Parallel Journeys: Creating and Conceptualising Learning in Language Counselling

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In this paper, we explore how learning is conceptualised and created in language counselling sessions in the ALMS (Autonomous Learning Modules) programme at Helsinki University Language Centre. In ALMS courses, learners reflect in order to plan, develop, and evaluate study programmes which fulfill their foreign-language degree requirement. This reflection partly happens in counselling sessions, with the learners conceptualising learning and themselves as language learners, in discussion with their counsellor. One of the aims of this discussion is to afford the emergence of new learning and new learning selves. The counsellor's experience is a parallel process: We create and recreate our counsellor selves through each counselling encounter. Moreover, in exploring this phenomenon, we conceptualise our counsellor selves through practitioner-research and engage in the reflective practice we ask of our learners. In our inquiry, we use free-writing after counselling sessions as a *method of inquiry* (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), both to create and analyse data. The article consists of two practitioner research accounts in which we critically examine the free-writing through our theoretical understandings. These accounts are framed by an introduction, responses to each other's research, and a coda. In this project, we wanted to experiment with new forms of academic writing. For us, writing from our experience, moving between free writing and academic text construction was a way of braiding the personal and the academic, making affective interpretations of our counselling encounters, and reconstructing ourselves textually. We believe this interactive process of reflective writing and critical discussion has the potential to afford learning and self-discovery for both counsellors and students.

本稿では、ヘルシンキ大学ランゲージセンターの自律的学習モジュール（ALMS）プログラムのカウンセリングセッションにおいて、学習がどのように概念化され、創造されるのかを考察した。ALMSコースでは、学習者が、自らが履修する言語プログラムを、計画、構成、そして評価するために省察を行う。この省察の一部はカウンセリングセッションの中で行われ、学習者は、自身の学習および学習者としてのあり方を、カウンセラーとのやり取りを通して概念化する。本稿の目的の一つは、新たな学習方法と、今までにない学習者像の提起である。カウンセラー自身の経験も学習者のそれと平行しており、毎回のカウンセリングを通じて、自身のカウンセラー像を追求していく。さらにこの現象を深く追求する中で、われわれはカウンセラーとしてのあり方を実践研究の中で概念化し、カウンセリングセッションで学習者に課しているものと同じような省察を、自らも行うようにした。本研究はmethod of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005)として、カウンセリングセッションの後に行われる自由記述を用いて、データを収集し分析した。本稿は、参加者二人の実践研究から構成されており、集められた自由記述は私たちの理論的解釈に基づいて分析された。これら二つの実践研究は導入、研究参加者相互によるフィードバック、そしてまとめからなっている。本研究において、我々は新たな形の学術文書様式を試みた。我々にとって、カウンセリングでの経験を記録し、自由記述と学術文書を行き来することは、個人的な経験を学術理論に組み込む一つの方法であり、カウンセリングで直面したことを効果的に解釈し、文字を通してカウンセラーとしての自分自身を再構築する方法ともなった。このような双方向的な省察と建設的ディスカッションの機会は、カウンセラーと学習者の双方に学習と自己の再発見を促す可能性を与えるものと思われる。

Keywords

language counselling/advising, practitioner research, reflective/ experiential writing, professional development, learner/counsellor reflective practice

キーワード

言語カウンセリング/アドバイジング、実践研究、省察的/経験的ライティング、専門的能力の開発、学習者/カウンセラーのリフレクティブ・プラクティス

L anguage counselling, as we practice it in the ALMS (Autonomous Language Learning Modules) programme at the University of Helsinki, involves a student and their coun–sellor meeting to discuss language learning. It is a form of language advising, drawing on humanistic counselling and language teaching (Carson & Mynard, 2012, p. 5) to promote

and support learning and learner autonomy. However, as ALMS counselling has emerged in our unique context so, too, each counselling meeting differs as individual students and their counsellors plan and reflect on learning.

In this paper, we—Leena Karlsson and Fergal Bradley, ALMS counsellors—explore our own counselling in relation to our students' learning processes during a semester-long ALMS course in spring 2016. We use a cycle of free writing after our counselling sessions, and considered commentary on the resulting texts, to reflect on the role of counselling in our students' learning journeys on their ALMS courses. We also explore our counsellor selves and how they grow and develop during the project. In this sense, our paper describes parallel journeys of students and counsellors in ALMS.

What is the ALMS Programme?

ALMS (Autonomous Language Learning Modules) is an English course, one of several options for students at the University of Helsinki to fulfill the required foreign-language studies component of their degrees. The students are primarily Finnish, and Finnish-speaking, undergraduate students working towards degrees in one of the university's 12 faculties. The course's underlying philosophy is learner autonomy, in that, after two awareness-raising sessions, students design, carry out and reflect upon their own programme of study in order to complete the course (for more information see Karlsson, Kjisik, & Nordlund, 1997, 2007). Students may attend a variety of support groups to practice and develop their language skills and knowledge, and many also create groups of their own. However, many also choose to do part of their work independently. The starting level for the course is nominally B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. In practice, however, students are often above or sometimes below this level. We ask ALMS students to consider the stated course objectives as a factor when planning a course that is personally relevant for them.

ALMS has few formal requirements, the primary ones being that students keep a learning diary and come to three counselling sessions. In the diary—or log, blog, or portfolio, the exact format is not important—students record their work and reflect on it, in writing. Reflection on language learning and language use occupies much of the awareness-raising sessions at the beginning of the course. These two compulsory sessions are the only official group meetings of an ALMS course. Comprising roughly 20 students, the groups are often faculty-specific, but this does not mean the students will necessarily work together or even meet again. The aim of these sessions is to start the reflection process and to support the students in developing a learning plan for the course. Students engage in and with various reflection models, methods and tools, such as completing the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990), writing language learner histories, and free writing about and discussing previous language encounters. They also learn about the practicalities and possibilities of ALMS: sharing ideas, asking questions, reading blogs and logs donated by former students, signing up for and creating support groups, and writing their own plans for the course. The reflection and planning—looking backwards and forwards—continues in the learning diary and the counselling sessions.

The Role of Counselling

ALMS students come to three counselling sessions throughout their course—at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. These counselling sessions are the primary contact students have with the responsible teacher on the course (their ALMS counsellor), who also leads the awareness-raising sessions at the beginning. Taking place at different stages, the counselling

sessions play different roles in a student's course. In the first session, students look back at their learning histories and plan their course based on this, echoing Kramsch's (2004), "re-membering how and imagining what if." In the second counselling session, students discuss the course in progress: their learning and the reflection on it in their diary. Finally, the third counselling session involves looking back and evaluating their learning, and looking forward to their future as language learners and users.

In ALMS, we view counselling as a holistic process, which involves the whole person: their studies, their personal, and their professional lives, and their pasts, presents, and futures. Counselling is also dialogic, in that students and counsellors discuss the course plan together and the counsellor tries not to dictate or tell the student what to do on their ALMS course. Ideally, it is the learner in the leading role—taking charge of their own learning (Holec, 1981, p.3)—with the counsellor advising, empathising or challenging as needed, but above all listening and responding. Counselling is also an autobiographical and experiential process. Students tell stories about themselves and their language experiences, sharing them with the counsellor, who may share their own stories and experiences in return. This sharing involves the building of a relationship between student and counsellor, involving empathy, respect, and genuineness (Mozzon-McPherson, 2012, p. 48).

This Project: Reflective Writing and Practitioner Research

Since it began in the mid-1990s, ALMS has always been inquiry oriented, with a tradition of practitioner research (see, for example, Karlsson, Kjisik, & Nordlund, 1997; Karlsson, 2008; Karlsson & Kjisik, 2011; Kidd & von Boehm, 2012). Recently, we have used methods such as peer group mentoring (PGM) (Heikkinen, Jokinen, & Tynjälä, 2012) as a support network and a means of professional development. The PGM meetings involve counsellors sharing stories, free writing, and reading literature from the field of language advising. This work has prompted further practitioner research, such as a recent project, inspired by Dörnyei and Kubanyiova's (2014) work on vision and motivation, where nine counsellors wrote to each other about their visions of future counselling selves (Bradley & Karlsson et al., 2016). This paper arises, then, from a culture of reflective writing and an attitude of inquiry (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). We wish to take up Laurel Richardson's (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) idea of writing as a method of inquiry but, as educators first, we also want our inquiry to be non-invasive and integrated into the counselling pedagogy (see the principles of Exploratory Practice, Allwright, 2003; Allwright & Hanks, 2009).

Through our PGM meetings, we became interested in how we, as counsellors, experience our students' reflective processes and the creation of new learning and new learning selves, as this happens in the counselling sessions. We also see a parallel between our learners' personal reflection process in ALMS and our own: through the counselling encounters and our practitioner research, we discover and create our counsellor selves, by doing the reflective practice we ask of our learners in ALMS. So for this project, we ask the question of how learning is conceptualised and created in counselling. Not expecting a single, simple answer, we work for understanding of our own counselling and our students' learning.

To explore the question, our first stage was free writing—pen on paper in a notebook—after our counselling sessions throughout one semester. This free writing then formed the basis for critical commentaries—typed on the computer—in which we examined and discussed our free writing our free writing through our theoretical understandings, interests and concerns. The process formed a cycle of immediate reflection and considered response on our counselling, which influenced one another, as we moved from first counselling to second and third during the semester. The writing, and then reading of ourselves, developed into a shared crit-

ical discussion of our practice as counsellors and our experiences and understandings of the students' learning in their ALMS courses.

Our concern in this project was with writing as an expression of autonomy. We use reflective and free writing with our students as a way of helping them to recognize and appreciate experiential lifewide learning (see Barnett, 2010), and so it seemed an appropriate method for us to explore our counselling practice and identity. In their diaries, the students write and are shaped by their writing, as are we in our inquiry effort. Writing, at its best, acts as a "glue" between different sites and experiences of learning. Similarly, counselling sessions encourage students to draw together their ideas, thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to language learning, and this is a way to stimulate new learning and help new learning selves emerge. Thus, reflective writing and counselling can both be seen as critical nodes or hotspots in the ecology or complex system of ALMS for both students and counsellors. They can both consolidate past learning and stimulate new learning.

Through writing here in our counsellor voices, we express our autonomy, and this expression emerges from engaging with theory. The theoretical perspectives that shape our thinking, that is, learner/teacher autonomy as a rich ecology (linking elements from complexity theory and learning ecologies, narrative autobiographical knowing, experiential learning, learning histories, and storied identities) have influenced the methodological choice for this research. Caring for the students' wellbeing and quality of life and, very importantly, their ownership of learning meant looking for a way of researching that would be pedagogically motivated. Thus, turning our gaze upon ourselves, an auto-ethnographical take on the counselling dialogue, felt like an ethical and pedagogically sustainable solution.

In a thought-provoking article, Arthur Bochner (2012) tells the story of why and how he (together with Carolyn Ellis) came to see narrative and autoethnographic storytelling as alternatives to standard academic writing practices in social sciences. He writes about what happened when they decided to think of themselves as *writers*, as storytellers, and turned an ethnographic eye on themselves and their own lived experiences, a process ours shares features with. In Bochner's text, which is both an academic article and a first-person story, we see an instance of autoethnographic storytelling which suggests how we can write about human experience, "not as reporters but as writers." This is also what we have tried to do in this paper.

The Structure of the Paper

The paper now splits into distinct but connected texts. The first is Leena's methodology section, *"Feeling My Way" through Writing from Experience*. In this section, Leena focuses on writing as a method and as data in this project (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005). This is followed by a response from Fergal. The third section is Fergal's results section, *Meeting of Minds and a Counsellor's Reaction*. Here, Fergal discusses what he learned through the project and the implications for his counsellor identity. Leena then responds to this. Finally, the Coda, or concluding section, draws together the various strands of the process, reflecting on writing as a means of professional development. Figure 1 demonstrates the structure visually.

We choose this structure to allow the reader into our different but related experiences and understandings and to allow our individual counsellor/researcher voices to express distinct but connected sense-making processes in this project.
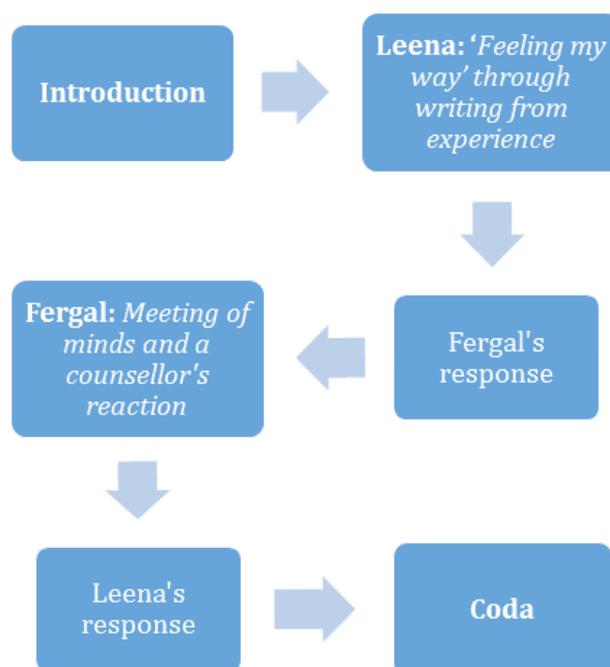
Figure 1.   The Structure of the Paper.

Leena: "Feeling my way"[i] through Writing from Experience

I am a language counsellor and have been living and working on the landscape of ALMS stories for 20 years. Language counselling means interacting with feeling, flesh-and-blood human beings, experiencing complexity and ambiguity, looking for, and often not finding, the words to express the experience I am going through and to interpret the one the student is telling about. My own and the students' embodied and emotional reactions to the encounter can be challenging to make sense of in the fleeting moment of counselling interaction. Finding sensitive interpretative tools in a retrospective research effort can be even more challenging.

I believe that language counselling, like teaching, should be reflective and become "an exploratory sort of research" (Vieira, 1997, p. 60). This kind of an educational inquiry should be on-going, context-sensitive and self-reflexive; in my experience, it is also a process that shapes my counsellor self as much as I shape my professional landscape through research. I am a practitioner who believes in pedagogy for autonomy and, as a researcher on the landscape, in always being aware of my own autobiography and its influence on my inquiry. In my research I have been using methods that, on the one hand, serve the purpose of getting close to lived and felt experience and, on the other hand, respect and serve the research participants. Autobiographical narratives, I find, are one powerful way of representing lived and context-shaped educational experiences. During my thesis writing process (Karlsson, 2008), I came to see writing as a method of inquiry. For me, it was a way of finding out about myself as a researcher and my research topic, a way of thinking and learning, of knowing, of discovery and analysis, and also a way of telling. Writing as inquiry (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005)

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1.   I borrow Sarah Ahmed's metaphorical concept of "feel our way"—inspired by Benesch's (2012) work—to describe my writing process and the emotional echoes from previous research and practice.

means using writing as both a method of data collection and data analysis, as inseparable from research. Thought happens in the very writing: the writer thinks, writes and creates.

I am also a facilitator of student writing and a writer of academic and professional texts. Writing as a process, experience and phenomenon puzzles and fascinates me. As a writer myself, I have experienced different ways and textual forms of writing, individual and collaborative, in academic contexts and elsewhere. I learnt about writing conventions and practices at school and university, worried about my lack of skill, experienced writer's blocks and felt uncertain about what to write and how to communicate my thoughts to an audience. These experiences have shaped my thinking and influenced the way I see the role of writing in educational and personal lives, that is, what writing can be and do, for myself and my students.

In recent years, I have been involved in experimenting collaboratively with personal kinds of scholarly writing that uses the writers' autobiographies as a basis (Barfield & Delgado, 2014; Bradley & Karlsson et al., 2016). Both writing projects have been first-hand experiences in relational writing and also meant engaging in professional development from the inside through pedagogical conversations, explorations, and collective authoring. Jiménez Raya and Vieira (2015) also suggest that we should see inquiry and writing *from* experience as professional development.

These projects raised my interest in further experiments in how one can/should/might write about educational experience in an academic text. I became convinced that searching for collaborative answers for these questions are ways of unlearning and relearning writing so as to bring it closer to the self and both the intellectual and emotional aspects of lived experience. The discussions with the other writers and the dialogic, multivoiced writing also became tools for developing a "scholarship of counselling" (see Vieira 2010; 2013), that is, inquiry into, narrating about, and disseminating our practice.

In my work, there is a need and duty for counsellor reflexivity, which in turn can become an ethical way of building a bridge between research and practice: being and becoming a reflexive practitioner. When students become participants in a research effort, a researcher's reflexivity should permeate every step in and aspect of the research process. For me, researcher reflexivity is the capacity to acknowledge how my own experiences and contexts, possibly fluid and changing, inform the process and outcomes of the inquiry (Etherington, 2004, pp. 31–32).

This means being aware of how my own experiences, thoughts, feelings, motivations, educational, social and personal history, my whole autobiography, inform me all the way through the pedagogical and research process, including the final text produced. Over the years, I have unlearnt certain ways of thinking and stopped seeing genres of writing promoted in schools and academia as the only legitimate ones. When using autobiographical narratives to capture the experiences on the ALMS landscape, I have written what could be called "braided" (Casanave, 2003) or "interwoven" (Choi, 2016) stories of personal and academic lives. However, during this project, I was determined to learn new writing and interpretative practices (Luce–Kapler, 2004) through writing and for my own writing in the future. In particular, I needed to work with raising the level of affective interpretation (Luce–Kapler, 2004) of what writing is and does in order to counsel and facilitate *from* my experience.

For this end, I hoped to gather such data in the (free) writing, which I would not otherwise be gathering: St. Pierre (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 970) calls this data "dream data", "sensual data", "emotional data", "response data", and "memory data". For me, her question "how can one textualize everything one thinks and senses in the course of a study" ties in with a concern for how to write about experience, how to find the language for emotional

reactions, how to understand and communicate what emotions *do* in learning (Benesch, 2012), and how to construct knowledge yet touch upon unspoken or hidden emotional reactions.

From a previous writing project (Karlsson, 2016), I knew that combining formal and creative uses of language can provide spaces for transformative learning when "less cognitively-driven, more spontaneous and bodily-felt approaches" (Hunt, 2013, p. 15) to learning and writing are used. Free writing was a choice that I knew would open me up to the bodily nature of writing (Hunt, 2013). How did I then write my way through this project? How did "thinking feelingly" (Hunt, 2013, p. 15) happen? Was emotional data created in the writing?

Emotions mattered and indeed guided me in and through this writing effort and every effort in our hybrid writing project: free writing after counselling, writing commentaries after "rereading myself" and engaging in writing this final text shaped me and gave a potentially novel insight into writing the next text. Here is an extract from my free writing after the 3rd counselling sessions:

> *... also what was happening, sporadically, was the awareness of our bodies, connections between them and our stories, our moment of being in the world together. My bitten nails and Minttu's, Ida's tears and her tense body, slowly relaxing. Maria's blushing face, her anxiety worse than before and how my own shock reaction slowly melted both of us into laughter and good feelings. Yes, I've felt old, feeble, almost smelly with some of these fresh and beautiful nimble bodies. And this takes me back to auto/biography* [reference to a central concept by Liz Stanley I used in my thesis]: *how complex the interrelations between partners in counselling are, the bodies and the physical space matter here. Fergal wrote about the meeting of minds* [reference to Fergals' commentary text I had read]; *I became really aware of the meeting of bodies, too. Bodies that shake, sweat and refuse to carry us to a classroom or a counselling office: anxiety is a bodily experience* (handwritten text, free writing 9.5.2016)

This then is an extract from a commentary text to the free writing, an example of re-reading myself and of how "thinking feelingly" continues and is woven in with the reading happening at the same time:

> *Fergal's "meeting of minds" is a wonderful metaphor for many counselling encounters that succeeded and a valuable goal for the work we do! In these final counsellings, I became very aware of my body and the students', the "meeting of bodies", and the connection between our bodies and our stories at the one moment of being together in the counselling room. Anxiety that I know so well from many troubled students is a bodily experience. Embodiment (e.g., Horsdal, 2014, Hunt, 2013), the biological bodies and how bodily processes underlie learning encounters, seems an avenue to be explored. Horsdal writes about bodies, minds and stories in interaction in autobiographical narratives. Perhaps also considering writing as a bodily action, as a body experience, as an activity and object, in the methodology chapter? My own writing has been happening using two techniques: 1) free writing after counselling meetings by hand (and also keeping a diary as in filling in notebook after notebook with everything that happens in life), and 2) writing commentaries with the computer. How have these techniques affected the meanings produced? Cixous (1993) writes about "writing as a method of embodied and emotional knowing", which this project has made a tangible thing* (commentary mid-May 2016).

It was clear that writing across the texts acted as self-support and as a way of venting feelings, but also as a way of getting back into being an academic writer, yet bringing some "feeling held" experiences into the final text being born. All writing seems to be "permeable" (Luce-Kapler, 2004, p. 19) and thus we import elements from other discourses we engage

in during the time of writing; my discussions with Fergal are a case in point. Writing was non-linear and complex, it was episodic and fragmentary but it became a "glue" between sites of learning, an ecology. Embodied and emotional learning from all my interactions with the writing environment happened.
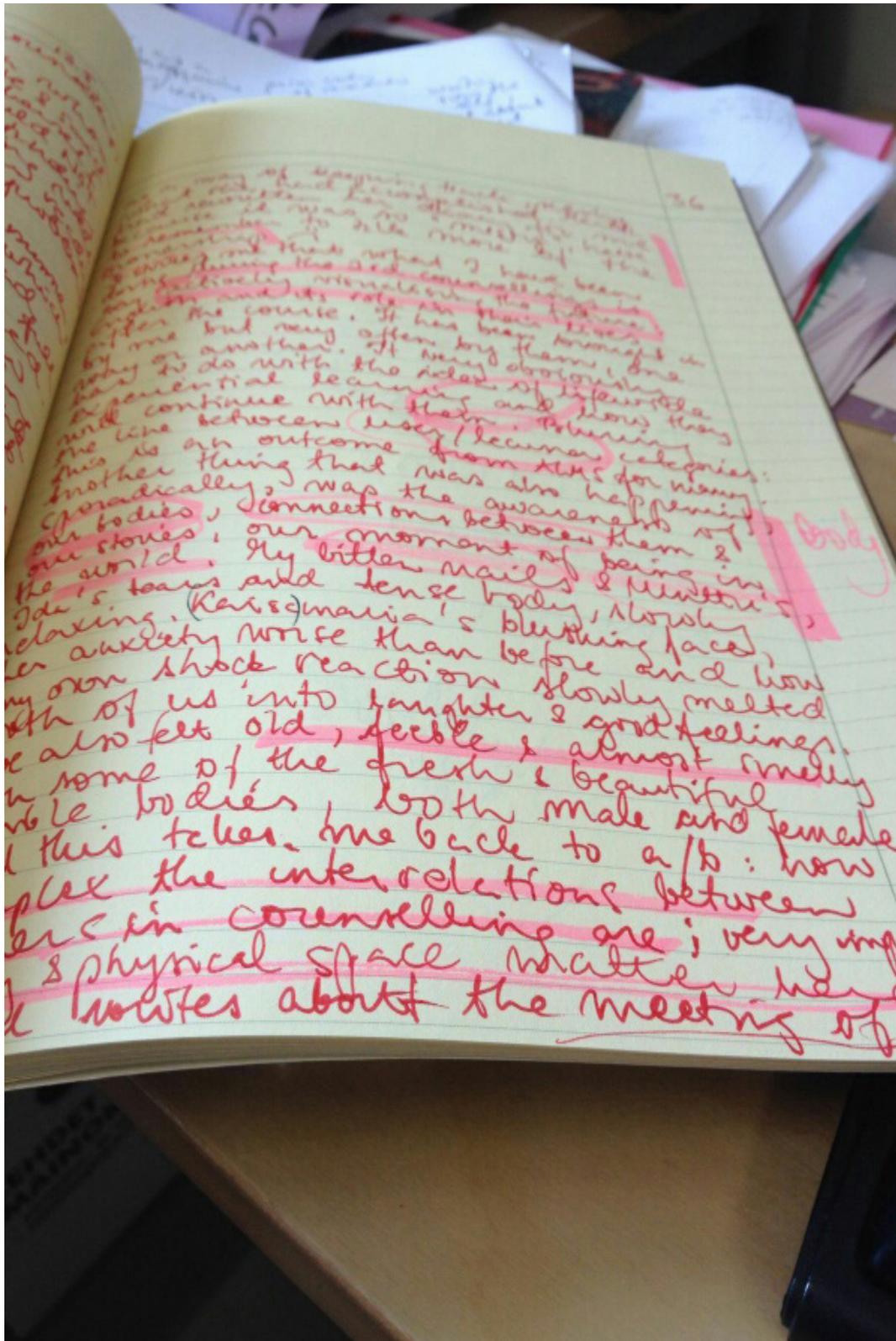

Figure 2. Leena's Free Writing Journal.

Fergal's Response to Leena's Text

Leena writes about writing as a *glue* between sites of learning, connecting ideas, thoughts and emotions, and holding them together. It is indeed a *sticky object* (Ahmed, 2004). Counselling, too, for me, is a sticky object for a student on their ALMS course: it plays a symbolic role in their learning journey and is associated with a variety of emotions. For counsellors, it is a point of contact with students and a window into their learning, but it also represents a node in a complex learning ecology, a potential site for an offshoot of new learning. I think, too, it is a chance to perform and, thus, reshape our counsellor identity. Leena writes about writing from experience, and counselling is *the* experience as an ALMS counsellor. This is perhaps why it is so *sticky*: it connects us to our students, our fellow counsellors and our reading, and it is the experience when we fully are who we are, that is, language counsellors. So writing about counselling, in the different modes we have taken here, feels important: a way of making sense, of learning about our students and ourselves.

In this response to Leena's text, I focus on how it resonates with my own experience of the project, which follows in the next section. Firstly, I am struck by the different directions our texts and our sense making processes take.

As Leena mentions, in my text, I focus on *meetings of minds*, but Leena's text brings up other meetings or meetings on other levels, which I had not written about or even read into my experiences. In my text, I chose to write about patterns of encounters which jumped out at me from my free writing and then, through another reading, about my actions and ways of being, in relation to those patterns. But left out are other actions, encounters, patterns, and ways of being. We are telling stories, spinning yarns, from our experiences, but also in our analyses. "It is through… storytelling… that humans narrate ways of knowing and being" (Lewis, 2011, p. 505).

These different departures show an ecological reality too: our projects evolving in parallel ways to different points, just like each ALMS student's course branches out from the opening sessions. This suggests that inquiry is never just simply a research question, followed by data collection, analysis and writing up the results, just as a language course is always more than setting aims and evaluating outcomes. Leena's text brings in her reading, her previous research, her own writing experiences, and the emotions and bodily experiences that interact in this project.

My second response to Leena's text is an understanding of how the writing feeds back into counselling. We began this process by writing after our counselling but, by the end, the free writing was also before counselling: the free writing and the commentary writing informed later counselling sessions. This complicates and enriches both the counselling and the free writing, as pedagogical and research experiences. We are writing from experience, but perhaps also experiencing from writing. As we draw academic writing closer to the self, we also draw ourselves closer to the writing, and our counselling practice is changed too. During the project, Leena has spoken of being "in" the counselling more because of the free writing and the commentaries. This, too, is what we ask of our students during their ALMS courses: to reflect on and be more aware of language, how it is being used, and what they are learning.

Fergal: Meetings of Minds and a Counsellor's Reaction

Three Types of Encounter

Unlike Leena, my history as ALMS counsellor is short—about four years. As well as counselling, I also teach, but I do not see those roles as separate; rather, they are different spaces to work with students developing their English skills. There is slippage between the roles of counsellor and teacher, which brings up interesting questions about my practice and its effect

on student learning. This project, for me, was a chance to explore my counsellor self, but also counselling itself as a specific learning encounter.

In my free writing, I quickly noticed several patterns emerging from my counselling. I was writing about three types of encounter in relation to learning being conceptualised and created. My initial texts concerned the first counselling sessions, where students were talking about their plans and goals for the course. The first type of encounter was one where students knew what they wanted to do and learn on the course. They were able to present a clear picture of where they were going on the course, and I use this visual metaphor deliberately: it was on my mind following a previous project on visions of future counselling selves (Bradley & Karlsson et al., 2016), inspired by Dörnyei and Kubanyiova's (2014) work. So visual metaphors were on my mind, and indeed they appear frequently in the free writing texts. The students too used visual imagery to describe their course plans. For example, I have quoted one student in my free writing as saying, "I have a picture of how the course is going to go."

The second type of encounter was one where students were less definite about their ALMS courses. This is not to say they had bad learning plans or didn't know what they wanted to do. Rather, in the counselling sessions, there was more dialogue about the direction of their course and their plans were being co-constructed through discussion with me. We were working on a picture of their learning together. Fleshing out a sketch or focusing a camera lens were images I used in my free writing.

The third group of encounters were with students who didn't or couldn't or wouldn't paint a picture of their ALMS course in counselling. I left the counselling sessions without an idea of what they wanted to learn or what they were going to do on the course. There didn't seem to be a vision, or if there was, they weren't revealing it to me.

There were variations on these types too: when students "pictures" didn't match up to what they had written about in their learner histories or needs analyses, or students whose pictures I was suspicious of or didn't quite believe. Why were they planning to do all of this reading work, when they were telling me that speaking was what they needed? Or were they actually going to do all of the things they had put in their plans? And would those things help them to learn?

In the second and third counselling sessions, the discussions gradually moved from planning learning to reporting and reflecting on work done and what was learned. Here again the same three types of encounter remained. There were students who knew what they'd learned—or when they weren't learning!—from different activities, and students who used the counselling as a discussion space to make meaning out of the hours they had already put in. The third type also remained, at least in the second counselling sessions, after which I wrote about the lack of a shared vision of learning with some students in my free writing.
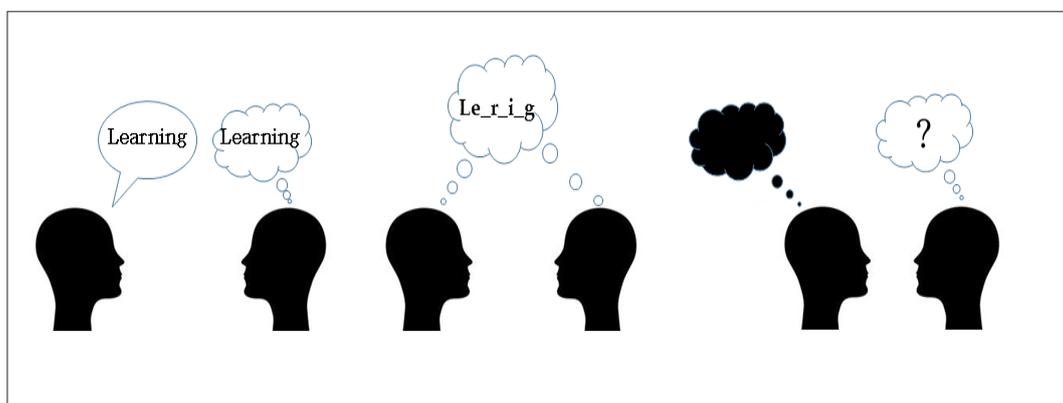

Figure 3. Three Types of Encounter With Students During Counselling.

By the third and final counselling sessions, there did seem to be a meeting of minds with all of my students. However, I do not imply that the course was a complete success for all students. Some students do drop out of courses and, in my four years of ALMS counselling, I have had final counselling sessions that ended without a vision of learning shared by both counsellor and student. The changes in encounter from one session to the next do seem to suggest that counselling works differently for students at different times of their ALMS course. The counselling encounter is not stable from one meeting to the next, but rather it changes in accordance with a student's learning journey. Through reflection, the student with a clear plan at the start of the course may find their ideas of what they want to learn change during the course. Likewise, those who are not sure at the beginning may learn more about themselves as learners and users of English as the course progresses. Students bring these reflections to counselling to tell them or open them up further.

These types of encounter seem to suggest that students use the counselling sessions in different ways and for different purposes on their ALMS courses. For some, the counselling session is a checkpoint or a milestone on their course and, through preparing to report on their learning plans or their work in counselling, they come to understandings and make meaning for themselves. For others, the counselling session is a potential learning experience. They can discuss plans, share thoughts and get ideas for their learning. The third type of encounter seemed to suggest that some students do not know what the counselling is for or how to use it and often, in this project, it seemed also to be associated with students who had blocks or constraints to their learning. One student recognized her problem was not with speaking, but with listening in English. For another, a trip abroad and contact with an international group made her think differently about her English—she stopped holding herself up to native speaker standards. For another, already a proficient user of English, the reflection work in ALMS made him think differently about other languages he was learning and using.

My Role in the Encounters: Affordance or Constraint? I-poems and Negative Knowledge

So, how was I responding to different students approaching counselling in different ways? Was I supporting or hindering them, being an affordance or a constraint to their learning? In making sense of this free writing project, I was inspired by the Listening Guide (Gilligan et al., 2003; Gilligan, 2015)—a qualitative approach to analysing data in psychology—to re-read my free writing texts. In this method, the first listening—listening for the plot—corresponded well with what I had done with Leena. I had made notes on what was happening, what were the key themes—in my case, the three types of encounter related to individual students' ALMS courses.

The Listening Guide's second listening involves creating I-poems: identifying instances of the first person singular, the I, and presenting them along with accompanying verbs and perhaps other words or phrases. Koelsch (2015, p. 98) describes the goal of I-poems as being "to forefront the participant's sense of herself within the story" and argues that they allow for an emotional reading of the participant's, in this case my, lived experience. I-poems also seemed to fit well with Richardson's (Richarson & St. Pierre, 2005) idea of creative analytical practices, which inspired this entire free writing project.

The following are some extracts from my I-poem, created from the collection of free writing texts (see Appendix A for the complete I-poem). I have chosen these because they brought to my attention or into focus certain themes related to my counsellor words and actions in the encounters.

I need to shut up
My butting in

I think I just spouted
I felt I went on a bit
My lecturing
I came out with

I-poem extracts: My talk as redundant or even constraining

I see a frustration throughout my writing with my own talk in counselling, especially in relation to traditional teacher talk. This regularly felt redundant or even sometimes a constraint on the counselling, not contributing to a student-generated but shared picture of learning. After one encounter of the third type, where there was no shared picture of learning emerging, I wrote about the problem of trying to create a picture of learning for the student. This echoes Dornyei and Kubanyiova's (2014, p. 36) comment that "the teacher can listen and prompt, but the L2 vision must ultimately become the student's own." The prompting comes through clearly in the I-poem, but with a sense of reluctance or of being used as a last resort. In the free writing, I seem to be justifying my explicitly teacher behaviour.

I found myself discussing.... describing
I felt like I needed to question

I felt I had to talk a lot
I made suggestions
I felt I had to emphasise

I-poem extracts: Having to talk / "teaching" as last resort

In one extract from the free writing, I wrote, "today, I had three counselling sessions, and I had to be different in each one." The I-poem also sheds light on different ways of being that were more positive, where my words and actions seem to afford learning.

I laid off a bit

I try to encourage

I think I asked good questions and allowed responses
I was legitimizing
I tried to open up
I was legitimizing

My letting her speak
I recognize her need to talk about this

I-poem extracts: Allowing, recognizing, validating learning

Bondi and Fewell's (2003) work with therapeutic counsellors—as distinct from language counsellors—positions their knowledge as a "negative" or "inverted" knowledge, as opposed to that of say doctors or lawyers who deliver expertise or specialist knowledge to a "patient" or "client." This resonates with my I-poem in that, in order to positively contribute to the students' learning, I seem to have to drop my "expert" language teacher knowledge as much use it. I was listening, giving space and support, responding as a language user and learner and indeed a person, as much as a language teacher. The teacher or expert role did not disappear, but waxed and waned in a dynamic relationship to other more lay, more human roles.

The question "what did you learn from doing this work?" was often difficult for students to answer, as they seemed to think I expected a technical answer—50 new words, how to use the present perfect, how to write an academic paper. In fact, their learning was often about feelings, attitudes, awareness, identity in relation to language learning and language use. The students who feel more comfortable speaking English now with strangers, who realize how much English they use in their day to day life and studies and are now aware of the potential there for learning, who see themselves applying to study abroad or writing their master's thesis in English.

In a recent paper, Kubanyiova (2016) called for language education research to shift in focus from learner characteristics to learner sense-making. This project forced me to look away from decontextualized characteristics of counsellor behaviour and instead led me into a process of making sense of my own counselling.

Leena's Response to Fergal's Text (and a Bit about My Own):
Making Sense of Free Writing

In a previous writing project (Karlsson, 2016) I had experienced how a writing ecology can be created in which the very writing acts as a glue between different sites of learning when creative and reflective ways of writing are used. In our current project I wanted to see if free writing, done retrospectively immediately after counselling meetings, could help me to look deeper into, even capture, my self-experience, the emotional elements that I knew were there but which, without documentation, mostly remained hidden or got forgotten. I also wanted to explore what emotions can do in counselling and how affective interpretations can be found, how I can write about them and communicate them in an academic text.

I take as my starting point a sentence in Fergal's text, a text which, with its wonderful I-poems, resonated strongly with me: "Today, I had three different counselling sessions and I had to be different in each one." Initially, Fergal's words made me think about the pedagogical sensitivity a counsellor needs; a sensitivity that resembles clinical sensitivity (Lindqvist, 2009), a prerequisite for a therapist's work. A counsellor too is meeting a unique human being, engaging in a unique encounter, listening attentively and with empathy, but potentially feeling an Otherness yet striving to make sense of it, searching for respectful and encouraging words, and giving space for the student's story about her learning. We were both concerned for the extent and depth of our pedagogical sensitivity and the worry was expressed in our free writing.

Like Fergal I found a way of making sense of my free writing through counselling literature, in a related and very powerful idea of the writer as the first reader of her own text, reading and re-reading her Self. Wright and Bolton (2012, p. 26) inspired me into thinking about free writing as re+cording (*re*=again and *cord*=heart). They describe the exploratory and expressive process of first writing (recording as in "getting closer to the heart"), then re-reading to the Self (which becomes a way of *listening* to oneself and can only happen after the writing), and finally a deep emotional reading of one's Self and a potential sharing with a confidential other. Unexpectedly, the way we had planned our project and writing turned out

to be in harmony with the idea of reflective writing as a personal questioning process (Wright & Bolton, 2012) and an integral part of professional development (Bolton, 2010) and that we both felt the positive effects.

As a result of my self-exploratory process I became acutely aware of why we have to be, cannot perhaps even avoid being, "different in each counselling session." This is because of the unique bodily processes involved in the encounters, the bodies that sweat or shake, the eyes that cry or mouths that laugh. In my third counselling sessions, as documented in the free writing, emotional and bodily reactions strongly guided the counselling dialogue. I now claim that this heightened awareness came at least partly from the experience of my ongoing writing, listening to and re-reading my Self and created, using Hunt's words, "an increased sense of inner space for thinking, a willingness to relax cognitive control and be open to a kind of learning that comes through bodily-felt and emotional experience rather than just through conscious reason" (Hunt, 2013, p. 15).

During this project it became very tangible to me what Horsdal (2014) means by suggesting that bodies, minds and stories are in interaction. In counselling, which I have written about as a storytelling event (Karlsson, 2013), listening to a student's story is just as much an embodied, emotional experience as is reading a story, say, when an entry in a diary or a learning history is brought into counselling. Writing stories is no less corporeal and emotionally charged and puts the writer in contact with her body in its environment. Ahmed (2004) writes about *sticky objects*, that is, objects, ideas or words to which emotions adhere. Emotions tend to shift and move but they also stick to a variety of objects and words in language learning and teaching situations, and, without doubt, to learning diaries and ALMS counselling itself and the very idea of what counts as learning. When normalizing happens with a learning tool, when "even students' reflective thought becomes an oppression" (Tochon, 2015, p. x) it can become a sticky object. Our concern should thus remain to ensure that for students, writing as inquiry or learning should mean open-ended "transgressive explorations" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 205), not narrow practices bound to models, rules, rigid instructions or an overpowering concern for accuracy. The writing should ultimately be their own, just like the visions of learning Fergal referred to in his text. We should respect our students' right to own their daydreaming and timetravelling (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014), using their own narrative capabilities and forming their personal visions for learning, blurred or sharp, in flux or fixed, or none at all.

Coda

In this project, we wanted to experiment and explore new forms of (academic) writing. We wanted to use writing as method and to give it a true prominence in representing lived experience. From what became an ecology of free writing, writing our commentaries, having critical reflective discussions and writing this final text, a mixture of stories emerged in which we try to make sense of our counselling lives and, in the end, attempt to give an account in which we "persuade others to see our perspective" (Choi, 2016, p. 116). We wrote the texts, this final research text included, in the first person; we made ourselves the objects of our inquiry; we depicted experience in episodic and fragmentary forms across time; we did not generalize across cases but tried to give concrete details of individual encounters; we presented the texts as stories with characters and storylines; we brought to light the emotional experiences in the counselling. We wrote "not as reporters but as writers" (Bochner, 2012).

We now hope that our research story manages to convey to the reader the experiential context of our counselling stories and to touch lightly upon some immediate experiences in our counselling rooms. We hope that the reader can "hear" some of the emotional and em-

bodied echoes of the encounters. We hope to have written in such a way that the concreteness of feelings and actions between the participants can be imagined. We hope the story we have written resonates with our readers and even creates vicarious experiences in them (Conle, 2000). For us, writing from our experience, moving from free/reflective and creative writing to academic text construction and back was a way of braiding the personal and the academic, a way of making affective interpretations of our counselling encounters and a way of textual self-reconstruction.

Based on our experience, we will wholeheartedly, but with a pedagogical sensitivity, recommend free/reflective writing to our students. Moreover, we will suggest that they consider taking self-exploratory and expressive writing further through engaging in reading and re-reading themselves in their texts and through writing and experimenting with different genres. The process of inquiry into learning, a parallel to the one described here we think, could have them walk the bridge from experience to reflection in the texts written, listened to and read; encountering, analyzing, and interpreting emotions, memories, learning, even sticky issues. They could move between sites of experiential lifewide learning in writing a learning diary or journal, in recording and reflecting on their learning. Such a self-created ecology of writing has the potential of becoming a way of thinking, of self-discovery, a method for emergent learning and an emotional and creative yet analytical process for students in the same way as it was for us as counsellors.

Review Process

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Appendix A

I-poem Created from Fergal's Free Writing

1st Counselling

> *Me thinking metacognitively*
> *I'm counselling*
> *I had*

I think
I forced him to confront
I'm not sure

I had
I ran over
I found myself discussing / describing
I also found
I need to be

I had
I find it hard
I'll go through
I don't know
I need to shut up, recognize, encourage
I found myself
My butting in
I was reminded
I got personal
I can still feel it
Am I changed?
I've given myself

I had
I felt like I needed to question
My questioning
I didn't have to confront
I laid off a bit
I still seem focused on
I had to be

I found it difficult
I don't know
I ran into
I try to encourage

2nd counselling

I had
I think
I could see
I saw

I said
My discussion
I'd like to read more on

(I was) negotiating myself
I was kinda chatty
I think I asked good questions and allowed responses
(I was) legitimizing
I tried to open up
I think I just spouted
(I was) legitimizing
I felt I went on a bit
My lecturing
I think
My letting her speak

I had
I had to be different

I felt I had to
I made suggestions
I felt I had to emphasise
I came out with
I always worry when
I think
I had to get personal
I would do ALMS
I was able to

I gave some suggestions

I was amazed

3rd counselling

I had
I think
I've asked if I can quote her

I had
I get the feeling
I finished

I will be writing again

I had
I've chatted
I feel
I feel
I was in a hurry
I was impatient
I recognize her need to talk about this