patients. Successful use of our pedagogy, *Education of the Heart*,

requires more work in educating tutors and students to integrate evidence-based knowledge into imaginal knowledge in a way that deepens their compassion, but ensures their professionalism.

As we have noted above, the major dilemma for tutors was the rawness conveyed in some students' artwork of their lived experiences of navigating the transformation from adolescent to adulthood, in a highly competitive environment and culture of personal responsibility. In such cases, teaching staff may be confronted with the necessity to assign a low grade, yet at the same time the work submitted heightens their awareness of the student's anxieties and ambitions concerning their future professional career. The contradictions here are innumerable. The relationship between tutors and students is meant to facilitate deep learning, or even transformative learning, yet it must also be professional, allowing the tutor to make judgements on learning without their emotions affecting outcomes. It is also possible that the tutor may need to refer a student to professional counselling, along with assigning a low grade. Where they are concerned about a student's mental health they must take action, yet also maintain a strong ethic of confidentiality. This is hard work, made particularly difficult by the prevailing culture of risk that challenges the opinions of "experts".

Despite these difficulties, we believe the *Education of the Heart* pedagogy remains a sound approach to transformative learning. Our pedagogy allows students to engage with the material at an emotional as well as critical and intellectual level in what we believe is a more grounded approach to professional transformation. What is required are an integrated approach to the classroom processes and continuing education for teaching staff. Moving from the reflective understanding of the lived experience to incorporating evidence-based clinical and policy to critique that includes understanding one's scope of practice requires careful management. Thinking more deeply about this is an area for future development.

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