Professional Experience and The Investigative Imagination
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CHAPTER ONE

<u>**REFLECTING ON EXPERIENCE AND THE IMAGINATIVE**</u>
<u>**CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING: WRITING AND SHARING 'FICTIONS'**</u>

Richard Winter, Anglia Polytechnic University, Cambridge, UK

PROLOGUE

The general argument of this book is that the role of the creative, 'artistic' imagination has been regrettably neglected in courses of professional education. It is based on several years' experience of courses for professional practitioners where participants explore and represent their professional practice through 'artistic', 'imaginative' forms of writing, in particular: 'fiction'. We usually think of the term' fiction' as referring to events that didn't actually happen, characters who don't actually exist, i.e. a sort of 'fantasy' -- as opposed to the 'facts' or 'theory' of 'non-fiction'. And that is indeed part of what this book is about -- exploring experience by <u>imagining</u> 'stories'. But the word 'fiction' also has a broader meaning, derived from its Latin origin, 'fingere' - meaning 'to shape, to fashion, to mould', and it is this meaning which is more central to our argument. So writing 'fictions', in the title above, refers generally to the process of exploring and reflecting on the meanings of experience by representing it in forms of writing which have been <u>shaped</u> by the writer's imagination. By 'imagination' we don't just mean general mental agility and resourcefulness; we mean specifically the creative faculty which shapes the raw material of experience into <u>artistc</u> form.

Of course, the artistic imagination uses many different media (paint, music, dance, sculpture, and so on) and so our general argument could, in principle, be expanded and adapted to suggest the value of all these media in exploring the meanings of our professional experience. But we focus on just one medium -- <u>writing</u>. We celebrate the learning potential of the writing process, but suggest that the largely <u>analytical</u> forms of writing in which we are usually asked to explore and represent our understanding of experience are too limited: they do not draw on artistic and imaginative capacities which we all possess, so that many people are prevented from doing justice to the power and subtlety of their thinking. Hence, our argument is not simply that the artistic imagination <u>could</u> play a larger role in professional learning, but that it <u>should</u> do so.

Most of the book is centred on examples of imaginative work by a range of professional practitioners (nurses, social workers, school teachers, managers, university lecturers, counsellors) exploring their practice by means of stories, poems, satires, fictionalised descriptions, etc. We begin with these examples almost immediately, but this brief Prologue provides a preliminary statement, a general summary and a 'menu' for what is to follow.

In an important respect, this book is a challenge -- a challenge to current conceptions of the role of imaginative 'Literature' in society and in education. The world of literary Art is conventionally seen as the specialist realm of 'famous'

novelists, dramatists, and poets in which the rest of us think of ourselves as merely spectators. But let us remember that the term 'artistry' is regularly applied to common features of our everyday performances. There is, we say, an 'art' to parenting, to packing a suitcase, to driving a car, to organising a party, and -- of course -- the skilful practices of nursing, social work, teaching, management, etc. The 'artistry' of reflective practice, says Donald Schon, refers to that close link between expert action and understanding which occurs whenever we deal sensitively and effectively with 'situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value-conflict' (Schon 1983 p. 50). In other words, 'artistry' is required on all those many occasions when there is no simple general rule, no single 'right way' of doing things.   And yet, in spite of Schon's repeated references to the artistry of skilful professional performance, he nowhere suggests that artistic means of expression might be valuable or appropriate as a way of representing practitioners' understanding of their work.

But if many (or even most) people regularly demonstrate a capacity for artistry in their actions, why should we not assume that they can use artistic means for expressing their understandings of those actions? And indeed, our work suggests that professional practitioners do actually have a capacity for representing and exploring their professional lives in the artistic medium of fiction, which they themselves find both surprising and impressive. The examples presented in this and the following chapters are intended to show the scope and nature of their work and to indicate its professional value. In this way our argument is fundamentally about widening access to advanced qualifications: it introduces formats for representing professional understanding which enable practitioners to draw on the full range of their cultural resources and the full range of their capacities (including imaginative empathy), rather than requiring them always to present their understandings within the restricted but normally dominant modes of 'description' and 'analysis'.

In our work over the past six years, we have used two basic approaches to the use of imaginative writing as a medium for reflection: 1) the writing and sharing of short fictional stories, and 2) the production of what we term 'patchwork texts', in which different forms of writing are 'shaped', 'fashioned' and assembled to explore the relationship between a variety of perspectives. Both approaches involve the sharing of short pieces of writing, so that writers can learn from several readers how their writing may be interpreted in different ways and incorporate this learning as a 'critical commentary' on their original text. (Hence, earlier versions of the ideas presented in this book used the term 'fictional-critical writing' to describe the overall process - see Winter 1986; 1989; 1991; Bolton, 1994). In their different ways, both stories and patchwork texts take advantage of the 'open-ness' of artistic representations of meaning; they shape experience into meanings which are purposeful and yet ambiguous and inevitably incomplete, and they represent experience in such a way that the form itself suggests that interpretations are open to question and critique. In this sense, then, they both use the methods of 'fiction' (shaping experience through artistic form) to represent the 'uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value-conflict' which, as Schon says, is characteristic of professsional work. These two approaches to the use of fiction as a method for professional reflection are introduced separately in the next two sections of this chapter.

The plan of the rest of the book is as follows. Chapter Two begins with an introduction to the nature of 'stories', describes the story-writing workshops, and

presents a collection of stories written by professional practitioners concerning an aspect of their work experience, together with discussions of each story's professional significance. Chapter Three gives i) further explanation of the concept of the 'patchwork text, ii) a description of the University 'Reflective Writing Course' in which the patchwork text is the basic format for participants' writing, and iii) a number of examples of the work produced in this format. Chapter Four consists of 'distance learning' course materials, which enable readers, if they wish, to work through, step by step, the same process as the participants in the university 'Reflective Writing' course whose work is presented in Chapter Three. Groups of practitioners could use this chapter, together with the rest of the book, as the basis for a sequence of professional development workshops, and tutors responsible for professional education courses (whether in universities or in the workplace) could use it (or adapt it) as the basis for their own courses. Chapter Five describes and discusses the impact of the 'fictional' approach to reflection, based on interviews with a number of participants and on their own written evaluations. Chapter Six is a detailed case study of one participants' involvement, first as a 'student' and then as a tutor; it then describes the impact of this method of working on her subsequent practice and on her personal response to a bereavement. Chapter Seven, which may be of particular interest to staff responsible for professsional education and training and also to staff involved in teaching 'literature', provides a detailed theoretical elaboration of the argument outlined above, concerning the relationship between the educational processes of 'reflection' and the creative aesthetic work of the imagination in producing 'fictional' representations of experience; tracing the argument to its philosophical roots and drawing out its political and cultural implications. Finally, the brief 'Epilogue' presents a couple of examples to reinforce the parallel between the cultural role of the artist and that of the reflective practitioner.

The book as a whole is intended to provide sufficient examples and explanations to enable practitioners and professional educators to try out for themselves an innovatory approach to professional development, using what we take to be the widespread (but curiously ignored) human capacity for understanding experience through <u>imaginative</u> representation.

SHARING STORIES

Let us take a look through this window of the university building and see what is going on. At one end of the room is the usual whiteboard and overhead projector, and a litter of furniture is pushed to the edges to create a space for three separate circles of five or six chairs. The people occupying the chairs may be social workers, or nurses, or teachers, or health visitors, or school teachers, or university lecturers, or managers, or counsellors, or doctors . And what they are doing -- with great concentration -- is reading and discussing the 'stories' concerning their professional work which they have written since the previous session, a week ago, when the idea was introduced and the task explained..

At the moment this group is reading a story by Christine Dale, a social worker. It is neatly typed on two sides of A4, about 800 words, and is called 'Great Expectations'.

A client has a dream in which a social worker arrives bathed in light, a fairy godmother figure, called Pandora. The client's children are Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, and Jack (of beanstalk fame), and in complaining to the social worker of her difficulties with them she comically turns the three fairy stories of children's heroic initiative upside down to provide symptoms of 'problem' behaviour! ('Jack will not do as he's told. . . He's dug up the few flowers that we had and planted this bloody great plant in the back yard.') The fairy godmother social worker opens her bag and brings out magical gifts for the children -- a coach and six white horses. The children step into it and wave to their mother. At this point the client is awakened from her dream by a knocking on the door : 'It's probably that bloody social worker again.' (The End).

Now the group have finished reading and start to discuss what they think the story is saying, while Christine listens and makes notes. Clearly, it is about the unrealistic expectations to which the social work profession is subjected. As though they could suddenly wave a wand and change clients' lives! And, anyway, what would happen if such dreams could be realised, since the client seems to have an excessively negative view of her children, and seems even to want them to vanish! Furthermore, the fairy godmother social worker is called Pandora, and her ability to produce limitless gifts from her capacious bag (like Mary Poppins) is actually very worrying, because when Pandora's box was opened, all the evils of mankind were let loose, leaving us only 'Hope'. So this seems to be a story about the dangers of unrealistic expectations on both sides: social workers' powers are limited and that is as it should be: professionals and clients are both liable to be misled by their 'dreams'. There is a lot of careful poring over the text to see what it actually says and a lot of serious discussion of the nature of the professional role -- as it is and as it is idealised -- as well as considerable laughter.

The two sessions on story writing came at the beginning of a course where the participants' main task was the compilation of a 'journal' of reflections on their professional work. The purpose of the story sessions was to broaden their sense of what might be important themes to look for in their own interpretations of events. The suggestion, the previous week, that they should write a fictional story based on their professional life had initially been greeted, as usual, with anxiety. They associated 'writing' with, on the one hand, producing a professional 'case report' or, on the other hand, an academic essay or perhaps making descriptive entries in a diary. The notion of a 'story' offered a somewhat worrying form of liberation from these familiar formats and often evoked distant but still powerful memories of not being 'good at' a school subject with the curious title 'English'. Writing 'stories', they had assumed, was either for children or for 'specialists' -- Jane Austen, perhaps, or Graham Greene, or Barbara Cartland.

Once upon a time (so the story goes) everyone used to be a story-teller. Every traveller, from nearby or from afar, was expected to have a tale to tell; personal experience was recreated and represented, shaped, framed and structured into performances for collective entertainment. And not only travellers: there was pleasure to be gained from celebrating the familiar -- anecdotes concerning local events and characters and myths embodying timeless patterns of experience. So stories were exchanged -- round the fire, in the shade of a tree, in the village inn, and in the

workshop; to pass the time on a journey (Chaucer's <u>Canterbury Tales</u>) or even while waiting for an outbreak of plague to abate (Boccaccio's <u>Decameron</u>). But, this story continues, that happy time is now past. The popular and universal art of story-telling has been extinguished by the passive habits of reading professionally published novels and watching the products of the film and TV industry. This is a popular myth of cultural decline, feeding the pleasures of nostalgia as we shake our heads lamenting lost arts, skills and forms of social relationship.

But there is another, contrasting story -- that the art of the story is alive and well. In the offices and canteens of workplaces, in the staffrooms of schools, colleges and universities; in pubs and parks, on beaches and round dinner tables; stories are told of the bizarre / comical / extraordinary / 'typical' / depressing / delightful behaviour of acquaintances, relatives, colleagues, bosses, customers, students, clients and patients. The specialisation of life in modern societies means that we are all travellers in realms unknown to some of our neighbours, while the mass media remind us endlessly of the themes which provide a framework of general significance both for public events and for individual experience: technological progress and social suffering, oppression and resistance, catastrophe and hope, glamour and sleaze, the investigation of wrong-doing and incompetence, and (above all) issues of justice and injustice. Moreover, our ancient ability to <u>tell</u> stories is now enhanced by our familiarity with the <u>written</u> narrative. And whereas the oral narrative has to have the simplicity and directness to be immediately understood there and then by the listener, the structure of the written text can be more complex and allusive, because it can be re-read, pondered at length, and analysed in the light of alternative interpretations.

A 'High Tech' version of this latter story is also gaining ground, in which stories are shared by Email or the Internet. At the press of a button or the click of a Mouse my story is transmitted to any number of readers, over any distance; and -- within minutes -- my printer is reeling off their various responses for me to ponder.

Hence the feasibility and the value of writing and sharing stories in a course aiming to develop a 'reflective' understanding of professional experience. The first time I tried out the idea, I shared the students' initial anxiety. Now, years later, I can respond to their worries by saying, confidently: 'You will be amazed at how "interesting" you find other people's stories and how interesting they will find yours. You will also be taken aback at the "quality" of the writing, although that will not be the point at issue because you will be discussing "non-judgementally" what the story seems to mean, what effect it has on you, its professional significance.'

Although the initial hesitancy is real, the responses afterwards are immediately enthusiastic. Here are the evaluative comments written by the group we have just been observing:

> * An excellent medium for exploring issues and dilemmas . . .for freeing up one's own thoughts and feelings, as well as gaining understanding of common problems.
> * The session drew out implicit feelings and values and made them explicit; acknowledged and identified professional feelings that could impede good professional practice; created an awareness of real issues that may have been dormant; a therapeutic experience.

* It was interesting to see the different interpretations that could be made from one piece of work - an interesting exercise in the need for awareness and openness to other options.'
* Enjoyable and creative - interesting to hear others' stories and their perspectives on our own story.
* All the creativity we hold within us - and so rare to get the chance to use it in the systems we are caught up in!
* I have in the past not considered writing to be a skill that I possess, certainly not this type of writing. Nevertheless, I felt freed up to write in a way I found to be very enjoyable and to my surprise it evoked reactions I did not expect. A powerful tool I may well introduce to others.

But so far we have only seen a single example of a practitioner's 'story', and there is a danger that this could leave a misleadingly narrow impression of the sort of work that is produced. One of the reasons for both the success of story-writing sessions, and also for the initial anxiety about it, is a sense of uncertainty about what might be meant by 'a story', and one of the points which is noted immediately in the group discussions is the enormous variety of forms that people use. Because a 'story' is not simply a narrative, and a 'fictional' story is not simply a narrative of 'imaginary' events which did not actually occur, but (as we have already noted) a portrayal of events, people, and scenes which has been consciously shaped and structured by the writer. And if there is a process of 'shaping' there is a purpose which guides the shaping. Thus, a 'story', in the work described in this book, means a piece of writing where the raw material of memory and imagination has been purposefully fashioned, moulded, selected, combined and edited, to give it (or bring out) a sense of its significance.

There are many ways in which this can be done, many ways in which we know already how it might be done, from our prior understanding of the structure of written texts . This variety, and our awareness of this variety, is important, because it explains why the instruction to write 'a story' or 'a fiction' is, after an initial worry, experienced as a freedom rather than a constraint. So to remind ourselves of some of the many ways in which 'a story' can be constructed, let us look at the variety of forms which members of this one group used, quite spontaneously, to shape their professional experience, to convey their sense of its significance; or, in other words, quite simply, to 'make a point'. In this way we will, I hope, get a broader sense of the the imaginative, creative, 'shaping' process which the rest of the book will explore in detail.

1. We have already seen Christine Dale's method: the conventional format of the dream as a way of contrasting reality with imaginary possibilities. She also builds her story round other stories that are already familiar - the three nursery tales, and the myth of Pandora, so that several sets of meanings are made to interweave.

2. 'Sam' by Esther Wilkins
Fitting in some necessary shopping at the end of an exhausting day, a health visitor finds a former client on the checkout who wishes to tell her about the progress of her little boy, Sam. Sam had been a sickly child and had been much indulged because he was 'special' although he and his mother also wanted him to be 'like the other boys'.

Now, his mother complains, he is extremely 'naughty', but is this because he is 'special', or --on the contrary -- because he is 'like the other boys'? However, the story is also about <u>boundaries</u> in the role of the community-based professional: does the narrator, the health-vistor, have to continue to be 'special', even at the supermarket checkout?

> (Esther sets the account of a former client as a memory or 'flashback' within the framework of an incident in the present, so that the two elements of the story are used to throw light on each other.)

3.   '<u>Timmy The Tiniest Coach' by Pam Jennings</u>
Written in the style of the popular children's stories about 'Thomas The Tank Engine', this story tells of Timmy the railway coach who everyday has to go either with Harold the Hightown Engine or with Lennie the Lakeside Engine, who 'were always arguing about who was going to pull him because he wasn't a bit heavy and told them stories and sang funny songs along the way the to make the journey go quicker'. Timmy never knows which engine he will have to go with each day, and he also wants to spend some time in the shed on his own, but the station-master is unsympathetic. In the end he refuses to move and gets his way, thanks to the intervention of the 'Chief Station Officer' who has a few words with the engine drivers and the station-master. The author, a social worker concerned with child protection, is suggesting that the needs and wishes of the child need to be taken into account in making care arrangements; and it is deeply worrying that Timmy has to resort to outright defiance and that the Chief Officer has to be brought in to the case.

> (Pam's method is that of 'allegory' - the apparent setting is 'fanciful' (a children's story in this case) but each detail can be 'read off' as referring to another, wholly serious reality.)

4.   '<u>Ignorance' by Naomi Ball</u>
Events in a maternity ward are narrated by a social worker who has just had her first child and is waiting anxiously to start to experience 'maternal' feelings. A teen-age girl with learning difficulties comes over to her to complain that when her baby is born it will be taken away by 'The Social'. When she leaves to go downstairs for a cigarette the middle class women in the neighbouring beds suggest complacently that 'people like that' ought to be sterilised. The narrator is dismayed at their ignorant prejudice, but then the teen-ager returns to introduce her parents to her newfound 'friend' and reaches over to pick up the narrator's baby son, and as she does so the story ends: 'I [the narrator / social worker] could feel my throat tighten and my back tense'. The maternal response has arrived at last, but provoked by the very prejudices (against the disadvantaged teen-ager) which she has just been criticising!   The contrast between personal feelings and professional values - a universal dilemma?

> (A sequence of events and conversations is contrived here so that the final 'punch-line' draws them all together and brings out the theme which links what had previously seemed to be unconnected feelings and relationships.)

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Here, then, are some of the manifold ways in which we know how to shape our experience by means of a written text conceived as 'a story'. It is not intended to be a comprehensive listing, just a note of the very different methods used by members of one typical group. (Further examples are given in Chapter Two.) It is also

presented as evidence that art of writing stories is indeed (as suggested earlier) alive, and well, and widespread, and thus available to be used as a tool for professional reflection.

CONSTRUCTING A 'PATCHWORK TEXT'

A story always moves towards an <u>ending</u>. Even though the ending is often ambiguous ('open-ended'), it still represents some sort of temporary 'closure' on a train of thought; the ending is, after all, very often the focus of the 'shaping' process at work. So the question is: how do we 're-open' the ending of a story, in order to <u>continue</u> the reflective exploration that the story has started? This leads to an important practical question: how can we put together a <u>course</u> of professional reflection in which the process of shaping experience through 'fiction' is continued over a period of several weeks? And our answer is: by constructing a '<u>patchwork</u> text'.

A 'patchwork text' may start from, or include, a story, but it includes a variety of different forms of writing, each of which provides a further perspective on the others. What defines a patchwork as an artistic medium is that its overall pattern is gradually assembled from smaller pieces, each of which has its own individual pattern. Thus, just as a patchwork fabric is a texture built from a variety of textures, and a design built up from a variety of sub-designs, a patchwork <u>text</u> is a fiction which is shaped at two levels, or twice over. Each piece is shaped in itself, but then there is the shaping of the overall meaning, as contrasting pieces of writing are assembled together, creating unity from the subtle parallels or stark contrasts between them. In the construction of a patchwork fabric this unified design is often planned from the outset, but sometimes each new segment is improvised, as in 'crazy patchwork' (Parker 1991 p. 34), where the unity and balance of the overall texture and design emerge gradually and even retrospectively.   It is this latter process which is mirrored in the patchwork texts produced for our Reflective Writing courses.

By way of introducing a further perspective on the concept of the patchwork text, here, to begin with, is a pleasant scene. A narrator is telling us a story -- sitting there in front of us and holding our attention -- creating for us through her words the people and events she is recounting. We hang on her words, and she transports us, portraying for us the world she describes with such skill (in selecting and presenting vivid and evocative details) that it seems to become a 'reality' -- she makes us feel that we are actually <u>there</u>. But then, to spoil this pleasant scene, a worry arises: is there not an element of falsity at work here? Because this is, after all, only her view of the story; its reality is a creation, not a description. So if we the readers come to accept this story as reality, then we are deceived; and if the story-teller is convinced by her own skill into thinking that her story is the only story, then she also is deceived. Then, to confuse matters further, here come the philosophers, telling us that there is no such thing as an accurate representation anyway; that all descriptions and narrations are <u>selective</u> --based on value judgements which can never be absolutely justified and which will be shared by some people but never by everyone. So, the argument runs, our narrator should not deceive us (and herself) by creating the illusion that this story is <u>the</u> story, but should make it clear (through the form of the narration) that there are <u>many possible</u> stories, that no story is ever the only story. Consequently, we should not think of narrators as encompassing an 'overall' perspective within a single

authoritative 'voice', and narrators should not think of themselves in this way. Instead, a narrative should recognise that it is <u>assembling</u> a variety of voices and perspectives into a 'multi-voiced' text, presenting contrasting points of view through the eyes and voices of different characters, as though they were contributing to a sort of documentary or as though they were actors in a drama.

Of course, the long tradition of the directly persuasive, single-voiced 'realistic' narrative is still very much with us. But the less familiar concept of the multi-voiced text (what we have called the 'patchwork text') has the merit of drawing attention directly to that essential process of fiction which makes it so appropriate a method for exploring the meanings of experience: collecting <u>different</u> aspects and interpretations of events and examining the relationships between them. Indeed, the argument for the value of the patchwork text could be made more strongly and more generally: its flexibility together with its essential characteristic of seeking a provisional unity within <u>varied</u> material make it in many ways a more 'natural' format for the presentation of complex understandings than the sustained analytical essay which has come to play such a dominant role in educational assessment processes. More precisely, whereas the analytical essay focuses exclusively on cognitive and logical skills (and thus favours the special talents of a minority) the patchwork text enables students <u>also</u> to draw on their imaginative, empathetic, affective and aesthetic modes of understanding, and thus takes more account of current theories of the general structure and distribution of human capacities (Gardner, 1983). Perhaps, therefore the patchwork text may be, in quite general terms, a more appropriate format for representing the complexity of understanding in a society which hopes to provide 'higher education' as an opportunity for the <u>majority</u> of its citizens.

So, how do participants in the Reflective Writing courses set about constructing a patchwork text? What happens is this. The course participants form small working groups of four or five members, which remain constant throughout the course. Each week everyone brings along several copies of a short piece of writing - a description, an account of an incident, a story, a poem, a dialogue (remembered or imagined) etc. To begin with, interpretations of the meaning of the piece are exchanged by the readers; but then further questions are raised. How might these events be portrayed from a different point of view? Or, what might be thought of as, perhaps, 'missing' from this piece of writing? Consequently, what is the next piece of writing going to be, which might explore this 'missing' dimension? In this way the group sharing process suggests to the participants how they might <u>continue</u> their writing and their reflections. The assignment submitted at the end of the course is a selection from the various pieces of writing, arranged in a sequence which may or may not be the order in which they were written, together with a final commentary which analyses the unifying theme(s) underlying the different pieces.

Here, as illustrations, are summaries and of two contrasting 'patchwork texts' produced within the Reflective Writing courses. The texts usually consist of five or six pieces of writing, each about a page or two pages long, sometimes with short linking commentaries. (Further examples, including longer extracts and complete texts, are presented in Chapter Three.)

Assessment: Dream or Reality? by Liz Morris

Liz Morris is a nursing sister with responsibility for the care of all the patients in one ward of a hospital.

1. The first piece in Liz's 'patchwork is called 'Dream Or Reality -- The Stroke'. John awakes in a strange environment and wonders where he is. He realises he is in hospital but he does not understand why and has no memory of how he got there. He tries to shout for help, but no words come. He tries to get out of bed to go home to find his wife,but finds that one of his legs will not function.

> when the nurses reached him his numb leg was trapped in the cot side and he was half hanging out of the bed. They untangled him and hurled him back up the bed.'You mustn't do that, Trevor,' they told him, 'You'll hurt yourself.' And then they went. John was left alone.

He goes to sleep hoping to wake and find it is all a dream When he wakes up and finds his wife there he thinks it was indeed a dream. But why is his wife weeping? 'He reached out to confort her but his arm would not move. [She] reached out to stroke his hand and he too began to cry . . .'

2. The next piece is called 'Dream or Reality -- 5.30'. A nurse awakes and sees her alarm clock showing 5.30. The beginning of another hectic day. A dizzying round of endless work is described 'with two staff off sick and no help available'. Suddenly:

> . . . . she noticed one of the patients climbing over the cotsides. 'Oh no,' she thought, 'Not geriatric gymnastics, not now!' Quickly she called for help and deftly put him back to bed. 'You mustn't do that, Trevor,' she said, wincing slightly as she recalled he preferred to be called John. Still that wasn't important right now, she had other priorities.

Exhausted, she falls asleep and then wakes to find her alarm clock showing 5.30. Thinking that the day has not yet begun she is relieved at the thought that it had all been a dream. But then she realises that the time is 5.30 in the afternoon, and that it has <u>not</u> been a dream.

3. Then there is a 'Commentary' in which Liz draws attention to the acute shortage of resources in hospitals: nurses are over-stretched and cannot offer the care they know they ought to provide, so that the emotional needs of patients like John go unrecognised. Medical care has become 'a consumer-led industry' with managers always 'on the look out for increased productivity from less staff'. Indeed an important report on health service management has just been compiled by the chief executive of Sainsburys, a nationwide chain of <u>foodstores!</u>

4. This leads on to the fourth piece of writing: 'The Sainsbury's Guide to Good Management -- A Recipe For Success?'

<u>Take</u>	A few tired harrassed nurses
<u>Add</u>	Large quantities of patients (The difficult demanding variety are best.)
<u>Mix Well</u>	

Now, in another pot

Take   One political party with fresh, new and unpalatable ideas

Remove   All evidence of cash flow

Blend Well

Gradually   Chill public perception of the service

And   Allow all negative emotions to be displayed attractively
            throughout the national press.

Finally Mix all these ingredients together and simmer gently,
            never allowing them to come to the boil.

Sit Back

Relax

Enjoy

5. In the final piece of her patchwork, Liz analyses the implications of the previous pieces of writing and provides an overall comentary on the problem of managing a hospital ward. She also notes that although the individual pieces convey rather negative messages she actually believes that the situation contains an 'exciting' opportunity for nurses to respond actively and positively. The crucial challenge is how to balance optimism and pessimism.

It is interesting that Liz finds that the 'Dream / Reality' theme which evokes very directly the patent's vulnerability in the first piece has a resonance for the wider situation, and uses it for her general title. Medical practice, and management decision-making are both forms of 'Assessment': are they perhaps both currently based on 'Dreams' and delusions, such as the supposed parallel between nursing and the production and marketing of food? Both this example and the next show how the fictional process of the patchwork text combines imaginary scenes and events with factual analytical writing. But we should not forget that this is true of fiction in general, and very obviously so in some cases, e.g. the whole of the science fiction genre, the many passages of historical analysis in the novels of George Eliot, and (to take a modern example) the extended accounts of the physics of ice and snow formations in Peter Hoeg's novel Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow.

Viewpoints on Behaviour Therapy, by Matthew Stewart

Matthew Stewart is a 'forensic' nurse working in a special hospital for patients whose mental health problems render them dangerous to others and / or who have committed violent offences. 'Behaviour therapy' is a controversial form of treatment based on theories of 'conditioning' in the training of animals.

1. Matthew's first piece has the punning title 'Personal Effects'. In the first section the abstract, 'kindly' voice of 'behaviour therapy' speaks:

I can change your behaviour, make you a better person, loved (or at least tolerated) by Society. I can mould your behaviour like a potter working his clay . . . .Of course it may take time and a little bit of hard work, but a myriad of our animal cousins have pulled levers, escaped from boxes, negotiated

mazes and salivated into jars to demonstrate the valdity of my claims. Give it a try. There's nothing to lose, is there?

In the second section a patient replies:

> I don't want to change. I don't give a damn if I'm loved or tolerated. . . .Who are you to decide what I should or should not do? Who are you to steal from me a part of <u>my</u> individuality, to steal that which helps make me me. I don't want to give it a try; there's plenty to lose, not least my very identity.

2. The second piece is an imaginary interview which brings out the powerful prejudices and emotions of the 'average citizen'. Although the self-righteous anger is shocking, there is no mistaking its insidious appeal:

> When I think of some of the things they've done it makes my blood boil. I know what I'd do with them . . . .lock them up for good as far away from civilisation as we can find. Otherwise they just get let out and the next thing you know another self-respecting citizen drops dead with some nutter's knife in his back. The Victorians weren't daft: lock them away in a nice big building with high walls and let normal people get on with their lives with one less worry on their minds. . .
>
> <u>Would you be in favour then of some form of treatment based on punishment?</u>
>
> Well that seems to me a much more logical approach. For a start that's the way the world works: you do something wrong, you face the consequences. . . Whereas you guys set up an environment which bears no resemblance to reality. In fact it turns the real world on its head. Instead of sending someone to prison and punishing them you take them off to your little holiday camp and say, 'Here's twelve quid a week; take care how you spend it'.
>
> <u>What about the research that suggests that punishment is not effective?</u>
>
> Bollocks.

3. Next comes an imaginary interview with 'A Psychologist':

> <u>What do you think of behaviour therapy?</u>
>
> Well, when I was studying I didn't believe in its use at all; but since working here and seeing how effectively it works in a lot of cases I think it certainly must have a place. . . .
>
> <u>Do you really get consent or do you just bribe people with a suitable reward?</u>
>
> It's the same thing really. We offer a reward and the client chooses to either have his reward, by not displaying a targeted behaviour, or chooses to forfeit that reward and instead display the behaviour. Voila: consent.

4. The next 'interview', with 'A Liberal and Enlightened Citizen', picks up the moral ambiguity just revealed by the psychological rationale:

> It's a difficult one. I mean, where do you stop? . . .You're changing the way someone acts, thinks even, against their will. . . . The fact that, in some cases, it works is not really the issue. If someone displayed a problem behaviour, picking their nose for instance, a simple and <u>very</u> effective approach to

eradicate the problem would be double amputation somewhere above the wrists. Effectiveness, therefore, I trust you agree, is not necessarily a justification.

5. The next piece presents the point of view of 'A Nurse', who recognises the potential value of the treatment but expresses reservations. It can easily be over-used, leading to treatment programmes which ignore the 'possible causes of challenging behaviour'. Some forms of behaviour offend some sections of society but don't necessarily affect a person's ability to function. So 'who decides what we use it for? Who plays God, if you like.'

6. Having thus displayed a variety of perspectives on the issue, with all their, sometimes frightening ambiguities, crudities and contradictions, Matthew's final piece is his own analysis, drawing on some of the current literature on the subject and arguing that treatment policy must 'steer a course between the polarised views of the persons from the earlier passages'. (This final image seems particularly appropriate, since Matthew's patchwork text has used the format of a series of imaginary interviews to draw up a sort of moral, cultural and intellectual 'chart' of this difficult topic.)

* * * * * * *

So, we have had a brief preliminary glimpse at the two sorts of work that this book will describe -- the use of a single 'story' and the use of patchwork texts where imaginary scenarios are continued, analysed and contrasted with other scenarios . But there is already a substantial tradition of work under the label of 'Reflective Writing', with which many readers may be familiar. So how do the ideas presented here relate to this tradition? To answer this question, and thus to complete our Introduction, let us briefly consider how the two approaches we have just outlined relate to, differ from, and expand upon other more familiar forms of writing frequently used to promote 'reflection' on professional experience.

WRITING FICTIONS AS A CONTRIBUTION TO 'METHODS' FOR REFLECTION

The publication of Schon's The Reflective Practitioner in 1983 was followed by several other highly influential books also emphasising the personal, experiential, explorative and -- above all -- the reflective nature of professional understanding; in particular: Boud et. al. 1985, Brookfield 1990, Mezirow et. al. 1990, Schon 1987, and Tripp 1993. But although these texts (and others influenced by them) frequently invoke the term 'artistic' along with their basic terminology of critical reflection and re-interpretation of experience, they do not include the artistic, imaginative shaping of experience through the writing of fiction among their basic repertoire of activities. Our argument, in contrast, is that the operation of the artistic imagination through the writing of fiction can be understood, precisely, as a mode of critical reflection upon, and re-interpetation of, experience.   This section will therefore review briefly the basic activities proposed in the seminal texts listed above in order to consider how the process of writing and sharing fiction would complement and enrich them.

Keeping A Journal

This is the basic process for capturing the details of experience. When Walker (1985) elaborates what he calls the 'diversity' of forms of 'writing as an aid to reflection' he gives the following list: 'journals, diaries, record books, portfolios, verbatims, sociological diaries, dossiers, and logs' (p. 52). (See, also, Cameron, 1993: 'Reflective peer journals: developing authentic nurses'.) However, what is common to all these formats, with the possible exception of the 'sociological diary', is the absence of an explicit awareness of the process of <u>shaping</u> experience through selection and interpretation. Each journal entry <u>is</u> of course selected and shaped, but the fragmentary and chronological structure of the journal as a format means that it does not, in itself, help us become aware of <u>how</u> we have selected and shaped -- nor, therefore, of the alternative selections and shapings that might be worth considering. In contrast, if one's 'reflective' writing is basically conceived as a form of 'fictional shaping', then entries in a journal are considered as a set of possible components of a 'patchwork text', constructed consciously to raise issues by placing discordant elements side by side and thereby pointing directly to ambiguities and alternatives in need of clarification.

Writing In Order To <u>Structure</u> Experience

Walker's mention of a 'sociological' diary suggests, implicitly at least, a recognition that reflection needs a guiding structure. Other examples of this from the 'reflective practitioner' texts are: the analysis of parallel experiences and options (Boxer 1985), the analysis of metaphors as a way of linking specific experiences to general cultural themes (Deshler 1990), and the use of repertory grids to make explicit one's assumptions and values (Candy 1990; Gould 1996). Heron presents the process in general terms as: description followed by conceptualisation, considering alternatives and seeking theoretical explanations (Heron 1985, pp. 136-7). More precisely, instructions are often given for writing a 'critical incident', which moves from 'what happened' through personal analysis (What did I feel? What was I trying to achieve?) and analysis of alternatives (What other choices did I have?) to analysis of learning (Bulman, 1994, p. 136). Broadly similar instructions are given by David Tripp, with the addition of a final phase in which one is asked to 'classify' the incident in terms of theoretical categories (Tripp, 1993, p. 27).

The limitations of these approaches is that the basic method seems to be a form of unassisted self-questioning, a purely 'rational' mode of introspection with no procedures for tapping into one's <u>imaginative</u> resources. And, unlike the process of writing a story and collecting different readings of it, or building up a patchwork text from a series of contrasts and reflection on those contrasts, these methods do not involve consciously shaping the original representation of the experience. It is therefore not clear how the initial description will provoke the recognition of alternative interpretations. Our argument here, in other words, is that although we agree wholeheartedly with the objectives proposed by these writers, we think that the methods they propose are 'difficult', and that if, instead, writing fiction is the starting point for the work, it is more likely that course participants will easily come across a line of thought that they did not initially have in mind.

<u>Sharing</u> Interpretations Of Experience

The general notion that reflection is facilitated by sharing accounts of experiences is emphasised in Main's (1985) account of co-operative learning strategies and Candy et. al.'s (1985) description of 'learning conversations'. More specifically, both Brookfield's and Tripp's approaches to critical incident analysis recognises the limitations of introspection. Tripp emphasises that incidents must be written with an audience in mind, since the knowledge that one is writing for others creates 'the discipline of anticipating what others would need to know, how they might react, what they might criticise' (Tripp 1993, p. 44). For Brookfield, the point of reflecting upon critical incidents is to expose one's assumptions, and he asks practitioners to describe an incident to a group of colleagues, who then suggest what assumptions (about 'good practice') are embedded in the writer's presentation (Brookfield, 1990).

Again, we would argue that where the accounts being shared are presented as 'fictional' stories, a specific <u>freedom</u> is provided for readers to bring their own interpretations to bear on the text; the 'open-ness' with which a story conveys its meaning anticipates and welcomes alternative readings in a way that an analytical description does not. As Bruner says:

> Fiction places events in a wider 'horizon' of possibilities. . . . Skilful narrative . . . . highlights subjective states, attenuating circumstances, alternative possibilities. . . .To make a <u>story</u> good, it would seem, you must make it somewhat uncertain, somehow open to variant readings.
> (Bruner 1990, pp. 53-4)

The fictional format thus provides an immediate creative <u>opportunity</u> for the reader, and it also provides <u>protection</u> for the writer. The ambiguity of a story means that there is uncertainty as to where the writer stands in relation to the text. Discussion about the meaning of the text does not, therefore, put the writer 'in the dock', whereas writing a descriptive account of one's practice and then awaiting others' views as to its underlying assumptions (as Brookfield proposes) is potentially highly threatening. The same potential emotional danger is present in the process of video-taping role-plays for interpretation by a group of peers (Moffat, 1996). In contrast, the relative <u>safety</u> of sharing a fictional story (as opposed to a descriptive account) has been specifically noted by participants in our fiction-based workshops and Reflective Writing courses, often with surprise and relief.

Autobiography

In some respects, autobiography as a format can have the same limitation as the journal, namely that it lacks a clear principle for <u>structuring</u> experience. It might thus be treated as an opportunity for 'recalling' events, i.e. providing 'data' which then require analysing. But then, where would one look for the <u>themes</u> to use as a basis for this analysis, so that it could gain a different perspective from the one already embodied in the descriptive recall? An external researcher can do so quite easily, of

course, but this reduces writers of autobiographies to mere providers of data, instead of being theorists of their own lives (Grumet 1990, p. 324).

Moreover, insofar as reflection is, in part, a process of collaborative learning, rather than an entirely private process, the use of autobiographical writing is also beset by the danger of emotional risk already noted above. Powell (1985) gives only minimal recognition to the problem, identifying the need for 'a climate of trust' (p. 49). Peter Abbs, in contrast, presents the difficulties clearly:

> In certain students' autobiographies, we detect a nervous evasiveness, an unwillingness to step into dangerous territory, a complex detour around some massively silent obstacle. This must be accepted and respected.
>
> (Abbs 1974, p. 9)

Or, as Madeleine Grumet puts it, 'Every telling is a partial prevarication.' (Grumet, 1987 p. 322).

The question, then, for autobiogaphical writing, is: how does one balance the need for emotional safety against the educational purpose of going beyond one's starting points? A fictional story also may well be, in many ways, a partial prevarication, which is why readers' interpretations can often tell writers something they themselves had not 'noticed'. But a fictional story does not necessarily need to be written with self-protection in mind -- as Abbs implies is often the case with autobiography. On the contrary, its status as a product of imagination means that writing a fiction sets us free -- to range over the possibilities implicit in our experience, secure in the knowledge that no-one will be able to 'pin down' any particular motive, opinion or action as that of the author.

* * * * *

Finally, it is important to note that these various approaches can be combined with the 'fiction-based' approach described in this book. A brief indication of how such a combination might work, based on our own experiences, is provided at the end of chapter four.

CONCLUSION

This brings us to the end of our introductory outline. We have presented our basic argument -- that current forms of writing in courses intended to foster the reflective analysis of experience have ignored the great educational potential locked in our creative capacity for writing 'fictions' -- either in the form of stories or more complex 'patchwork texts'. We have given a preliminary indication of what practitioners' fictions are like, and of their value as explorations of professional practices and understandings. And we have indicated how such forms of writing would both enrich and facilitate the writing activities conventionally undertaken. Clearly, we have raised a host of questions and so far given only the sketchiest of answers to a very few of them. What is the general rationale for writing and sharing fictions as a mode of reflection on professional practice? What is the relationship between educational processes, imaginative creation, and the interpretation of imaginative representations

of experience? What is the relation between 'fictional' accounts and 'factual' accounts of experience, between the particular and the general, and (most importantly) between 'imagination', 'reflection' and the development of professional knowledge? These questions are examined in detail in chapter seven. But on the whole our book is organised to enable the work produced by the course participants to speak for itself; so the next two chapters present a wealth of examples -- firstly (in chapter two) of stories and then (in chapter three) of patchwork texts. We hope that these examples will begin at least to provide support for the arguments and claims that have been put forward so far.