The Trajectory of Reflective Writing

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My examples come from:

- A PDP subcorpus of BAWE
- 94 Business School internship reports

= 153 files - 49,466 words
The essayist tradition

- **logic** over emotion; **academic truth** (published theory and research) over personal experience; **linearity** over circularity; **explicitness** .... over evocation; **closing down of possible meanings** rather than open-endedness; **certainty** over uncertainty; **formality** over informality; **competitiveness** over collaboration.

(Lillis, 2001)
Reflective practice

• logic v. emotion;
• academic truth v. personal experience;
• linearity v. circularity;
• explicitness v. evocation;
• closing down of meanings v. open-endedness;
• certainty v. uncertainty;
• formality v. informality;
• competitiveness v. collaboration.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vertical</th>
<th>Horizontal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scientific</td>
<td>Artistic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>Accessible</td>
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<td>Rational</td>
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<td>Objective</td>
<td>Subjective</td>
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<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>Communal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>Local</td>
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Sense v. Sensibility

• “Exposition ..... takes difference as a point of departure and reasons towards consensus” – A quest for truth, unfolding as logic

• “Stories are about shared feeling. We tell stories to people we believe will react to them the way we do” – A community-building activity, unfolding as rhetoric.
# Story Genres

(Martin 2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recount</td>
<td>Unproblematic</td>
<td>Running commentary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anecdote</td>
<td>Unexpected disruption</td>
<td>Emotional empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplum</td>
<td>Noteworthy incident</td>
<td>Moral judgement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Complication resolved</td>
<td>Building and release of tension</td>
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Reflections as ‘narratives of personal experience’

Stages:

- Complicating action – the problem
- Evaluation
- Resolution
- Coda (returning to present from narrative past)

Labov & Waletzky (1967)
Donald Schön’s “swampy lowlands”

“In the varied topography of professional practice, there is the high, hard ground overlooking the swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution.”

(Schön 1987: 1)
Reflective writing has to indicate participation in the reflective cycle - showing recognition of “messy, confusing problems”
Not too slick

Because (from an academic assessor’s perspective) ......

‘tidying up uncertain situations and unassociated ideas may be indicative of a failure to deal with the complexity of the world, and a desire to assert the self, rather than reveal/discover it’

Evans (2007:75)

•
BUT AT THE SAME TIME.....

Reflective writing has to elicit the reader’s sympathy and present the writer in a good light (in preparation for the job market)
A delicate balance

between the high ground and the swamp
How do writers achieve this?

• by acknowledging and then appearing to resolve uncertain situations (narrative structure)
• by using emotive language to establish empathy
• by shifting responsibility for any serious problems
Linguistically, they employ:

“the semantic resources used to negotiate emotions, judgements, and valuations, alongside resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations”

(Martin, 2000: 145)

(engagement = modality and related systems)
APPRAISAL systems

- **Probability, possibility, obligation** (MODALITY)
- **Emotion** (AFFECT) - fear, desire, unhappiness, insecurity, dissatisfaction
- **Ethics** (JUDGEMENT) - normality, capacity, tenacity
- **Aesthetics** (APPRECIATION) - reaction, composition, valuation
Complications resolved

I have now completed a year’s work experience at Cowley Manor hotel, and feel I have developed as a person. Moving into the world of full time work after my first year at university was quite a shock. The first few weeks were busy with me settling into a new job and new town. I soon discovered that I enjoyed the set routine that comes with a full time job and knowing that time outside work was my own.
Complications resolved

.......this internship has prove me that I can perform a successful market research and develop an online marketing campaign for an organisation, with not much help....... Even though I said above that the campaign was not working well, I was able to identify the mistake, amend them, and finally develop a good campaign which will be useful for the organisation in the future to expand their market and attract new customers.
## Modal 4-grams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Count 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I WAS ABLE TO</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WILL BE ABLE TO</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>I WILL BE ABLE</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I WOULD LIKE TO</td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I WILL REFLECT ON</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I WILL TRY TO</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE WERE ABLE TO</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WE WERE GOING TO</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>HOPE TO BE ABLE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>I CAN NOW SEE</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>I WAS GOING TO</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT WOULD HAVE BEEN</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOULD BE INTERESTING TO</td>
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Engagement - modality
‘I should have’ with excuses

• Personally, I have to admit that, because of the fact that I lacked the practice that input and output offers to a learner, I should have invested more time and effort to the learning process.

• This was due to poor communication between the Chef Trainer and I. I should have been told about the quick lunch, but equally I had heard that the quick lunch menu was on, so I should have asked who prepared it.
Disguised agency to avoid self-blame

• Ideally it would have been beneficial to record the interview on a camcorder.

• Also at the beginning of the interview it would have been better to state how long it was likely to last.

• There are still lots of areas that are greatly lacking, some for lack of resources, some because they should have been done earlier in the project.
Sharing the blame - ‘we should have’

- This was possibly an issue we should have addressed early in order to maintain some professionalism and structure to the group.
- In hindsight we should have mentioned the noise levels during our interview.
- A customer didn't want caraway seeds on their carrots, but all the portions had been made with caraway seeds. We should have considered that a customer may not like caraway seeds.
1st person and positive AFFECT for feelings the reader might approve of....

• This assignment has left me with a genuine interest [AFFECT: satisfaction +] in the area of international strategies and strategic thinking, which I would like to explore further [AFFECT: inclination +]

• Posting on fora is not something I tend to do, but it was strangely enjoyable
Ist person and negative AFFECT for feelings the reader might sympathise with....

• I was a bit nervous [AFFECT: security -: disposition] because we were the first group to go, and I felt slightly disadvantaged [AFFECT: security -: disposition]

• I was upset [AFFECT: unhappiness: disposition] that the person who was supposed to work on that aspect didn’t look into it...

• I found it very frustrating [AFFECT: satisfaction -: disposition] that she didn't contribute to group communications

• Joe was in charge of the finances; Ben was all over the Design. Apart from this, the other two didn't really do much. I was quite disappointed [AFFECT: satisfaction -] that they wouldn't get more involved.

• I was not satisfied [AFFECT: satisfaction -: disposition] by how I handled myself during that meeting. I felt as though I should have fought away my nervousness [AFFECT: security -: disposition] and contributed more during the meeting.
BUT when the feeling does not reflect well on the writer....

**AFFECT** (the expression of emotion)
tends to become institutionalised as

**JUDGEMENT** (evaluation of behaviour)
or **APPRECIATION** (expression of taste)
APPRECIATION or JUDGEMENT instead of AFFECT

• One area I found difficult [APPRECIATION: composition-] was that sometimes too much was expected of me [JUDGEMENT: capacity -] in terms of my ability

• I feel the interview also gave us an opportunity to build on our team building skills and organisational skills. I however, feel that I am a very independent person [JUDGEMENT: normality +] and I work better on my own. Yet within this profession it's not possible to work on my own and so it has helped me [APPRECIATION: valuation +] to try and improve my skills and confidence of working within a group and learning to listen to other people's opinions
Disguised agency and JUDGEMENT

• It is not envisaged that any specification changes would be necessary, but it is possible (as the author has little previous experience in these areas) that the time required has been underestimated [JUDGEMENT: capacity -] and therefore that these phases may take longer than anticipated
APPRECIATION

One area that I feel I failed to enjoy or get anything from this term is the book review sessions [APPRECIATION: reaction -]. When reflecting on this it is because I found the objectives of the book reviews fairly obscure [APPRECIATION: composition-] and was unsure [AFFECT: insecurity] whether the focus should be on critiquing the ideas put forth, the writing style used or the format of the text.
Engagement- modality: enthusiasm for the future

• I have spent 10 sessions in each section. They have taught me lessons that I will be able to use in the future, in my career in the hospitality industry.

• I hope that in future I will be able to creatively engage in professional work

• I am acutely aware of the increased expectations of third year students and the impending expectations of qualifying and hope that by focusing on a personal characteristic I feel needs attention I will be able to develop both personally and professionally.
References


