



RESEARCH PAPER

Marking as emotional labour: A discussion of the affective impact of assessment feedback on enabling educators

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Assessment feedback is increasingly a central part of pedagogy, with the academic benefits and affectual impact on students well described in scholarly literature. There is, however, little scholarly recognition of the affectual impact on markers; for this, one must turn to more general writing, for example, personal teacher blogs. To explore the issue from a scholarly perspective, this paper discusses the affective impact of marking on enabling educators; who are deeply committed to the personal journeys of their students and for whom marking often involves careful and extensive feedback on assignments intended to drive student learning and help them improve their academic skills in preparation for undergraduate studies. This paper introduces an autoethnographic reflection on the marking experiences of one enabling educator. This reflection is then mapped to categories of identified student emotions to provide an insight into the emotional labour of marking itself, separate to the general labour of teaching and supporting students in widening participation. It shows that marking is more than an academic task which has emotional impacts on students (both positive and negative), but a task that also emotionally impacts markers themselves. By making this emotional labour visible within a ‘pedagogy of care’, we can continue to identify ways to support enabling educators and address workload policy for this central dimension of academic work.

Keywords: enabling programs; higher education; student preparation; widening participation; assessment feedback

Introduction

Pastoral care of students is a central aspect of enabling education. This paper focuses within that pastoral care to consider how the task of marking assessments can impact the emotional state of enabling educators. It is an acknowledgment of the human being at the end of the red pen and arises from my own desire to examine my affective experience of marking, firstly the different emotions surrounding marking and secondly, why these emotions can sometimes be so negative for me. In this paper, emotions and affect are intricately connected terms, where affect refers to the “experience of feeling or emotion” (APA, n.d.) which contributes with mood to a person’s overall feeling state. I begin with an autoethnographic reflection of my own marking experiences, which includes recalling informal discussions with my colleagues. I then discuss my autoethnographic reflection through categories of emotions that have been suggested as part of the student experience of feedback, in order to raise the visibility of

marking within the overall emotional labour of being a caring teacher. Without such visibility, appropriate support for educators for this central dimension of academic work, with its workload policy implications, may be overlooked.

Background to this autoethnography

Being an enabling educator is a professional identity which is enacted across many regular duties; including course administration, teaching students synchronously and asynchronously (either face to face or mediated online), lesson planning, research in both discipline expertise and teaching practice, and marking student assessments. Importantly, pastoral care of students can be a central component of enabling educators' identity and work, with many staff self-identifying as 'caring' (Bennett et al., 2016, p. 39). This care can be placed within the feminised 'pedagogies of care', which Motta and Bennett (2018) report are "embodied through the ethics, practices and relationships which, we found, plays out in the emotional, epistemological and affective terrains of the enabling educators" (p. 632). Bennett et al. (2016) show that 'careful' approaches are often focused within the classroom, for example as making students feel welcome and accepted in class, never belittling them, and using non-judgemental language (p. 28).

This paper, however, moves from the classroom to focus more specifically on the role of marking within the emotional labour of being a caring educator, since marking takes a major proportion of workload but is not easily visible within the literature of caring labour. Here, marking is the feedback and grading on student assignments and the focus is the emotional labour required to support and simultaneously judge the work of students as they engage with enabling courses. Student feedback in the more general sense has been researched within the context of classroom dialogue (Amundrud, 2017) but, in this paper, feedback is restricted to that which is provided on paper or electronically on individual student assignments to explain the reasons for grades and to guide students to improve their skills in, for example, critical writing, written expression, referencing, and so on. Here, feedback does not include newer feedback modes, such as the use of audio and video feedback.

Marking and feedback hold an essential place in all academic work, from enabling to higher degrees. Within tertiary education, feedback has undergone a challenging repositioning, from its primary task of summative marking/grading of end of term papers (often written under exam conditions) (Boud & Molloy, 2013) to formative and summative feedback as central to teaching itself within the context of 'assessment for learning' (Carless, 2017). Connecting feedback so directly to meaningful learning has greatly impacted the working patterns and workloads of educators. With the focus firmly on the benefits for students, the role of educators in managing the assessment for learning approach is described principally in relation to pedagogic strategies. Any reflective capacity of a teacher is directed at academic or pedagogic usefulness, not towards the emotional impact on themselves. For example, the preface to Tang and Logonnathan's (2016) edited volume emphasises that "Educators must ... not only provide students valuable feedback for their learning, but also adjust their teaching strategies accordingly and consider more carefully how they use learning activities in their classrooms" (p. v) and includes student perceptions on being marked. Carless et al. (2017) acknowledge that "Assessment is a shared enterprise where teachers and students come together to not only develop knowledge and skills, but also to use and create knowledge and identities" (Front Matter, n.p.). The chapters in Carless et al. (2017) include a consideration of the role of emotions for students' identities (Rowe, 2017) but do not address the emotional identity of markers. Teachers are viewed primarily through an emphasis on markers' responsibilities,

efficiencies, and roles in developing student success with little discussion given to how marking impacts teachers emotionally.

The overall emotional impact of being an educator, however, is discussed in the literature in the context of working in a neoliberal institution. Loveday (2018), for instance, reports on a University and College Union survey which found that “79% of academic staff surveyed either agreed (46%) or strongly agreed (33%) with the statement ‘I find my job stressful’ (UCU, 2014, p. 1)” (p. 162). The stress of academic labour identified includes intensification of workload, publishing demands, and receiving good evaluations from students, but not the direct emotional impact of marking itself. The reflections presented in this paper are therefore a way to make visible a stress that is not overtly recognised within academic discourse.

The affective impact on the marker is real, however, and to fully grasp the emotional burden one needs to read beyond the academic literature and turn to popular writing; such as in the personal writing found in blogs and opinion pieces. An article in *The Guardian* (2018) poignantly describes the anguish of a teacher over the Christmas break in the UK:

I was trapped in my office, correcting the same spelling mistakes and spliced commas on each and every paper, the pain in my back building as I sat hunched over the desk for five, six, seven hours at a time. It seemed as though the end would never come. (n.p.)

Although a part of the lived experience of all educators, Crawford et al. (2018) describe the difficulty of theorising the complex emotional, cognitive, and social tasks that enabling educators perform. They suggest the use of ‘emotional work’ and connect it to ‘emotional labour’, a term initially coined by sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983) to describe the service caring work predominantly done by women. Emotional labour involves the processing of people and requires the display of feelings with warmth and concern, so that “seeming to love the job is part of the job” (Abel & Nelson, 1990, p. 12). Crawford et al. (2018) extend Hochschild’s concept to cover the work of enabling educators in understanding and caring for their students. The aim of this paper is to show that emotional labour also applies to marking as a task of ‘care’ within the overall care provided by enabling educators. Because the consideration of the emotions of markers is not well described in the literature it is necessary to turn to descriptions of student affect categories. Rowe (2017) provides a comprehensive description of the role of student emotions in assessment for learning and these categories will be introduced in the methodology as an organising principle for the discussion.

Methodology

The research described in this paper involved autoethnography, a method which arises from the disciplines of autobiography and ethnography, where researchers can use their personal stories as a lens through which to understand sociocultural contexts (Chang, Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2012). It is particularly suitable for the study of the affective domain because an affectual response is a first-hand experience, which Alvesson (2003) suggests “offer(s) a deeper level of understanding and a stronger authority-base than sending out questionnaires and listening to people’s ‘stories’ in interview situations” (p. 171). Autoethnography also allows for ‘thick description’ (that is, careful accounts of social phenomena) (Geertz, 1973, cited in Alvesson 2003, p. 171), which creates an opportunity to make visible aspects of the enabling educator experience that are otherwise difficult to quantify. This can contribute to knowledge in its own right or lead to a further “more abstract conceptual contribution” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 181).

Here, the data is my personal reflection of the affective experience of marking (grading papers) as an enabling educator which I have titled ‘My marking life’. My reflections also include recalling conversations and interactions with marking colleagues over my academic career. Although I have worked as an undergraduate marker in both permanent and casual positions, my reflections arise from my current identity as a permanently employed enabling educator. The lens of this autoethnography is focused on the sociocultural context of marking in an enabling education course, where students are progressing towards university undergraduate studies. The course is firmly grounded in widening participation philosophies, and is taught both on campus and online. I teach writing units, so the marking under reflection for this paper includes essays and technical reports, which may present some differences in the affective impact on markers compared with marking short answer maths and science papers, but does, however, include many similarities in regard to pastoral care aspects.

Autoethnography as a method can encompass a wide range of interpretations that may be broadly categorised as either analytic or evocative (Le Roux, 2017). Analytic interpretations entail “objective writing and analysis of a particular group” (Mendez, 2013, p. 281) while evocative interpretations seek emotional connections with readers through more personal experiences. This autoethnographic study arises from my personal experience as an enabling educator which may connect evocatively to readers’ experiences. My experience is not everyone’s; I acknowledge that affectual responses to marking are both individual and subject to contextual influences (including security of work, which is beyond the scope of this paper). Although my response is individual, I have had many conversations with many markers from many institutions to know it is not entirely unique. This is how autoethnography engages; exploring the experiences of one person to engage that voice with the experiences of others, to provide an understanding in a manner that quantitative research cannot easily access. My individual experience becomes a lens to explore the sociocultural context of marking.

This study also seeks to extend along the autoethnographic continuum, moving from a personal story with evocative elements towards an analytic interpretation through an additional discussion of the themes of the autoethnographic reflection. My recounted personal emotions are made available for scholarly consideration by mapping them to categories of student achievement emotions as identified by Rowe (2017), “including enjoyment, hope, pride, anger, anxiety, shame, hopelessness, relief, boredom and interest” (p. 162). Then I consider other themes of emotional labour from ‘My marking life’ which are external to these emotional categories. This mapping provides both an organising principle to display the themes of the autoethnographic reflection and a way to interact with the literature.

‘My marking life’

Around the world the groan goes out. So, I get the chocolates (carrots nowadays), sharpen the pens (warm up the screen nowadays), and warn my friends and relatives (no change nowadays)—it is marking time. Year after year it is the same pattern, four times in a 12 week period, two to three terms a year. Friends and family comment “you are always marking”, family decisions and social life are scheduled around it. Wads of paper (laptop nowadays) get dragged to children’s sporting events, as I am ever on the lookout for a few moments to mark “one more” paper. Even the physiotherapist knows when it is marking time and greets me like it is ‘Groundhog Day’ as she commences the time-honoured desk jockey treatment plan.

It is not just me. You can enter our staff room and tell when it is marking time—either we are talking excessively about silly things to stop us falling into the slump or we are in the slump, unable to initiate and sustain conversation. A slump of sludgy drudgery.

How can I like my job, like my students (most of them anyway), feel committed to students' pastoral care and be proud of being an enabling educator, yet dislike marking so much? The moment I dare ask the question to myself a torrent of feeling pours out in reply: "Well, you know why—because it is boring, repetitive, depressing, time consuming, enervating, thankless and lonely. It takes a huge cognitive load, so that even while it is boring you cannot tune out as you could with manual boring tasks. At the end of a long day it feels unrewarding with your only tangible outcome a backache and a headache". "Fair point", I agree with myself.

Clearly this major aspect of my work and my enabling educator identity has an emotional impact on me. Marking is something I dread, then endure as exhausting, and then hardly recover from before it begins again. I wish something exciting would happen to interrupt the task while simultaneously hoping nothing gets in the way or I will be even more time pressured. The deadline is always looming. Other work piles up but cannot be addressed until the marking is done. I count progress in different ways—ok, so 40 to go and I can mark 8 per day so that's 5 days to go, always wishfully hoping someone has dropped out to decrease the count (so much for my theoretical support of widening participation at that moment in time!). Then the dilemma of the marking order; I have to decide how not to depress myself. If I start with what I think are likely to be the good ones, knowing there will be some encouragement and they will be quick to mark it creates a false positive to the marking rate, since they are easier to mark than the poor ones. I try and save some potential High Distinctions (HDs) as treats for the end! Next to mark are the assignments with the potential to either delight or annoy me, that is, the students for whom I have spent considerable time in supporting, explaining and reviewing their drafts. Will their assignments provide the brief satisfaction of seeing an improvement or is it a descent into irritation because they have not made even the simplest of grammatical corrections in response to all my effort? Then the poorly written assignments, which induce the most negative emotions in all aspects, especially with the less well-known online students; not knowing the reason behind their poor assignments. Is it their poor time management, or their lack of engagement, which itself could be due to juggling all the circumstances that often beset students in enabling education, or their lack of ability even though they have put in a huge effort, or is it, let's be blunt, just their downright laziness? So much to overthink! So much to balance in what I can write in the feedback comments, especially for online marking. Although students may not be aware, much agonising goes over the grading. Judging and grading other people's work is exhausting. I swing and roundabout over HD/D/C/P, let alone the agony of failing a student, an agony that comes from fear of being unfair (even when marking to strict criteria), as well as the interpersonal anxiety of potentially upsetting a student who may be crushed by their mark, but then again, may equally be ready for what they know is a fair response.

That's before I get to the plagiarism (academic misconduct nowadays) which induces anger; some anger directed at the students for cheating in blatant disregard for the instructions, some anger directed at the amount of extra work and procedures I will have to add to my workload. And then there is the backlog of students looking for extensions at the last minute, some legitimate, some spurious, but all creating a flood of assignments to mark on the weekend to meet the university deadlines required for 'timely feedback'.

It is not just the students who impact my emotions. The institution looms over every aspect of this; marking deadlines which are impossible to achieve without working all weekend; levels of administration and self-protection which are required for every academic integrity case; and the student evaluations of staff which serve as an instrument of regulation. High praise to students, whether warranted or not, can improve student evaluations, which are then integral

to teacher evaluations and hence one's standing among peers and promotion panels. When marking it is important to forget the institutional context and mark to academic criteria, whilst at the same time being encouraging. And anyway, experience suggests that the students I devote the most time to are the most likely to not appreciate it, nor see any need to positively evaluate it, so it goes unnoticed.

And finally, marking cannot be complained about. It is an integral part of pedagogy now. I know the benefits of feedback in theory. I have written about and studied marking from the pedagogic perspective (Henderson-Brooks, 2016). I know the ideals in an academic decontextualized manner, but I feel the 'real life crushing you' context of actually grading assignments. Emotional labour requires "seeming to love the job is part of the job" (Hoschild, 1983, cited in Abel & Nelson, 1990, p. 12). So, when I arrive in class on Monday morning to the clamour of "Is it marked yet?", when I have missed a weekend social event, am exhausted and it is only two days since they submitted their work, there is no value in complaining. Partly, because they have no sympathy since they had to spend time doing the assignment I set, but also because as an enabler I am not there to display my emotions. I know my focus is on them.

Discussion: The emotional labour of marking

Writing this reflection has been strangely satisfying as a chance to articulate what is usually just 'felt'. As a teacher of technical writing it is also freeing to write sentence fragments, as a momentary escape from the strictures of formal writing. It shows me, as someone new to autoethnography, how the method can make visible aspects of life (in this case, academia) that are difficult to quantify but important to discuss.

Although this paper focuses on my experience, the discussion below frames that experience more generally by locating marking as an interpersonal activity between marker and student. It then examines the role played by personal identity which a marker brings to the marking experience. The themes of the autoethnographic reflection are then mapped to affectual categories previously aligned to student experiences of the feedback provided by markers. The discussion concludes with comments on further aspects of the emotional labour associated with marking and the impact of institutional demands.

Marking as interpersonal labour

Marking is an interpersonal activity, which involves one person (the marker) engaging with the work of another person (the student). Although assessments are marked according to academic criteria, marks and feedback are received through an interpersonal filter. Pedagogically, there is increasing emphasis on two-way communication and dialogue in feedback so as to position students as active learners (Rowe, 2017). Further, although marking may once have been perceived as a purely academic objective task, increasingly markers are expected to recognise that for students "assessment is 'deeply personal' creating the potential for strong feelings" (Crossman, 2007, cited in Rowe, 2017, p. 162).

This then extends the work of markers from a primarily academic task to include emotional labour. Rowe (2017) reports, "Much of the focus of recent educational scholarship on emotions emphasises the need for teachers to understand student emotions and responses to feedback (Rowe, 2013; Storrs, 2012)" (p. 165). She further summarises strategies and approaches for teachers to enhance positive emotions to improve learning and reduce negative emotions in students which "interfere with their ability to engage with feedback" (Rowe, 2017, p. 165). I argue that the act of balancing increasing demands for student personal development with academic criteria is one reason why marking is also 'deeply personal' and emotionally tiring

for enabling educators who are committed to widening participation. Further, learning by its very nature requires some exposure to deficit and a degree of vulnerability (Molloy & Bearman, 2019) and thus enabling educators whose role includes exposing this deficit through marking, may face a challenge to their 'caring' identity, which so carefully encourages and uplifts students.

The marker

Every marker brings their own lived experience to marking, including personality, age, academic philosophy and their own previous student identity. Rowe (2017) suggests that:

there is a perception by some lecturers that student engagement with feedback is limited (Price, Handley, Millar & O'Donovan, 2010), and such perceptions are likely to reduce the amount of thought and effort invested by teachers in providing feedback to students. (p.165)

Further to this aspect, my informal conversations with undergraduate academics whose own student experience did not include interpersonal positive feedback suggests that there is also a perception by some lecturers that supportive feedback is 'mollycoddling'.

In contrast, as part of research into feedback for academic literacy development (Henderson-Brooks, 2017), the caring orientation of enabling educators is demonstrated in colleagues' email responses to my questions about their marking philosophy: "I try to acknowledge that the student is putting in effort, perhaps quite a lot! Putting one's writing out there is a risk-taking feat in its own right, so I try to tread lightly so as not to hurt a student's confidence in themselves or their writing" (Colleague A) and "I want to see improvement. That's my goal. My underpinning philosophy is 'what feedback would I welcome if I were a student?' and 'what advice can I offer this student that will advance their learning journey?'" (Colleague B) (Henderson-Brooks, 2017).

This autoethnographic reflection, 'My marking life', although primarily written as an enabling educator, is written in the context of a 20-year career in academia in undergraduate and enabling settings, in casual and tenured positions. Although I have not always known about enabling education, I have always aligned to pedagogies of care as part of my teaching philosophy. In comparison to my colleagues quoted above, however, in terms of marking I am perhaps more task driven, as my marking philosophy reflects: "I want to encourage the students to understand their writing in terms of genre and register. I want to say why they are doing things correctly, based on language theory" (Henderson-Brooks, 2017).

Mapping 'My marking life' to student achievement emotions

The discussion now maps my recounted emotions to the student achievement categories described in Rowe (2017): enjoyment, hope/hopelessness, pride, anger, anxiety, shame, relief and boredom. It then considers other themes from 'My marking life' which are external to these emotional categories, as well as physical and institutional impacts.

Enjoyment

There are no expressions of direct enjoyment in 'My marking life'. This is essentially because enjoyment in enabling education is a long game, where gratification is delayed from the marking task to further along in the trajectory of a student's program. In the isolated task of marking many essays in a short timeframe there is very little enjoyment. It can, however, be gleaned from the pleasure of the HDs "as treats for the end!" and in the lucky dip of

“assignments with the potential to either delight or annoy me”. When students engage with class material and feedback on their drafts and then do well, there is enjoyment for the marker. Like my colleague quoted above, I want the students to do well. ‘Doing well’ is not just perceived as an HD; it is the progress of the individual student across a semester towards a level of competence that will allow them to enter a university degree program. Their success is closely linked to my commitment to enabling education for the purpose of widening participation. Their success is part of my work enjoyment. It is positive emotional labour. This aspect of long-term enjoyment is not as readily available for casualised contract markers because they often mark in isolation from the teaching delivery and they may only be employed on short-term contracts.

Hope/Hopelessness

Hope is a defining characteristic for enabling educators, who believe in students’ abilities and resilience, and who describe “optimism and affirmation” as key components in their pedagogical “toolkit” (Bennett et al., 2016, p. 24). Hope is seen in ‘My marking life’ as “assignments with the potential to either delight or annoy me, that is, the students for whom I have spent considerable time in supporting, explaining and reviewing their drafts. Will their assignments provide the brief satisfaction of seeing an improvement?”

Of course, any hope also teeters on the brink of hopelessness, as I go on to imply, “or is it a descent into irritation because they have not made even the simplest of grammatical corrections in response to all my effort?” It is also seen in the cumulative impact of negative emotion in ‘My marking life’: “boring, repetitive, depressing, time consuming, enervating, thankless and lonely” and further realised in concert with the physical effect; “At the end of a long day it feels unrewarding with your only tangible outcome a backache and a headache”. Too many disappointed hopes can create a sense of hopelessness for the whole enabling educator endeavour.

Pride

In comparison to student pride in their submitted assignment, there is no pride in the physical work of marking assignments because marking by itself is a non-creative task that does not produce a tangible artefact. There is, perhaps, pride attached to the academic expertise of providing extensive and clearly explained feedback. Most pride, however, arises from interpersonal pride in students who have done good work (in connection to enjoyment). There is also pride in the delayed gratification of end of term student evaluations of teaching, where there may be positive feedback on the marker’s feedback, such as this comment to me; “I also appreciated the feedback that was left on my assignments greatly. They helped guide me in the right direction and I believe the information provided in that feedback will help me in my undergraduate course”. As enabling educators we want to have ‘enabled’ students, so positive feedback on our feedback forms part of our pride in our identity as an enabling educator.

Anger

Anger is perhaps surprising for someone who is a caring professional but ‘My marking life’ shows it as a foregrounded emotion. While student anger can be considered a force for action, for example, to initiate a conversation with a teacher over a perception of unfair marking (Rowe, 2017), ‘caring’ professionals can never direct anger at students in any form stronger than neutral comments. Anger, however, is certainly present in the marking experience. Perhaps, paradoxically, it is present precisely because of the level of emotional labour an enabling educator has expended. Most anger associated with marking is closely connected to disappointment and is mingled with hopelessness. The anger is multifaceted. Much of it is

directed at academic misconduct (plagiarism); “some anger directed at the students for cheating in blatant disregard for the instructions, some anger directed at the amount of extra work and procedures I will have to add to my workload”. There is also interpersonal irritation when students have not even answered the question for the assignment, as it takes time and effort to unravel the cause of a completely off task assignment. Further, there is even doubt about whether anger can be justified; “not knowing ... Is it their poor time management, or their lack of engagement ... their lack of ability ... or is it, let’s be blunt, just their downright laziness?” The enabling educator identity and enjoyment is closely connected to student progress, so when I have given considerable individual consultation time to a student to find that they have not made the simplest adjustment, it is very annoying, as are unopened feedback files. Part of the frustration is the wasted opportunity for the student, again showing the level of personal investment in students’ development.

A further anger is produced in the tension between the time allocated for marking by the institution and the ‘real’ time that marking takes. Any action that contributes to extending marking time can induce a negative emotion because it has consequences for a marker’s health, leisure and work time management. Hence my irritation at “the backlog of students looking for extensions at the last minute, some legitimate, some spurious, but all creating a flood of assignments to mark on the weekend to meet the university deadlines”.

Anxiety

Dealing with student anxiety is part of the care enabling educators provide for students in enabling courses. Anxiety as an emotion for markers is perhaps less expected, yet it is surprisingly present in ‘My marking life’. Common-sense suggests that it is students who are anxious and that the power is all on the side of the educator, but the role of being a gatekeeper to tertiary education, while simultaneously trying to progress students from situations of social inequity, causes a layer of anxiety (Crawford et al., 2018). Marked assignments are the sites where determination of student readiness for higher education is overtly realised. Anxiety is revealed directly as “interpersonal anxiety” and indirectly as “so much to overthink!” and “agonising” in ‘My marking life’: “much agonising goes over the grading. Judging and grading other people’s work is exhausting. I swing and roundabout over HD/D/C/P, let alone the agony of failing a student, an agony that comes from fear of being unfair (even when marking to strict criteria) and from the interpersonal anxiety of potentially upsetting a student who may be crushed by their mark but may equally be ready for what they know is a fair response”. These comments reveal a nebulous anxiety about balancing affirmation and judgment for a vulnerable group of students, as well as the level of caution required in written feedback, especially when marking less well-known online students.

Shame

There is no evidence of shame in ‘My marking life’ showing that Rowe’s (2017) categories which describe common student experiences of feedback are not necessarily applicable to markers. For a discussion on student shame in enabling education, which is beyond the scope of this paper, see Loveday (2016).

Relief

The predominant sense of both physical and mental relief for the marker occurs when the marking task is complete. Within the marking task, for me, moments of relief occur on behalf of students, either at the moment when I realise that a student who has put in a lot of effort has actually passed or in “the brief satisfaction of seeing an improvement”.

Boredom

The boredom and unrelenting nature of the task is a major theme of ‘My marking life’: “boring, repetitive, depressing, time consuming, enervating, thankless and lonely. It takes a huge cognitive load, so that even while it is boring you cannot tune out as you could with manual boring tasks”. For essay writing, where each assignment has incorporated different readings and structured different arguments, considerable cognitive energy must be expended by the marker to align each individual assignment to the marking rubric, often for little satisfaction. Boredom spans across the term as the marking cycle is repeated often with very little respite from the last session of marking. To be frequently giving up precious leisure and family time for something so boring and tiring makes it different to creative time-consuming enterprise, such as journal article writing.

Overall utility of these categories

The above sections mapped the themes and emotions of ‘My marking life’ specifically to literature on student emotions (Rowe, 2017), which has allowed the impact of marking as emotional labour to be made visible. This discussion shows that emotions are central even to the seemingly mundane task of providing feedback to students on their work, and allows a way to integrate affectual aspects of marking into our understanding of the emotional labour performed by enabling educators. Positive and negative emotions are present, with anxiety displayed as central to balancing the explicit judgement of marking with the ongoing desire to encourage students. Anger, too, occurred when student progress is not seen.

One section of ‘My marking life’ could not, however, be easily categorised; my experience of masking my emotions about marking when “marking cannot be complained about ... there is no value in complaining ... as an enabler I am not there to display my emotions”. Although this comment is not easily categorised it demonstrates the sometimes neglected emotional impact of being polite, upbeat and encouraging all the time. The need to be continuously aware of student emotions and responses to feedback while at the same time subduing one’s own emotional responses places an extra burden on educators, similar to other caring professions. This burden can be aligned to Hochschild’s original definition of emotional labour, where “seeming to love the job is part of the job” (Abel & Nelson, 1990, p. 12).

Physical impacts

Although this discussion has focused on the affective impact of marking, ‘My marking life’ includes reference to the physical impact of marking; “Even the physiotherapist knows when it is marking time” and “headaches and backaches”. There is no way to perform the task in its current form without working to deadlines for many hours in front of a computer screen, and this is physical work. Unlike some other physical work, it does not build aerobic or muscular fitness; instead the hunched over impact of desk work must be mitigated against by frequent breaks and exercises. The detrimental impact on the body must play into the ennui and the sludge feeling; the “slump of sludgy drudgery”.

Institutional impacts

‘My marking life’ reports, “It is not just the students who impact my emotions. The institution looms over every aspect of this; marking deadlines which are impossible to achieve without working all weekend; levels of administration and self-protection which are required for every academic integrity case; and the student evaluations of staff which serve as an instrument of regulation”. Some of these demands impact anxiety as previously discussed. There is, however, a further institutional impact because of the tension between the amount of feedback which is pedagogically required to attain best practice for assessment feedback (especially in the writing

courses I teach) and the academic workload available to achieve this. With ever increasing student focused assessment there is an increase in required marking time, which has not been reflected in workload adjustments and may not be economically achievable for universities. Nicol, Thomson and Breslin (2014) warn that feedback is “a troublesome issue in higher education” (p102), and that responses to improving teachers’ quality feedback “require a significant increase in academic staff workload, which is problematic given current resource constraints and rising student numbers” (p. 102). For enabling educators there is a further layer of workload, driven by ‘caring’ pedagogy. As Storrs (2012) suggests, “Instructors committed to an emotional curriculum must be informed of the high degree of engagement and time investment required ...” (p.10). I am not suggesting an endless allocation of time for marking but that the balance between curriculum goals and student support is an important topic for further discussion. Making emotional labour visible reminds us that marking is more than an assembly line activity.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the emotional labour of marking as one aspect of the overall workload of enabling educators in supporting students and widening participation in tertiary education. An autoethnographic reflection has been shown to be an effective way to explore the affectual impact of marking, creating data for an otherwise difficult subject to investigate from a scholarly perspective. If my autoethnographic reflection on marking is indicative of a wider educator experience, as anecdotally described and reported in the popular literature, then it can be argued that emotions are more than individual responses but an aspect of the socio-cultural context of marking in enabling education. Mapping the emotions I experience as a marker to identified student emotion categories has been an organising principle which has further elucidated themes of the emotional labour of marking and extended this personal reflection towards a more analytic autoethnography. The data displays that anger and anxiety can accompany the academic judgment of the very students we are attempting to affirm on their academic journey. It shows that the caring commitment to enabling students overarches all of the expressed emotions and shows that even positive emotions are emotional labour because they are deeply connected to the interpersonal development of students as well as their academic progression. This paper has been a first step in making the emotional labour of marking visible within a ‘pedagogy of care’. It provides a voice to contribute to institutional and scholarly discussions, so that we can identify ways to support enabling educators and address the workload policy implications for this central dimension of academic work.

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