Reading Fiction as a Learning Activity in Clinical Psychology Education: Students' Perspectives

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The use of fictional literature as "case studies" in psychology education has a potential to support students' learning in various ways. To further the understanding of such applications of fiction, we investigated how clinical psychology students perceived reading fiction as a learning activity. The participants saw benefits for their clinical training, theoretical understanding, and self-awareness. They also saw use of fiction in their education as predominantly beneficial for their learning environment. How the present findings support our understanding of fiction as an educational device is discussed in light of previous studies about the potential of fiction in higher education.

Reading fictional literature can be a way of learning about the world and the human condition – a claim explicated by Schick (1982) and empirically confirmed by, for example, Marsh, Butler, and Umanath (2012). An aspect of this is the use of fiction for educational purposes. In this study, we investigate how clinical psychology students perceive reading fiction as a learning activity, and what they feel they learn by reading fiction. The frame of reference is the use of fiction in higher education, in particular within the field of medical humanities.

Fiction in Education and Clinical Practice

It has been argued that engagement with the arts and humanities might increase health professionals' capacity to empathically listen to patients and help them to understand and handle their own reactions to others so that their emotions can support rather than hinder engagement with patients (e.g., Charon, 2001; Lewis, 2011). Rolfe (2002) argued both that health professionals need the capacity to identify with their clients on an affective level and that this capacity might be increased through reading fiction. Such reading experiences can provide an understanding of others that is unobtainable in scientifically oriented texts. This perspective has been termed *medical humanities* (e.g., Charon, 2001; Chiapperino & Boniolo, 2014). In line with this, there is an increasing interest in using fictional literature in the education of health professionals, particularly medical students.

The educational approach to medical humanities was defined by Graham et al. (2016, p. 1334-1335) "as an activity that might improve empathy in medical students by fostering skills such as the interpretation of narratives and the ability to manage situations where there is no single correct answer." Use of fictional literature is perhaps the most common way of including arts and humanities in higher education, but as Ousager and Johannessen (2010) noted, few studies have investigated the assumption that fictional literature

improves medical students' and practitioners' clinical skills. Yet, some compelling examples exist. Peters, Greenberger-Rosovsky, Crowder, Block and Moore (2000) found that almost ten years after graduation from Harvard Medical School, physicians who had been educated in humanistic-oriented medicine felt more prepared to handle patients' psychosocial difficulties than did physicians who had engaged in traditional medical education. Moreover, while it is known that empathy tends to decrease during medical education, studies have shown that empathy among medical students who engaged in a medical humanities course did not decrease as much as it did among students in traditional medical education, and the engagement with humanities improved capacity for communication and cooperation (e.g., Arntfield, Slesar, Dickson, & Charon, 2013; Graham et al. 2016; Mangione et al., 2018). Fictional literature can also support theoretical understanding, and Voss (2012) argued that well-chosen fictional descriptions of diseases could supplement scientific literature and clinical training to increase our understanding of neurological disorders.

A Wider Perspective on the Use of Fiction

It should be acknowledged that medical humanities is just one of the disciplines that show how reading fiction might improve empathy, the capacity to understand others, and the capacity to imagine oneself in situations that differs from previous and current experiences. Marsh and colleagues (2012) reviewed studies showing that when fictional literature and other fictional sources such as movies are integrated into education, learners increase their capacity to connect pieces of information and achieve a holistic understanding in ways not observed when textbooks alone are used. Pérez, Linde, Molas-Castells and Fuertes-Alpiste (2018) found that criminology students, who had been reading novellas as part of their education, reported improvement in their understanding

of concepts. Kidd and Castano (2013) found that reading fictional literature improved readers' ability to understand others' mental states. Furthermore, Djikic and Oatley (2014) argued that reading fiction supports personal development. Also, in the fields of both leadership education and business, the use of fiction have helped students to understand ethics and develop their empathy, as well as encouraging students to reconceptualize taken-for-granted assumptions (Hoggan & Cranton, 2014; Michaelson, 2016). On the other hand, Marsh et al. (2012) acknowledged the risk that fictional sources might include misleading information and errors that might be taken as facts, and they stressed that students' reactions to fictional sources are heterogeneous and complex. Accordingly, it is difficult to show direct connections between the use of fictional literature and specific goals in the curriculum.

Fiction in Psychology Education

The capabilities that can be augmented through reading fiction, according to the cited literature, are also relevant to clinical psychology education. Here, Moghaddam (2004) argued for the use of fiction in psychology education (see also Mills, 2006). It can also be argued that fiction may be even more important in psychology education than in medical education: lacking the physiological measures central to medicine, psychologists encounter clients in complex situations with ambiguous information and a need for interpretation, making the ability to understand concepts and relate complex descriptions of reality to theoretical models central to the clinical psychologist's education (e.g., Erikson & Erlandson, 2015). However, there are few studies of the integration of fictional literature into clinical psychology education. An exception is Janit, Hammock, and Richardson (2011), who found that students in a course on abnormal psychology increased their understanding of the subject by reading fictional narratives as case studies, to which they applied the theories and concepts they were learning. Deering (2018) found similar benefits associated with the use of fictional literature when teaching crisis intervention (see also Pérez et al., 2018).

The influence of literary quality on readers' personal development has been studied within experimental psychology. It has been shown that content alone does not explain the influence that has been observed, and that the literary quality of the text is important (Djikic, Oatley, Zoeterman & Peterson, 2009; Mar, Oatley, Hirsh, dela Paz, & Peterson, 2006). However, the question of literary quality goes beyond the scope of this study.

One benefit of fictional literature is that traditional case studies are written with the aim to illustrate some particular points from a particular theoretical angle,

whereas a fictional text usually is less focused, thus, requiring students to assume responsibility for identifying the theoretically relevant aspects (e.g., Michaelson, 2016). This difference between fiction and traditional case studies concerns a general feature of clinical psychology education: the clinical psychologist is constantly confronted with situations where there are no clear answers or where patients' narratives are incoherent or infused with strong emotional reactions, which are more often than not the reason the patient is seeing the psychologist.

Fictional literature often offers existential dilemmas without solutions: dilemmas that also characterize clinical psychological practice in which there are seldom clear or perfect solutions, and the professional task is to find a solution that is individually framed and good enough (e.g., Hammarström, 2016; Punzi & Hagen, 2017; Topor, Böe, & Larsen, 2018). Therefore, findings suggesting that fictional literature can help students to increase their capacity to handle complex information and reach holistic understanding, as reviewed by Marsh et al. (2012), have direct bearing on clinical psychology education. Particularly relevant to psychology education is Rolfe's (2002) claim that fictional literature is a potential device when teaching future health professionals to understand their clients on an affective level. This is also in line with a current trend in clinical practice and research where there is a prominent focus on emotional reactions and regulation in assessment and treatment interventions representing various theoretical perspectives (e.g., Berking et al., 2018; Mathiesen et al., 2015; Mlotek & Paivio, 2017). It is important to note that fictional characters are not restricted to the role of 'patients', but might also become positive role models for students, as shown by Hoggan and Cranton (2014).

Many of the capabilities supported by reading fiction are related to what is usually discussed in terms of critical thinking, such as the ability to proceed with caution when conclusions must be drawn from complex and conflicting information. Accordingly, Peters et al. (2000) argued that reading fiction could support students' development of critical thinking (see also Hoggan & Cranton, 2014). Whereas critical thinking is one of the more enigmatic concepts in higher education, it is hardly controversial to want students to develop critical thinking abilities in line with what Ennis (1993, p. 180) described as "reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do" in relation to their professional capabilities. Here, critical thinking is also a matter of understanding and accepting the uncertainty of knowledge claims, a vital aspect of higher education going back to the early 19th century and the educational ideals of Wilhelm von Humboldt (e.g., von Humboldt, 1970).

A way of framing the benefits of reading fiction is the possibility of confronting the unexpected and challenging features of human life under educational

conditions where they can be discussed and placed in a context. The need for such confrontations, whether promoted by the use of fiction or not, was accentuated by Barnett (2011, p. 124), who wrote: "It is the university's direct responsibility to bring students to confront accounts of the world that are new to those students. It is the university's implicit responsibility, therefore, to disturb the students with strangeness." Biesta (2005), supporting this view, saw development of knowledge as a reaction to challenges, disturbance, and even irritation, and then went so far as to describe it as a violent dimension to education, which for us includes helping students to develop both "knowing what" and "knowing how". We submit that all university students have the right to receive an education with such disturbing elements that will push them out of their comfort zones (see also Erikson, 2019a). For psychology students this must be done in a way that prepares them for a profession in which emotional challenges are an everyday occurrence. Therefore, the case for reading fiction as part of the training to be a psychologist is definitely not a matter of romantic expectations about aesthetic experiences or of promoting personal development per se. The clinical psychology student must confront the aspects of human desires and human interaction that can appear strange or repulsive and that must be familiar ground for a clinician (e.g., Punzi, 2016; Shalev & Yerushalmi, 2009) or for anyone who encounters individuals with extraordinary experiences in their professional practice. The case for reading fiction is that it can help students to confront, understand, and respect the complexity of the human condition, provided the fictional examples are selected and used with a clear pedagogical idea that leads students in such a direction. Thus, setting assignments that involve students reading fiction implies a dual responsibility: pushing the students outside their comfort-zones and doing so in a way that supports their development (see, e.g., Erikson, 2019a, for a further discussion of such responsibilities).

However, whereas these arguments suggest that students benefit from reading fiction as part of their education, students' motivation to engage with such tasks depends on the extent to which they see the potential benefits associated with such learning activities. Despite the compelling arguments for using fictional literature in clinical psychology education, we know little about how students themselves perceive reading fiction as a learning activity. Accordingly, the purpose of the present study is to investigate how clinical psychology students perceive reading fiction as a learning activity and what they feel they learn by reading fiction. The findings from the study, together with the educational theory reviewed, can help in developing use of fiction as an educational device to support learning. Given that psychology covers a wide range of theoretical traditions, concerned with various levels of

analysis, use of fictional literature might have different functions in different contexts of psychology education.

Method

Participants

In total, 109 students participated. They studied in a 5-year clinical psychology program at a Swedish university to gain a professional education required to become a licenced psychologist. The first five semesters of the programme constitute the pre-clinical part. During the sixth semester, students practice in clinical settings. The participants in the present study were currently in their second year of education and thus in the pre-clinical part.

The data were collected over a period of three semesters, thus involving students from three different admission waves. Each semester, the students were divided into three seminar groups. Thus, nine seminar groups participated. The first semester, the group consisted of 33 students (23 women). The group from the second semester consisted of 43 students (32 women), and the group from the third semester consisted of 33 students (23 women). The gender distribution is representative of Swedish clinical psychology education (Centrum för rättvisa, 2009).

Procedure

During a course in cognitive psychology, a lecture was given on cognitive models of motivation that included a presentation of the concept of possible selves (conceptions of self in future situation, e.g., Erikson, 2019b; Markus & Nurius, 1986). The lecture was followed by a seminar during which the data collection took place. In preparation for the seminar, the students were asked to read the first part of the novel *Doctor Glas* by Swedish author Hjalmar Söderberg (1869-1941), which would be used in a discussion of the possible selves distinguishable in the fictional characters.

The novel, originally published in 1905, is written as a diary (available in English translation; Söderberg, 2002). The students read the first 1800 words which cover the first two days of the diary and which present the doctor's initial reflections on his private and professional life. Doctor Glas is presented as a lonely man with anxieties and occasional strong emotional reactions, in particular regarding his animosity not only against a clergyman, Reverend Gregorius, whom the doctor encounters in both social and professional settings, but also against female patients seeking abortion (which was illegal at the time). The book caused a huge controversy in Sweden when it was originally published because the doctor eventually murders Reverend Gregorius. However, the latter part

of the narrative, in which the murder occurred, was not included in the part read by the students.

The text was chosen for the course because the doctor's reflections about himself, as well as the other characters' behavior and reactions, can be analyzed in terms of the construct of possible selves, making it useful for discussing and illustrating the theory. The students were given the task of reading the text in advance. During the seminar, the students were asked to reflect on the fictional characters in terms of their possible selves and these possible selves' influence on the characters' behavior and understanding of the world. The final task of the seminars was to respond to the question, "What kind of knowledge about psychology can you acquire by using a fictional text for the kind of analysis you have just performed?" The discussions of this final task provided the data for this study. We do not know whether individual students previously had read the book, which might have influenced their ability to discuss the characters. However, the task of discussing the experience of reading fiction was not related explicitly to the specific novel, and whether they have read the book as a whole is therefore considered to be of marginal influence.

Each seminar lasted for two hours. Each seminar group (11 to 14 students) was divided into three or four smaller groups, which during the first hour discussed the questions. During the second hour, the seminar group as a whole shared and discussed their reflections. For the last five to ten minutes of the seminar, the students discussed the kind of psychological knowledge they can develop through the use of fiction.

During these final discussions, the seminar leader, who is the second author of the present study, took notes directly—not by transcribing verbatim each statement by the students, but by identifying topics the students discussed—and made notes on these. For each topic, at least one student statement was included in the notes. These notes constitute our data set. Thus, the notes are not representative of the weight given by students to various topics, but the statements represent the students' various reflections on each topic and thus the breadth of the discussions.

The students agreed to detailed notes of the discussions being taken by the teacher, notes that would eventually be used for research, as well as course development. At Swedish universities, ethical approval is not required for this kind of data collection, and no part of the documentation of the data could be connected to individual students at any time during the data collection or analysis process.

Analysis

The data from each of the nine seminar groups were initially analyzed separately using thematic analysis (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006; Willig, 2013). In the first step, we coded the data and identified and labelled meaning units in the notes. In the second step, these meaning units, from all the seminar groups, were sorted into twenty-one sub-themes such as "Literature captures human existence", "An accepting group atmosphere", Alternative to case studies", "Alternatives to research articles", "Ethical perspectives," "Real persons are more complex", and "Openness". In the final step, these subthemes were sorted into four themes: "Clinical skills", "Self-knowledge", "Research and theory", and "Extended room for learning".

Results

The discussions in the different groups varied in their approaches, and the four themes were therefore given different attention by the students, as different groups were interested in, and returned to, certain topics during their discussions. Still, the overall attitude towards the use of fiction was positive.

Clinical Skills

This theme was the only one discussed in all seminar groups, and in seven of the nine groups, this theme was important to the students. Here, the students discussed how reading fictional literature could improve their future clinical skills. For example, they sensed that fictional literature improved their capacity to perceive phenomena from varying perspectives. They also suggested that fictional literature made them more aware of how emotional states might be expressed in many different ways. These observations all concerned capacities that are needed in clinical work and, thus, are part of learning to become a clinical psychologist.

Some groups specifically discussed language in terms of the varying verbal expressions that refer to emotional states. Others discussed being able to understand the subtle emotions presented by the main character in the novel, which they felt supported their capacity to encounter and understand their future clients. Students also discussed the extent to which fictional literature could increase their capacity for reflection and simultaneously provide a medium on which they could reflect. In relation to clinical skills, students discussed the importance of empathy and how empathy was necessary for the capacity to take different perspectives. They also assumed that the capacity to take different perspectives increased empathy.

The students mentioned the need to avoid over-interpretation, as well as biased conclusions, which were also perceived as important in their future clinical work. Some sensed that fictional literature could be overly explicit, as the characters were constructed by the author to make a specific point. Therefore, fictional

literature should be approached with caution. The students also suggested that characters in novels cannot be equated with "real persons". Nevertheless, there was agreement that studies of fictional characters could support the development of clinical skills, especially those centered on reflection, emotion, and empathy. The students also mentioned picturing themselves encountering clients when they discussed how fictional literature might support learning. For example, they sensed that fictional literature could improve their future capacity to encounter clients without judging them or perceiving them as one-dimensional.

Other discussions in relation to clinical skills concerned how fictional literature could raise existential questions about what it means to be a human being, thus broadening their perspective on future clients. In line with this, some students sensed that fictional characters could offer perspectives on how human beings feel, think, and understand themselves and their world because fictional characters are described "from within".

Self-knowledge

In five of the nine groups, students discussed how fictional literature could increase their self-knowledge, and this was a particularly important theme for students in one of the groups. Such self-knowledge could concern one's own emotional reactions, as well as awareness of assumptions and even stereotypes about others. The students discussed the need to be aware of one's own assumptions and how many assumptions one indeed makes without being aware of it, not only when reading fictional literature, but also "in real life". In this regard, the students believed fictional literature could enable such awareness.

Moreover, the students discussed how fictional literature could foster their development both as individuals and as future clinicians. Some suggested that clinical psychology is not only a matter of theories, research, and methods, but also of human encounters. For this reason, future clinicians need to learn about themselves and their own reactions and emotions. The students were able, for example, to reflect on how their own reading and understanding of the characters reveals something about them. By identifying with the characters, one could imagine what it might feel like to be in a certain situation. By reflecting on one's own possible reactions and ways of handling the situation, one could also learn more about oneself. Such self-knowledge could make it easier to also understand others. Moreover, it could also help them to understand the complexities of human beings, and to note that people's reactions and behaviors cannot be assessed in any straightforward way, because the motives and intentions of the individual concerned might vary in so many ways.

The students thus sensed that fictional literature provided insights that could be applied to other life circumstances and contexts. Moreover, by reading fictional literature, one developed the capacity to understand fragmentations and disruptions in narratives, for example how people, including the reader, might lie both to themselves and others and how one needs to listen to the whole narrative in order to understand an individual.

Research and Theory

In eight of the nine groups, the students discussed the relationship between fictional literature and their understanding of psychological research and theory. For one of the groups, this was a particularly important theme. In their discussions, students compared knowledge acquired from reading fictional literature with knowledge acquired from research and theory. Here, fictional literature could be perceived both as a supplement to research and theory and as providing a qualitatively different kind of knowledge. The students felt that fiction gave a presentation of psychological life that was richer and deeper than representations from research or theory alone. Moreover, the students discussed how fictional literature supported their learning of theories, because it allowed them to connect theories to characters and themes in the novel, rendering the theories easier to understand and remember. The students also sensed that theoretical knowledge became more profound through fiction, because it could be connected to a representation of human experiences, making it less abstract.

Fictional characters were perceived as case studies, and the work with fictional cases improved their capacity to analyze and interpret psychological processes from varying theoretical perspectives. According to some students, the fictional characters offered possibilities to test the utility of theories. For example, the students discussed how some theoretical concepts were too limited to capture psychological processes or complexities. They also mentioned that if varying theories were applied to the same case, the theories could be challenged. In this way, fictional literature could open the door to integrating and nuancing theoretical perspectives. Moreover, fiction could initiate communication by adding a layer of human experience that, according to some students, was not captured by research or theory. Moreover, this layer was difficult to verbalize, but some students reported sensing that fictional literature begins where psychology ends.

The students also mentioned that fiction gave rating scales and statistical data a human touch, and in this respect fictional literature was perceived as a unique form of knowledge. Some students mentioned that reading about the depressed Doctor Glas gave more

relevant knowledge about depression than did learning about theories and rating scales for depression. Theories and concepts that were difficult to understand could be approached from an intuitive perspective. Because fictional texts are free in form and might have an insider perspective, they can, according to the students, elucidate psychological processes that are otherwise hidden. Moreover, the students sensed that, in real life, patients might refrain from telling their psychologists everything. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that real human beings are more unpredictable when encountered in real life than when presented in academic or fictional literature. Throughout the discussions the students contemplated whether fictional literature might be just as simplifying as theories are.

Extended Room for Learning

In seven of the nine groups, the students discussed how fiction brought new elements to their learning, and this was repeatedly discussed in five of these groups. Fictional literature was perceived as fun and stimulating, thereby enhancing motivation. Moreover, the coherence of the text created a structure that could be perceived as beneficial for learning specific concepts or theories because ambiguities were downplayed. However, other students sensed that, in fiction, ambiguities were tolerated to a greater extent than in traditional case studies. For example, students discussed how fictional characters could be contrasted to educational case studies constructed to illustrate a specific diagnosis or difficulty. The students felt that in traditional case studies the inner life of the individual could be excluded, and thus these cases were perceived as non-engaging.

Integrating fictional literature into education could be timesaving, according to the students. Fiction is accessible: the fictional character is there. The students were aware that an author had created the characters, as well as that the characters were not available for further questions as real clients are. Nevertheless, they sensed that the utility and timesaving aspects of fictional literature should be acknowledged. Some students also sensed that fictional characters were "compact". The most relevant aspects of the character were already defined, which also was timesaving. They compared this to research data that could be too extensive for students to grasp.

The students also discussed ethical aspects of using fiction as compared to cases based on real persons. When working with real cases, the students wanted to be respectful and humble, whereas they sensed less responsibility when working with fictional characters. They felt comfortable with discussing psychological processes in detail and dared to discuss positive as well as negative sides of the character concerned. It was possible to test ideas and perspectives that could be perceived as somewhat harsh without hurting or patronizing anyone.

The integration of fictional literature could also have positive effects on the interpersonal atmosphere in class, which in turn was beneficial to learning. For example, making a joke was welcome, and the climate was more accepting and productive. Moreover, it was possible to dwell on specific aspects of the character and even to speculate because the person was not a real human being. Students also thought it was fun to read and discuss fiction, and the simple fact that the teaching and learning activity was fun facilitated learning and improved the atmosphere in the group.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate clinical psychology students' perceptions concerning reading fiction as a learning activity, as well as what they felt they learned by reading fiction. The students could spontaneously see a range of advantages and some challenges in the use in fiction. In their responses the students moved the discussion to a more concrete level where new dimensions could be seen that went beyond the more theoretical level of the study aim. In this respect, the students, who were in the pre-clinical part of their education were focused on their future roles as clinical psychologists and their encounters with patients.

In particular, the students clearly saw the benefits of using literature in their clinical training, which is in line with prior studies (Djikic & Oatley, 2014; Kidd & Castano, 2013; Marsh et al., 2012). Moreover, the potential of fiction to offer a didactic tool, illustrating theoretical models and concepts – as argued for by Deering (2018), Janit and colleagues (2011), as well as Michaelson (2016) – was perceived by the students (see also Pérez et al., 2018).

The students also problematized the use of fiction, partly in line with the discussions by Marsh et al. (2012), as they felt that fictional characters might be too "compact" or incompletely described to offer a fair representation of human complexity. This points to a responsibility for the teachers to present tasks involving fictions in a nuanced way, making the students aware of the potential difficulties. There is also a need for further empirical research on these kinds of difficulties, as well as on the risk of students being emotionally overwhelmed by particularly distressing passages or topics in the literature, thus hampering their capacity for reflection.

It was not expected that *Doctor Glas* would provoke the kind of strong emotional reactions in a modern reader that it did when originally published, and a different kind of book might have led the discussions in more emotional directions. However, the students' discussion of self-knowledge touches upon

the possibility of fiction evoking emotional reactions. If strong emotional reactions are evoked, they could in turn help psychology students to acknowledge the clinical need to understand even the strange and revolting aspects of human behavior, as argued for by, for example, Punzi (2016). Based on our findings, we suggest that it is possible to go further and use fiction to challenge students in a more deliberate way, in line with the claims regarding comfort zones made by Barnett (2011) and Biesta (2005). Use of well-selected fiction has the potential to push students out of their comfort zones in relation to emotional reactions. This is a crucial part of clinical psychology education since students must be aware of the risk that their own affective reactions might hamper their understanding of others. Thus, fictional literature also offers a device for tackling this aspect of self-reflection, as Rolfe (2002) argued. In other words, the use of fiction in psychology education is the opposite of offering students safe spaces. This use of fiction can also be extended to other disciplines and vocational training, preparing students for encountering emotionally challenging situations such as the education of social workers, occupational therapists, and other human care professions.

Even if students are not familiar with the theoretical construct of critical thinking, as described by, for example, Ennis (1993), they are making allusions to the kinds of abilities typically included in this construct. One example is that the students discussed how fiction could increase their capacity to perceive phenomena from varying perspectives (see also Peters et al., 2000).

The students also discussed some interesting benefits of the educational use of fiction not mentioned in the research literature. This concerned how using fiction created an extended room for learning. One example of this was that the responsibilities connected to discussions of real persons were not an issue when fictional characters were discussed. This allowed students to feel more relaxed and freer in their discussions and in creating an environment in which open, creative thinking was encouraged: a feature of the learning environment psychology students have been shown to value (Erikson, Erikson, & Punzi, 2016).

Limitations

It is of course impossible to draw any far-reaching conclusions concerning "all fictional texts", and students in other settings might have reacted differently, particularly if the text had presented more challenging contents. Even though the context was social cognition, the present study has relevance for education in a broader set of psychology programs. The variety of possible features of fictional narratives makes it important to consider what characteristics and what

level of complexity are needed for particular educational purposes. Selecting a text that serves the course's purposes is an important responsibility for a teacher wishing to use fictional literature.

A methodological limitation of the present study is that full nuances and details of the students' discussions could not be covered by the data collection. There are other methodological issues. The students might have been trying to please the teacher or to restrict the discussion to uncontroversial subjects in front of their peers. For example, students might sense that their own emotional reactions could hamper understanding of clients but might be reluctant to bring this up in front of their peers. Accordingly, the responses might have been different if the students had been asked to write their personal reflections on the use of fiction.

Conclusion

Much of the discussion presented by the students, as well as the research literature on use of fiction, points to the potential for fiction to support students' development, as they mature into more reflective knowledge-seekers as regards, for example, self-knowledge, clinical skills, and theoretical understanding. In this sense, use of fictional literature can also be seen as a tool for student transition, a topic that calls for future studies. The focus and interests varied among the groups of students, which is natural given the open nature of the task and the limited time allowed. It is reasonable to conclude that the students have a basic understanding both of the capabilities their future work requires and the relevance of fictional literature in developing such capabilities. The present results suggest that students tend to grasp the possible advantages of fiction in their education. Therefore, we propose that fiction should be introduced to students as something beneficial for their education and future professional roles.

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