Writers block revisited - A micro-phenomenological case study on the blocking influence of an internalized voice

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Abstract

Writer's block, a common form of procrastination, can have a serious negative impact on an individual's academic performance. In this case study, a student with writer's block was interviewed and asked to perform body movements that represented the process of writing a master's thesis.

A micro-phenomenological method developed by Petitmengin was used to investigate the student´s experience of writer's block and the role of an inner voice. The analysis unveiled the process by which the inner voice impeded the student, i.e. how the student perceived a set of mental images, movements and sensations in relation to the "inner voice".

The findings suggest that non-verbal modes of learning – through movement– may be applied productively to overcome writer's block and other forms of procrastination in broader areas such as research writing. Moreover, the micro-phenomenological method, together with the interpretation of video recordings, can reveal valuable information regarding this learning process in higher education.

Keywords: Embodiment, first person perspective, micro phenomenology, procrastination, video recording, writer's block

Background

Procrastination is a common experience: approximately a half of the student population perceive themselves as being severely affected (Rozental et al 2015a, Fernie et al 2016), and the prevalence of procrastination in an adult community was found to be around 20 % (Harriott & Ferrari 1996). For scholarly communities, the consequences of procrastination can be serious, including academic under-performance, unemployment or underemployment, negative health outcomes, adjustment problems and suicidal tendencies (Steel, 2007, p. 66).

Procrastinators can be categorised based on severity, quality of life, and levels of depression and anxiety (Rozental et al 2015a). One of the most common definitions of procrastination is "to voluntarily delay an intended course of action despite expecting to be worse off for the delay" (Rozental et al 2015a). Often, procrastination means that an individual not only voluntarily delays or postpones the completion of a given task but also postpones the very starting of it. Procrastination has been conceptualised as a "self-regulation failure" (Fernie et al., 2016) which often involves not only stress reactions, but also reduced levels of self-compassion (Rozental et al. 2015b, Flett et al. 2016). There is a great need to better help students in scholarly/academic contexts with writer´s block problems. The question is, how can we better understand and treat this "self-regulation failure" and to what extent can we be aware of the underlying mechanisms of the manifestations of procrastination, such as in writer's block?

Current work that investigates this issue has two principle shortcomings: Firstly, although different treatment methods have been used in academic writing practices, e.g. automaticity, regime, cognitive behavioural therapy and social mutual support, which seem to be more effective in combination (Boice 1992); there are very few intervention studies that take into account the process of academic writing, with the notable exception of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) programs, mainly internet-based (Rozental et al 2015b). These have also been used with and without guidance from a therapist, and seem to be an effective tool in overcoming writer's block (Rozental et al 2015b). Secondly, scholarly writing on procrastination lacks theorisation of the behavioural patterns, thought processes and cognitive operations behind it (Flett et al. 2016).

This paper builds on a previous study that used a meditation exercise to facilitate a contemplative inquiry into writer's block (Bojner Horwitz et al. 2013). In that study, a master's student suffering from writer's block was asked to perform physical movements, or 'body movements', to represent the process of writing the master thesis. Drawing on the phenomenological hermeneutic method as described in the original study (Bojner Horwitz et al. 2013), an interview was used to investigate the student's experience during the exercise, including bodily sensations, feelings and thoughts. This new embodied knowledge helped the student to identify and to accept 'blocking information' (such as self-

critique attacks), and subsequently to overcome it. The way in which the student was able to overcome the block was found to involve further processes involving acceptance, identifications of emotions, body/mind expansion and body memories (Bojner Horwitz 2013).

This study raised further questions about *how* one's writer's block can be overcome with regards to the cognitive processes involved. The original study found that, for the student, "the fear of being stupid was the greatest concern" and perceiving that "the ones with words are the ones with power." In response to the question, "*what does the fear of being stupid look like?",* the student described the sound of her mother's voice saying, *"You are not good enough – you will never make it."* The present paper investigates the experience of the 'mother's voice' as a process associated with writer's block, working with the same student. Developing the analysis of the interview with the student conducted in the original study, the aim of the present study was to understand:

1) How the inner voice, the mother's voice, acts on the student's cognition

2) How the student relates the writer's block to her inner voice

In investigating this, the paper builds on the methods of the original study. It is difficult to become aware of one's internal processed and even more so to describe it with precision, but such a description may be facilitated and analysed by using specific questions (e.g. Maurel 2009). The phenomenological hermeneutic method that was employed in the first study was found to be insufficient for exploring the processual aspects of writer's block and so in this study, we used the method of 'micro phenomenology'.

Method

The micro phenomenological method was developed by Vermersch during the 1990s (1999, 2009), and was later appropriated into fields such as cognitive science by Petitmengin and co-workers (1999, 2001, 2006), into various therapeutic contexts (Katz 2011) and into clinical practices (Petitmengin, Navarro, & Le van Quyen 2007). The method was used to better understand experiences from a first-person perspective, and facilitates access to our reflective mind. A more detailed description of how the method was used in the present study follows below.

The interview procedure

The implementation of the micro phenomenological method in the present study, involved conducting a total of four interviews:

- Three micro-phenomenological interviews (with one participant interviewed on three separate occasions)

- One post-micro-phenomenological interview (performed as a follow-up interview after the three initial interviews).

The micro-phenomenological interviews were conducted on three separate occasions with the same setup: the interviewee (the master's student) sat in a chair close to the recorder and the interviewer (the researcher) sat next to the student at the distance of approximately one meter**)**. Each interview lasted 35 minutes**.** During the micro-phenomenological interviews with the student, we focused on the internalized voice from the student's mother by asking questions regarding *how* the student experiences a recorded voice – a recording in which the student speaks the phrase of interest: *"You are not good enough – you will never make it*. The student listened to her recorded phrase twice in a row *"You are not good enough – you will never make it*" and immediately afterward was asked to describe her experience. The movements that the interviewee performed while evoking the experience of hearing the voice, was also recorded on video during the interview sessions.

The post-micro-phenomenological interview was conducted whilst the student viewed herself on the video-films from the three initial interviews. In this stage – the student was asked for her reflections on the interviewing process, and was asked to describe her experience of writer's block in relation to what she saw on the video recordings. A more detailed account of the data collection process follows later in this section.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and the video recordings were analysed in relation to body movements and gestures. Throughout, the interviewer strived to maintain a neutral position by, as far as possible, only repeating the words that the interviewee herself used, and avoided any directive instructions.

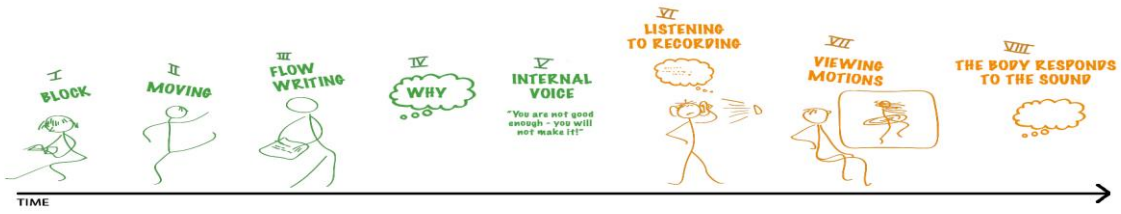

Figure 1. The figure represents two different studies. **Stages I -V (**in green**)** represent the original phenomenological study (Bojner Horwitz et al 2013): from a writer´s block situation (I), to "acting out" the writer´s block through movement (II) and back into writing with a flow (III). At stage IV the question arose as to *why* the writer´s block was eased, and the relation with the inner voice was revealed (V).

Stages VI – VIII (in yellow) represent the present micro phenomenological study; from listening to the recording of the inner voice (VI), and viewing the movements from the video recording (VII) and finally the awareness of the body responses to the inner sound of the voice in terms of movements (VIII) wherein the participant is watching her movements from the micro-phenomenology interview.

The first-person interview

To understand how we perceive a cognitive process (such as listening to a recorded sentence or sound) we need to be aware of how we usually act/react in any given cognitive situation irrespective of whether the process involves seeing, watching, remembering, or learning; that is the whole person that is "living through" it. This 'living through' is of course subjective and is not always accessible to our conscious mind and can therefore be hard to express in words (Vermersch 2009). The micro-phenomenological method seeks to overcome of the challenge of how we access the cognitive reflective mind. The first-person perspective interview attempts to facilitate an awareness of our pre-reflections through the posing of questions and directions through words but also through gestures. The idea is that these questions help the interviewee to access habitually unrecognized parts of his/her cognitive processes (Petitmengin 2006).

In the case of this study, the questions were designed to help the interviewee to access and to verbalise the internalized voice as experienced as a process (Petitmengin 2006, Petitmengin 2013, Petitmengin 2014).

There were four steps to the micro-phenomenological interview:

1. The recording of the internalized voice from the student's mother is the experience of reference in this study (Vermersch 2009). The recording is an object that is highly contextual with regards to space and time, this helps the interviewee to focus on a specific experience. The recording helps to recall the interviewee if s/he drifts from the experience of interest. This first step is therefore about helping the student focus on the listening procedure: the interviewer invites the interviewee to revisit the experience by asking: "How do you experience the voice saying: *"You are not good enough – you will never make it"? How can you describe your experience of the sound of the voice?*
2. In the second step, the interviewer tries to help the interviewee to recall greater specificities of the experience, by asking questions such as "what was the first thing that happened to you when you were listening to the recording?" and "what kind of sensations (such as tactile, kinaesthetic, visual etc.) do you associate with your listening procedure?" This step seeks to help focus the interviewee on the internalized voice. The interviewee's body – its movements, gestures, breathing rhythms, eye movements – gave clues as to whether the interviewee was fully engaged with the process. When the interviewee was fully engaged, in the so called 'evoked state', (Petitmengin 2006), the interviewee tended to speak more slowly and to use present tense.
3. The third step involved reading in greater detail the student's movements, gestures, eye movements, voice volume, and choice of tense. By asking questions such as "what do you see?" or "what is happening now?", the student is helped to reach the evoked state. At this

stage, the gestures and body movements that are an integral part of the re-enactment of experience and so are video recorded. The recording provides an additional source of information from which to identify patterns related to the experience, and complements the verbal accounts given by the interviewee.

4. In the fourth step, we began to examine the "how" instead of the "what". The evoked state does not yield sufficient information by itself for us to understand the cognitive *process* that is initiated by listening to the recording. The process needs to be unpicked through the analysis of two temporal dimensions: A) diachronic and B) synchronic:

A) The diachronic dimension refers to the unfolding of an experience over time. For example, *"first I see a black hole in front of my chest and then I see an image of a tunnel."* In this quote, two elements of the experience take place as successive events. Events that occur within a diachronic dimension may be broken down into phases and sub-phases.

B) The synchronic dimension refers to discrete moments in time where elements of an experience occur simultaneously. For example: *"In the hole there is an image where I am in the kitchen at the table in my childhood home and my mom is boiling the laundry on the stove and I smell the sheets*". Experiences that are conveyed in the synchronic dimension often contain information about sensorial modalities, images, or kinaesthetic experiences. The synchronic dimension is often most evident after having identified diachronic sub-phases. The synchronic contents of sub-phases may be understood as 'micro-actions'.

Information relating to both diachronic and synchronic dimensions within the accounts given by the interviewee were recorded verbatim within the interviews. As the interview progresses, questions posed to the interviewee become more and more precise and oriented toward any micro-actions, and the interviewee's accounts also become more detailed. Saturation point is reached when the interviewee repeats the same detailed information, often in a pattern, without introducing any new information. The conduct of the interview on three separate occasions meant greater reliability in the patterns identified, and from the process of "going back to the specific time when you heard the sound".

Analytical process

There are a set of seven phases (according to Claire Petitmengin training in Paris 2013-2016) that constitute the process of analysis. After having transcribed the recordings from the interviews and numerating the texts, we reduced the accounts to those sections that related to an experiential dimension, and in some cases the accounts were re-sequenced to gather similar pieces of data together. A process of delineating and representing the *diachronic structure* of the experiences was conducted

step by step for each phase identified; and a process of delineating and representing of the *synchronic structure* of the experience was conducted only for the descriptive category of the visual senses. After the analysis, possible generic structures are identified, together with a validation of the results.

In the text below, we have chosen to present our findings by gathering representative "descriptemes" (phrases) which relate to the four phases and to the objective of our study.

Findings

The findings are presented and structured as follows:

A) Structure within the diachronic dimension
B) Experiential categories within the synchronic dimension
C) Gestures
D) Post-elicitation interview

A. Structure within the diachronic dimension:

The structure of the cognitive process occurring within the diachronic dimension were categorised into four phases. The different phases are:

1. Predisposition (preparing the body to be able to take in the voice).
2. Re-inviting the sound of the voice into the body
3. The sound of the voice imposes itself
4. Moving away from the sound

The student moves through these four cognitive phases when exploring the inner voice, which is critical of them:

1. Predisposition **(**preparing the body to be able to take in the voice)
   "Everything goes in slow motion," "sorting stimuli out,"
   "It is like everything stops," "Like a freezing state in body and mind."

2. Re-inviting the sound into the body
   "Expanding my body," "everything is focused in the chest,"

"a listening motion in the chest."

This was followed by:

a) Images from a film *"a movie from space"*
b) Sensations from the body *"breathing movement in the body"*
c) Smell *"boiling white sheets"*

3. The sound imposes itself

"It's like the sound takes over the whole body,
" Sounds that spread and crack bones," "Sounds multiply inside me"

a) Associated images: *"seeing a black hole," "a cable above my head,"*
"a white plastic tube entering the thorax"
b) Dissociated images: *"image of temporary disruption"*
c) Feelings related to the sound: *"feeling of wanting to throw up," "the feeling of deep sorrow," "a feeling of sadness," a lot of fear," "a lot of shame," "feeling of shame,"*
d) Bodily sensations related to the sound*: "difficulty to breathe," "shrinking sensation," "a pressure on the breathing torso," "sharp sensation of pain"*
e) Images of the sound: *"a light tile 20 cm behind my head," "gas," "as if a wall was inside me," "a blue image – icy blue," "image of white organs," "images of something breaking inside me," "Images of my own guts," "Images of my face torn apart," "point of contact between my heart and my throat"*
f) Sounds: *"slamming sound," "a sound of silence," "sound of my bones breaking,"*
g) Images of the shapes of the sound*: "flashes images from the sound"*

4. Moving away from the sound

"I accept the sound and let it encircle my broken body" "the sound vanishes and it flows out of my body", "I contact my knees."

a) Images of the sound: *"something green that arrives from the earth," "something light comes from the mouth and leaves me," "composting the sound in the Earth"*
b) Sound from the sound: *"the sound of a temporary disruption, like lightning that disappears"*
c) Emotions from the sound: *"very sad," "a deep sorrow"*
d) Body position and image from the sound: *"lie down on the earth and let go of everything,"*

B. Experiential categories within the synchronic dimension

In the following list of images, different experiential categories: cognitive, auditory, sensitive, visual and motor are regrouped into the descriptive category of *visual senses*. The "descriptemes" of the experiential categories are presented in a list below:

During the exploration of the inner critical voice, the following images and micro-actions were evoked:

1. Images presenting a memory of a real situation: *The image of the kitchen table from the childhood house, the image of the stove in the kitchen*
2. Image of a sound that has previously been heard: *Image of lightning, light yellow glow, from a temporary disruption, image of splashing intestines*
3. Images of a smell: *The image of the kitchen when experiencing the smelling from Mom's laundry*
4. Abstract images built from real life situation: *An image of a space, as if I was space itself.*
5. Image of a movement: *Something bright coming out of my mouth, like some form of gas.*
6. Image of a sound: *A light-yellow glow that makes a sound, a black hole here in my chest that makes a sound*
7. Images developing in interaction with micro movement in relation to listening: *An image of my body breaking down and the sound of bones breaking*
8. Action changing the image of the sound; Inner movement affecting the image of the sound: *I am shrinking before the black hole and have trouble breathing*

C. Gestures following the experience of hearing the voice

As discussed earlier, gestures are understood to be indicative that the interviewee is fully engaged with the evoked state but they are also reflective of the experience of hearing the voice. These gestures and sounds could be categorised in the following framework:

1. Gestures – *finger pointing, hand towards head*
2. Eye movements – *shifting upwards*
3. Breathing movements – *slowed breathing*
4. Body movements – *slow motion, relaxing*
5. Pauses – *silence*
6. Voice level – *speaking more slowly, deeper pitch*
7. Tempus – talking in present tense.

D. Post micro-phenomenological interview

After the first stage, the micro phenomenological interviews, we asked the student about her experiences of writer's block in relation to the exploration of the inner voice that was critical of her: *"You are not good enough, you will never make it."* The purpose of this second stage of interviewing was to provide a form of validity. The student was surprised at the richness and granularity of the experience that the voice had triggered and was surprised by the movements she had performed when conveying her perception of the inner voice: when she watched the video recording of her body movements that was captured as part of the micro phenomenological interview, she became aware of how interrelated the mental images she had described and the physical movements were in relation to the inner voice. The student could 'see' her inner voice in the way that it triggered movements and gestures and not the other way around. The trigger, as she saw it, was her internal voice which had activated a set of movements, something she was not previously aware of. Moving into the writer´s block seemed to be connected with an experience of internal sound.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to investigate how an inner voice, in the form of a mother´s voice, acts on a student with writer´s block through examining how the student reflects on her writer´s block in relation to the inner voice. This reflection included the student viewing herself on video, performing movements as she was interviewed using a micro-phenomenological method. This means that during the post-elicitation, or validation interview, the student was not only asked for her reflections on the process and findings of the first interviews; but also to describe her experience of writer´s block in relation to what she saw on the video recording. The video recording gave access to the gestures and body movements that accompanied the evocation of the experience of listening to her recorded inner voice.

Compared with the phenomenological hermeneutic method alone (Bojner Horwitz et al. 2013), the micro phenomenological method helped to reveal a more detailed structure to the student's cognitive process (i.e. the diachronic dimension) and more nuanced to the experiences, sensations and perceptions of the inner voice related to the writer's block categories (i.e. the visual senses within the synchronic dimension). Furthermore, the method facilitated an appreciation of the inner voice as triggering different movements and gestures, and that these were related to the interviewee´s reflective process and not the other way around. The information obtained from viewing the micro-phenomenological interview on video, enabled the student to better understand the possible processes behind her blocked writing. Compared to the first phenomenological hermeneutic study (Bojner Horwitz et al. 2013), where the student could resolve the block with movements – in this study, the

movements were linked to the evocation of experience itself. As the student said: her movements responded to her inner critical voice and she could *see* them. Following from this, it seems that by physically manifesting the blockage through movement and gestures, and by fully engaging with the inner voice in an embodied way, the student started to reflect on the blockage. The student herself exclaimed, "*maybe this moving of my inner sound was helping me overcome my blockage".* This means that the student started to reflect on the connection between "movements related to internal voices" and "movements = moving to writer´s block". To our knowledge, there are no detailed accounts in the extant literature of internal voices as being related to writer´s block.

Is it important to consider the extent to which it is possible to be able to discern directionality from our findings, that is which came first, the voice or the movements? For the student, the order in which these things appeared to be particularly important in relation to conceiving of a possible resolution of her writer's block. An awareness of the link between movement and the inner voice gave the student a new understanding of how the mother´s voice has been potentially important of her writer's block. There were seemingly two ways to manage a cognitive block, either by going "backwards" through using movements and/or by fully engaging with the inner voice in an embodied way. These approaches may be related to the notion of *"psychological flexibility*", which are integral components in ACT – Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Hayes, Stroshal, & Wilson 2012). In ACT, you practice being aware of the present moment, which includes your own thoughts, feelings, sensations, etc., and acceptance (i.e., acknowledging what is there without denial and avoidance). You also learn to reflect on the idea that you are not your thoughts, voices and so on, but that these come and go and can be observed at a somewhat of a distance ("defusion" or "decentering"). In the present study, increased awareness, acceptance, and defusion of the writer's block and its underlying causes/antecedents was facilitated primarily via the expression of the writing process and the blockage non-verbally via movements, along with the experiences that these gave rise to. These reflective movements uncovered knowledge about the blockage. Practicing awareness and acceptance allows for the identification of ongoing processes and practicing the observational perspective allows the *"defusion"* of thoughts and feelings from the self, rendering a more flexible relationship to one's thoughts and feelings. This, in turn, promotes greater control over their impact on one's subsequent states and behaviours. This creates greater potential for our behaviours to be guided by valued goals and our commitment to those valued goals (for example, writing a doctoral thesis).

Thus, non-verbal methods such as body movement, in addition to verbal methods, may be fruitful in helping to resolve blockages by tapping into processes of increased awareness, cognitive behavioural analysis, acceptance and defusion of the causes of the blockage away from the self. Using these different modalities to cultivate psychological flexibility could be beneficial for handling writer's block by increasing our ability to experience and process experiences in a new way; from a different perspective. A parallel interpretation of this could be an understanding that you are also not your

movements: they may be cultivated and used in order to experience and process obstacles in a new way and thus also to help to move the blockages out of oneself into the open to become more observable, understandable objects that are "defused" from the self. In this interpretation, the obstacles and their antecedents are not the self but rather are experiences of the self. Creating distance from the self renders those obstacles more manageable. Using different modalities, such as body movements and inner voices, together with ACT could therefore inform practice with regard to solving writer´s block and handling forms of procrastination.

Cognitive theory seems to be moving away from a view of cognition as being encapsulated in the "brain" (Kimmel 2013), and there have long been philosophers and neuroscientists who have argued that cognition is embodied (Proust 1929/1987, Merleau-Ponty 1945, Varela 1996, Rosch et al., 1991, Borghi & Cimatti 2010, Damasio 1999, Mehling et al. 2011). Thompson (2016) describes cognition as something that is not isolated or restricted to neural processes but is also embedded, enactive, extended and ecological, that is, located in the complex, dynamic arc of interactions that includes brains, bodies, environments, and cultural artifacts and institutions (Thomson & Stapleton 2009, Christoff et al. 2011, Lutz & Thompson 2003, Pires de Oliveira & de Souza Bittencourt, 2008). Hence, to better understand cognition it is important to include the embodied perspective which includes emotions and emotional regulation (Christoff et al. 2011). The present study engages in this conversation by exploring new ways of studying embodied cognition. In particular, the voice of the mother: *"you are not good enough – you will never make it*, can evoke considerable emotion in the form of shame and guilt, and is therefore highly embodied.

Body movements can serve as an tool to access the cognitive processes that are an integral part of our everyday lives: researchers have shown that gestures can facilitate thought (Iverson & Goldin-Meadow 1998, Goldin Meadow 2005), that mental rehearsal may be improved by overt physical movement (Coffman 1990), and, crucially, that physical simulation of a process can help us to better understand it (Collins 1991) and – as in a recent study Stieff et al. in STEM (2016) –gestures support spatial thinking. Bodily experiences therefore contribute to cognition in different ways; the term 'embodiment' is often used in referring to this idea (Krieger 2005). Embodiment is often described as both construct, and a process in which humans are simultaneously social beings and biological organisms (Krieger 2005). The term refers to the body´s physicality in enabling motor functions, as well as its function as an emotional and cognitive affective feedback system (Bojner Horwitz et al 2015). The student embodied the relationship between the voice and her movements by watching the video recording of the interview. By letting the interviewee view her own movements and gestures from the video recording in addition to listening to the voice recording of the elicitation interview, the interviewee was allowed to gain further insights about the block she was experiencing and begin to work through it. Other studies support the idea that the viewing of video can have a therapeutic effect: for example, a video-interpretation technique has been used to help patients to become more aware of

their movement pattern changes and emotions after interventions with theatre and dance (Bojner Horwitz 2004, 2010).

We tend to interpret a given cognitive process or to generalise from it rather than to describe the process itself in fine detail (Gallagher 2003, Hurlbert & Schwitzgebel 2007, Petitmengin 2006, 2011). By using the second stage of interviewing, a second-person perspective was introduced (Varela 1996). The second person perspective seems to have triggered a new level of awareness: the student could perceive a further layer of individual sounds and voices, which related to the images, movements and gestures that had appeared in the original study. This suggests that a process of interpreting video of an evoked state may be useful in trying to understand further forms of cognitive blockage.

Findings from multiple areas of research show that people have trouble engaging in perspective taking and acting 'wisely', when they reason about issues that are personally meaningful (Epley & Caruso 2008). Hence, methods to increase one's ability to engage in perspective taking have been developed and investigated (e.g. walking in another person's shoes, perspective taking, distancing (Kross & Grossmann 2012). In the current study, empathetic understanding isn't about walking in *another* person's shoes, but rather the interviewee is encouraged to watch whilst she is walking in her own shoes, via the video recording and the video interpretation, facilitating perspective taking at a distance.

Hearing voices is a relatively common phenomenon – In an on-line questionnaire study, diverse experiences regarding the hearing of voices were collected (Woods et al. 2015). People, 81% of respondents who had not been diagnosed with a condition such as schizophrenia, reported that they had heard multiple voices quite often (124 of 153 respondents) and 66% reported experiencing bodily sensations while they heard voices, results which suggest that there is a connection between the two. "Self-attacking" voices are also common in conditions such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. These are the subject for new therapeutic approaches such as compassion mind training (Gilbert & Procter 2006, Smeets et al., 2014). Using a micro phenomenological method and first-person interviews may also help to reveal experiences, sensations and perceptions about embodied cognitive processes, related to these inner voices. It is also likely that such methods may be useful more directly in the resolution of writer's block suffered by other groups, such as researchers.

When comparing the phenomenological hermeneutic method with the micro-phenomenological method there are two important differences: Firstly, the phenomenological hermeneutic approach incorporates an interpretation from the researcher of the texts that are produced (interview accounts), whereas the micro-phenomenological approach does not. Secondly, the purpose of the two approaches differs: a micro-phenomenological approach attempts to elicit information about *how* a process occurs rather than what happens during it. The phenomenon of writer´s block is a complex process and so for the student, the micro phenomenological interview helped to produce an insight into the *specific* sensations that were blocking her writing, in this case the elements of experience that constituted the

internalized voice from her mother saying *"you are not good enough – you will never make it"*, and *how* it was acting upon her.

Limitations

Every method that aims to tap into the first-person experience is characterized by the fact that the interview itself has an impact on the content that the subject is reporting (Titchener 1907, 1912, Zahavi 2007), and this is something that certainly applies in the current study. For a detailed analysis of the effects of the investigator's prompts see. Vermersch (2006). The validity of the study may be strengthened however by the experience of the interviewer, having four years of micro phenomenological training, and the conduct of the method: being aware of the impact of oneself and behaving as neutral as possible in the repeated interview opportunities (Petitmengin 2011).
There can also be difficulties in accessing and describing experience, an issue that has been described by several researchers (e.g. Varela 1996, Hurlbert & Schwitzgebel 2007, Maurel 2009, Zahavi D. 2007, p.1.), and which Petitmengin (2011) summarizes succinctly:

> "the fleeting and changeable character of experience, the tendency of the subject to shift from the description of the singular experience toward hasty generalizations, to infiltrate his/her theories, beliefs and presuppositions in the description of the experience, the absorption into exterior objects to the detriment of inner experience, the lack of adequate vocabulary to describe experience, the distorting effect of metaphors"

The fact that experience is not immediately accessible to awareness and therefore to description translates to the challenges of methods that aim to capture the first-person experience, including the micro phenomenological method. Inevitably, the descriptions gathered are somehow transformed by the interpretations of the subject who is producing them and by the interviewer who is gathering them. Each moment of the micro phenomenological method introduces a transformation of experience: the relived experience, the reflected experience; any experience put into words is effectively a new experience. Rather than rejecting rejection of all descriptions in the first or second person, it is essential to observe and to describe as precisely as possible how these transformations occur. We believe that a rigorous description of these operations can contribute towards a better understanding of experiences from the first-person perspective, and create a greater potential for own behaviours to be guided by valued goals. Finally, it is important to note that we present our results from only one participant and therefore we cannot generalize our findings to all cases of writer's block.

Conclusion

This study shows that there is a richness of images, emotions and kinaesthetic information that may be helpful when identifying the factors involved in resolving writer's block. Furthermore, the micro-phenomenological method used together with video interpretation can help to produce detailed information about an experience, and the movements and sensations associated with it.

The findings suggest that the combination of verbal and non-verbal ways of learning may be applied in broader areas of scholarly practice such as research writing.

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