

# USING POETRY TO DEVELOP WRITING CONFIDENCE AND REFLECTIVE SKILLS IN NURSING EDUCATION

DR CAMILLE CRONIN & CAROLINE HAWTHORNE

## Background

Pressure to conform to academic conventions on entering HEIs can be daunting and some students face considerable challenges engaging with the literary process. Some students may experience a degree of anxiety when beginning to write and some are fearful of the actual process of writing.

The focus was on non-traditional students: mature students; may have left education early to start families or support a relative through illness; and had negative educational experiences. Often they manage competing interests: work and family; and students experience anxiety when required to bridge gaps in their academic literacy in a 'highly-accelerated way' (Whiteside and Wrigley, 2013, p.107). They may also be the first in their family to go to University, coping with the financial burden of study, as well as the transition into a culture of HE.

## Aim & Objectives

To explore how classroom-based poetry writing activities might support students in developing their skills as student-writers and reflective practitioners in the School of Health and Social Care.

- To use poetry as a writing strategy
- To explore the possible benefits of such an intervention for both language and subject development.

## Method

Research design: A qualitative approach was employed to explore emergent themes in students' poems and students' reactions to creative writing teaching strategies.

Setting: A university based in the South East of England.

Participants: A cohort of 25 students undertaking a Health Science Foundation Degree.

Methods: Data collected from student poems were analysed thematically using the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006).

## Interventions

A collaborative approach to embedding academic literacy was used to support a cohort of Health Care Support Workers (HCSWs).

Sloane and Porter (2010) CEM (Contextualisation, Embedding, and Mapping) pedagogical model was adapted (Hawthorne and Cronin, 2017).

Embedding and contextualising language materials within the HSC community of practice, improved levels of academic literacy and confidence within the cohort.

## References

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## A Poetry Writing Session

This session was scheduled in the first few weeks of the programme with the aim of developing reflective skills, and building students' confidence about their writing abilities.

The session, entitled 'Poetry in Motion' was introduced by the subject lecturer who explained that students would be invited to listen to a poetry recital and to study a photograph.



The poem concerned the rehabilitation of a young man and the photograph portrayed the moving scene of an empty intensive treatment unit, following the death of a young patient.

After discussing the poem and the photograph, students were invited to write their own poem about 'communication in the workplace', the topic for their assessment.

Forty-five minutes was given to complete the task, and students were instructed to write their poem in any way they chose.

The lecturer and academic skills tutor monitored the activity, and provided individual support where required.

## Results

Students found the experience of writing poetry challenging at first, but ultimately rewarding.

Compared with writing more formal academic reflections, many students valued the opportunity to express their emotions and experiences more freely.

Analysis of the student poems also revealed a rich bank of data relating to key professional themes and students' lived experiences.

## Examples of poems

### Work poem

This is poetry in motion  
I help fix bones that were broken in motion  
Comforting patients that are feeling all types of emotion's  
getting the theatre ready caught up in the commotion  
Three minds working as one to get the job done  
Talking, writing, gesturing  
Are some of the things in my day that I've done  
Laughing and smiling my job can be fun  
Tiring, frustrating I think that I'm done  
But working together we get the job done  
Communicating together we care for are patient as one  
From start to end well be their friend  
And help them on their way  
It's been a long day and I reflect on what I've done  
I've found that working together we get the job done

She came in to hospital with what was thought a UTI  
Two days later her world came crashing down  
Last stages of cancer  
Doctors said only weeks to live  
Her family rallied round her  
Tears. Anger. Fear.  
She was a mobile, independent lady  
Days later too weak to get out of bed  
Friends came to say their goodbyes  
Her husband never left her side  
So much love filled her room  
11 days later her last breath came  
At peace with the world she lay  
Her family's life will never be the same.

## Student attitudes to poetry sessions

Figure 2  
Students' feelings before poetry writing session

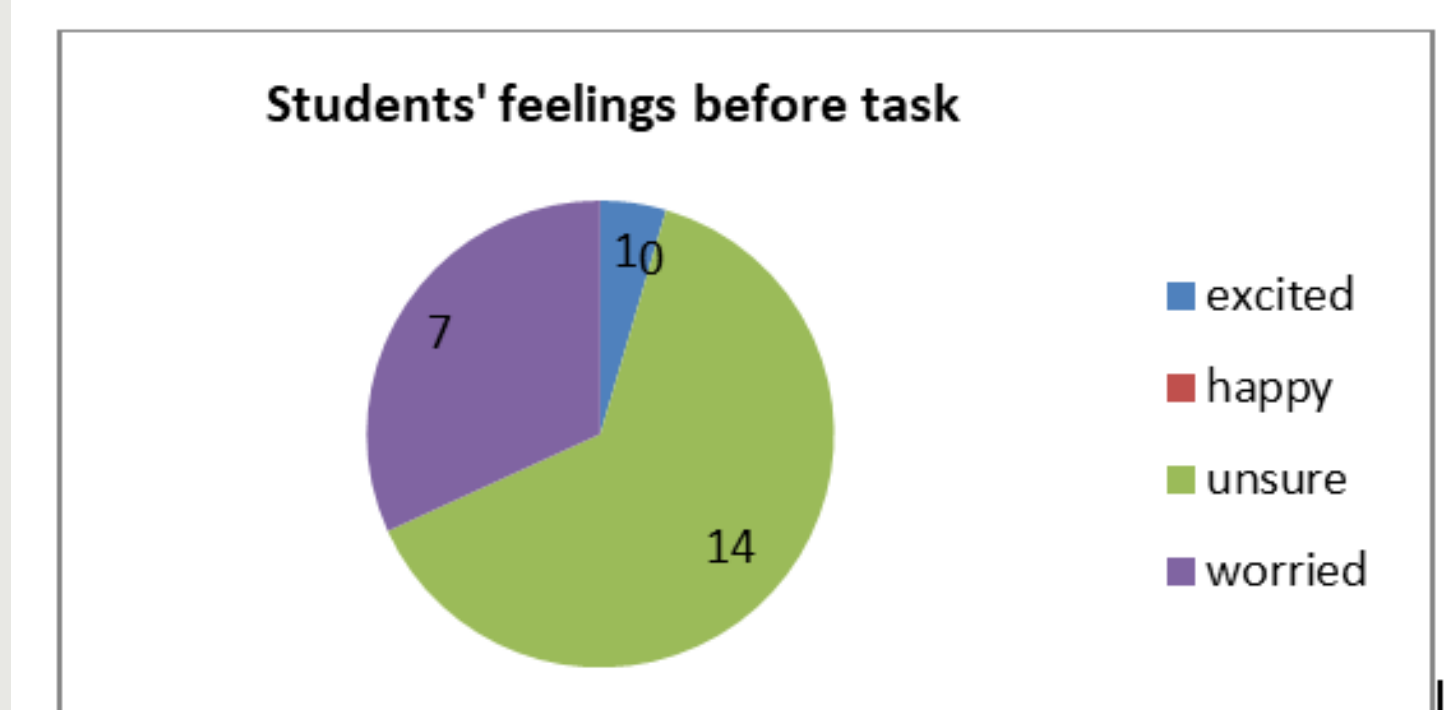
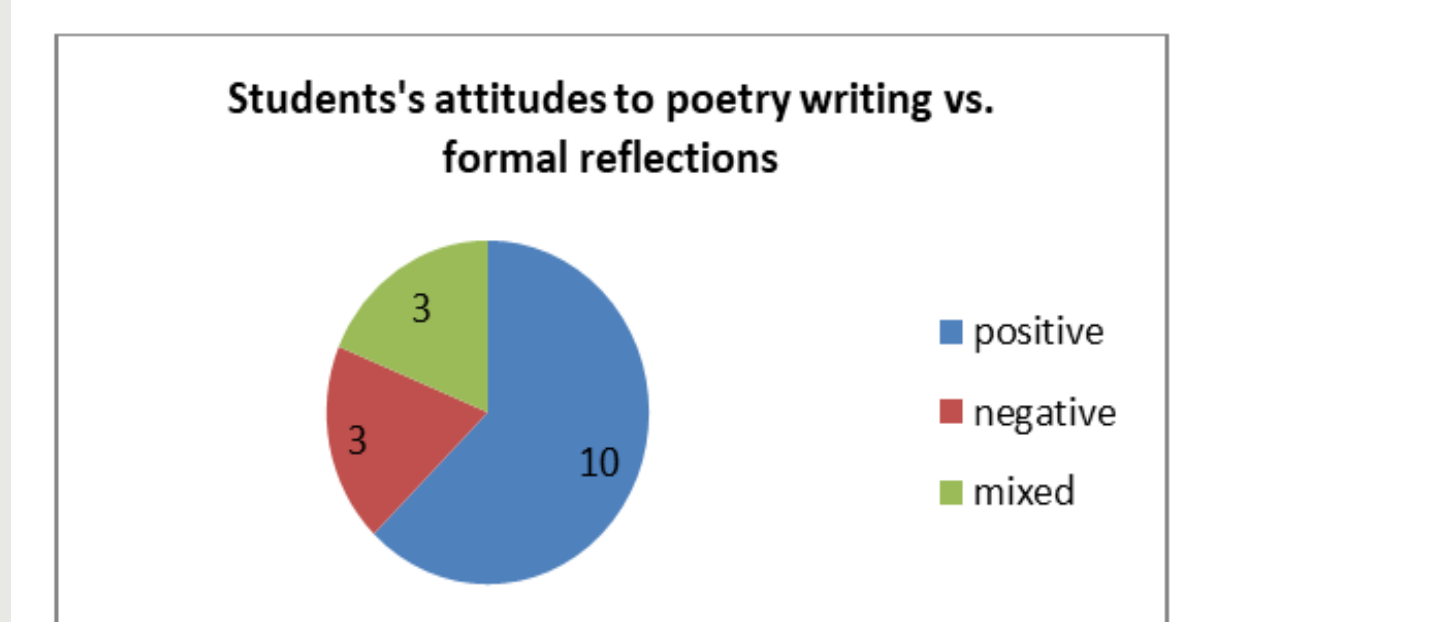


Figure 4  
Students' attitudes to poetry writing versus more formal academic-style reflections



## Conclusions

Poetry writing helps students to develop writing craft and reflective skills.

It encourages students to articulate often complex emotions associated with their professional worlds

Provides invaluable insights into the everyday lives of healthcare workers.

This paper should provide others working in nursing education with a deeper understanding of possible benefits of incorporating poetry writing into the curriculum.

## Contact details

Email: [camille.cronin@essex.ac.uk](mailto:camille.cronin@essex.ac.uk)

University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, Essex CO4 3SQ, UK