

Reflections from the Classroom: Towards a Radical Pedagogy for Early Years Practitioners

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Abstract

This paper comprises some critical reflections on the teaching of a second year undergraduate module called Children's Cultural Worlds in which students are required to engage with original studies which are then used to stimulate self-reflection and engagement with wider issues relating to our understanding of children's place in the social world. It will be argued that when individual memories are shared it is possible to identify continuities and discontinuities in childhood experiences as well as the intersections between childhood and other social divisions such as gender, class and ethnicity. The requirement that students recall and reflect on their childhood memories and share them with others is a way of students learning through their own experiences, reflecting on their views and values. Furthermore, as it will be shown, it opens up spaces for alternative values and viewpoints to emerge about how we might 'regulate' early childhood because "When we tell stories and process them, using reflective dialogues, we create the possibility of change in ourselves and others" (McDrury & Alterio, 2002: p.38)

Introduction

This paper comprises some critical reflections on the teaching of a second year undergraduate module called *Children's Cultural Worlds*. It will be argued that it is important to introduce early childhood studies students to the approach of naturalism, as it has been applied to the study of children's lives, because in doing so, students are invited to reflect upon the various ways in which we, as adults regulate childhood through our treatment of them. Also, in designing the module in the way outlined below, students can be helped to consider how they might disrupt some of the taken for granted assumptions about children which might otherwise contribute to dominant discourses of early childhood education and care in the UK (Moss and Petrie, 2002); dominant discourses which justify much of the current regulatory practices in early childhood education and care as necessary in providing what children are said to 'need' (Mayall, 2000).

In order to do this, the paper is divided into four main parts. The first part of the paper outlines the approach taken in the module to the concept of children's cultural worlds. Thus, the module was premised on the methodological commitment to capture an interior view of children's cultural practices, that is to say, cultural practices *from within*. The second part of the paper sketches out the structure of the module and the teaching and assessment strategy employed. Accordingly, a narrative approach was adopted whereby students were required to engage with original studies which are then used to stimulate storytelling and self-reflection along with engagement with wider issues relating to our understanding of children's place in the social world. The third part of the paper considers some of the recurrent themes which students identified in their work, before finally, reflecting upon how the approach taken to the content, structure and teaching of the module might be understood as a step towards a radical pedagogy for early years. This approach is in line with much work carried out within the new sociology of childhood which questions the value of an image of the child as future citizens (Lee 2001) rather than as competent and active participants in their own and others' lives.

The Story of a Module

As lecturers in social science and as sociologists by training, we set out, a couple of years ago, to devise a module entitled: *Children's Cultural Worlds*, suitable for undergraduate students on our Early Childhood Studies programme. We were aware that we were not alone in this endeavour, as over the past decade growing numbers of universities in the UK have begun offering Early Childhood Studies (ECS) degrees, with modules on children's cultural worlds in one form or another included in their programmes. Indeed, this topic now has become a requirement of all ECS programmes taught in Higher Education in the United Kingdom since, in 2014, the UK QAA benchmarks document for undergraduate Early Childhood Studies programmes emphasised the importance, in ECS degrees, of some recognition of '*children as active participants*' (QAA, 2014:4). This is said to be because:

3.4 A critical analysis of children as active participants, their rights and an anti-bias approach which considers early childhood as a site for democracy, sustainability and social justice underpins and permeates the subject. (QAA, 2014:4)

The undertaking for us became the design of a module which would be successful in encouraging this sensibility in our students. We wanted to deliver a module which would challenge some of the students' common sense assumptions about young children's competence, and encourage them to see children's cultural practices as the highly skilful accomplishments which they are, and of their social worlds as worthy of study in their own right.

At the same time, we wanted them to be able to situate this competence within the bounded nature of childhood as a social category in society. In this regard, we were working within the interactionist tradition (Mead, 1962) which reminds us that we experience the world as unique individuals, whilst simultaneously being part of such a world which is composed of, as Sharrock, Hughes and Martin (2003) put it: '*wider sets of rules and shared understandings of the community and the social order*'. Our task as lecturers, was to provide a way for our students to understand the individual uniqueness of children's experiences, within a social world which was not of their making. We developed 'solutions to these problems' by focusing on the teaching and assessment strategy. However, inspiration for the content of our module came from a classic study by Francis Chaput Waksler.

In her classic paper, 'The Hard Times of Childhood and Children's Strategies for Dealing with Them', (1991) Waksler reports on her findings from a study in which she elicited stories from her undergraduate students comprising memories of their own childhood with particular emphasis on the 'hard times' of being a child. These were not hard times as we might understand them as adults, but rather some of the ordinary, everyday difficulties of simply 'being a child' in relation to adults, other children, and the broader social world; experiences that children themselves, at the time, see as hard. Her aim was to examine children's lack of control over aspects of their lives, (including: lack of control over the physical world, their bodies, activities and appearance; lack of control over their emotions and feelings and lack of control over their moral world) and to explore the various strategies which they employed to deal with this lack of control. In so doing, Waksler demonstrates that children do indeed have 'strategies' for regaining control over these 'hard times' and therefore are social actors rather than passive recipients of adult control. Waksler's study inspired us to include academic content which all had in common a commitment to what has been called 'naturalism' (Matza, 1969). Thus, we made the decision to focus the content of our module on some classic and contemporary empirical studies which describe particular aspects of children's lives *from within*.

With respect to our teaching and assessment method, we adopted a narrative approach which involved students engaging in self-reflective exercises. As part of their assessment, students were asked to reflect upon and write about some aspect of their childhood memories which related to the empirical topics covered each week in the module. By engaging with literature from key figures in the field who share a methodological commitment to understanding children's cultural worlds *from within*, students were encouraged to reflect upon aspects of children's cultural practices to gain an insight into how children experience the world and how aspects of it are constructed by them. A more detailed description of the particular structure of the module and assessment will be provided later. First, however, a brief outline of the analytic approach taken in this module will be presented.

The Story of an Analytic Sensibility

The analytic approach we chose is now recognised by mainstream sociology as one strand of research within the field of the 'new social studies of childhood' (James and Prout, 1990; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). However, previously, sociology's interest in the study of childhood was that children needed what was called 'socialization'. Actual children and actual children's lives were not considered to be of any interest to sociology; they were only of interest as 'human becomings' (Lee, 2001) rather than human beings in their own right. Indeed, sociology has long sought to describe the transition from 'human becoming' to human being in terms of the process of 'socialization', '*the internalisation of the culture of the society into which the child is born*', (Talcott Parsons, 1956: 17).

Within sociology, an alternative to this dominant framework developed during the 1960's and 1970's. What was argued by these sociologists was firstly, that socialization theory was just an adult ideology which adults imposed upon children. Who is to say that children need socialization? Children certainly don't say so, but adults do. Therefore it occurred to these sociologists that it would be interesting to study just how adults of one sort or another, especially parents and teachers, imposed this ideology of socialization upon children in their dealings with them. So they studied adult-child interaction. The key figures in this were Robert MacKay (1974), Hugh Mehan (1974) and Mathew Speier (1976). Secondly, these writers also argued that if socialization theory was part of adult culture, then it made sense to suppose that children might also have their own cultures which were separate to some extent to the culture of adults. They came up with the notion that when adults and children interacted with each other there occurred something called 'culture contact'. If this was so, that there was culture contact, it made it reasonable to explore the nature of the culture that children brought to such interaction and that they shared with one another. Support for this idea came from the work of the anthropologists, Iona and Peter Opie.

These two alternative directions, although they were ground breaking, remained rather marginal to mainstream sociological concerns. However, they were eventually taken up in the late 1970's and early 1980's in the UK by what came to be known as 'the new social studies of childhood' (James and Prout, 1990) and in the US by Francis Chaput Waksler (1991). The reasons for this take-up came from both outside sociology and inside it. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these influences in full, (for a summary of these developments see James and Prout, (1990), Alanen, (1988), Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, (1998). However, it is worth noting one of these influences here, as this comprises our approach to understanding children's cultural worlds.

During the 1950's and 1960's sociologists became increasingly interested in 'naturalistic' approaches to the study of social life. They turned away from the grand theorizing of people like Parsons who studied whole societies and what held them together, to studies of the culture of groups within societies. They were inspired by the theoretical perspectives of symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and ethnomethodology and they produced a collection of what are known as ethnographies of social life. These are studies which seek to capture an interior view

of people's cultures, that is to say cultures seen from within¹. All of these were done within the area of the sociology of deviance and all were about adults. As more ethnographic studies were completed through the 1950's and 1960's, a kind of cultural consensus began to emerge about the practicalities of ethnography and the best ways in which it should be done. A common way of referring to this consensus is ethnography's 'commitment to naturalism' (Matza 1969). Naturalism means being faithful to the phenomenon being investigated.

Those working within the 'new social studies of childhood' found this work to be congenial because they were also interested in the 'realities' of children's lives and in seeing children as active 'agents' in the social construction of their lives. Thus, there now exists a burgeoning number of studies which seek to gain an understanding of aspects of children's social worlds, of the organisation of their cultural practices and how children experience the world and how aspects of it are constructed by them (Corsaro, 2003; Corsaro and Eder, 1990; Danby, 2003; Danby and Baker, 1998a; Danby and Baker, 1998b; Goodwin, 2006; Goodwin and Goodwin, 1987, Renold, 2005 to name a few). Although interested in a diverse and disparate range of issues, what these researchers have in common is their commitment to study children's cultural worlds from within. They attempted to view children's worlds from their perspectives and presented the cultural practices they engage in as important and worthy of study in their own right. It was this analytical sensibility that we wanted to introduce to our students to encourage them to view young children as human 'being' rather than human 'becomings'.

A Narrative Approach to Teaching, Learning and Assessment

With respect to the content of the module, we decided to focus on those areas of children's lives where historically, what was known about children, was filtered through an adult lens (children's place within the family, for example) and where now there is a growing body of research, inspired by the kinds of naturalistic studies identified above, which positions children and their cultural practices as worthy of study in their own right. Consequently, we delivered lectures on such things as children's relationships with family and friends, the ways in which they perform their identities and the extent to which they engage in interpretive reproduction through their play and food practices.

As already stated, the assessment method for this module firstly required students to read and summarise extracts from empirical studies, all of which had in common their theoretical and methodological commitment to capture children's lives *from within*. The students were then asked to engage in memory activities in which they wrote about some childhood experience which related to the reading. For example, in one activity, based on Waksler's (1991) paper, students were asked to recall and write about a 'hard time' which they had experienced as a child and the strategies they developed to deal with them. The students brought their stories to the classroom, shared them with the group and then engaged in a process of reflective dialogue. Following the seminar the students were asked to write a short summary of

¹ Some classic studies in this genre are Howard Becker's *Outsiders* (date), Donald Cressey's *Other People's Money* (date) and Ned Polsky's *Hustlers, Beats and Others* (date).

the seminar discussion consisting of a brief outline of the main conclusions reached in the seminar.

In devising our teaching, learning and assessment strategy, we adopted an narrative approach. Narrative is an interpretive approach which has a long history within the social sciences and which involves a 'storytelling' methodology based on the view that telling and hearing stories are fundamental to how we make sense of the world and our place within it. It takes as its starting point a social constructionist view of reality as constituted through social interactions (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). In this respect narrative analysis is often situated, in the social theory literature, within postmodernism (Cuff, Sharrock and Francis, 2002; Beck, 1986; Giddens, 1990).

In narrative inquiry, the story is the object of study and analysis focuses upon how individuals or groups make sense of events and actions in their lives through the stories they tell. Methods such as the survey or the questionnaire are inadequate for gaining access to the multiplicity of perspectives comprising social reality as it is constructed through such stories. Instead, researchers record participants' stories through a variety of ethnographic methods including interviews, observations, written journals and other autobiographical texts.

The narrative approach is becoming increasingly popular in education studies (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) because it can help students, teachers and *their* teachers, make the link between theories of teaching and learning and the process of reflective practice, as we were to discover in the course of teaching the module *Children's Cultural Worlds*.

Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry as Pedagogy and Method for Reflective Practice

In this module, we were telling stories about children's cultural practices from an interior position, attempting to make sense of their cultural worlds *from within*. We started from the premise that all teaching involves telling stories of some kind and, as McDrury and Alterio (2002:p.34) suggest, "*it makes sense ... to encourage students to tell stories about events they have experienced and to make links between stories of the world and their own stories.*" For us, the requirement that students recalled and reflected on their childhood memories and shared them with others consists of "a way to knowing" (McDrury & Alterio, 2000: p.35. Emphasis in original). It is a way of students learning through their own experiences, reflecting on their views and values and opening up spaces for alternative values and viewpoints to emerge because "[W]hen we tell stories and process them, using reflective dialogues, we create the possibility of change in ourselves and others" (McDrury & Alterio, 2002: p.38)

Reflective learning and reflective practice are increasingly seen as vital ingredients of high quality teaching and learning in Higher Education. In the words of Burrows (cited in Maich et al, 2000: p.309): "*If professional practice is about change, development and meaningful action [which teaching and learning in Higher Education undoubtedly is], the art of reflection becomes a pre-requisite*". Despite the current interest in reflection, there is no consensus over what reflective practice is or what function it should serve (Kember, Wong & Yeung, 2001; Norton & Campbell,

2007), with disciplinary contexts determining the definitional parameters and the underpinning theoretical base of reflection.

However, irrespective of this definitional complexity, it is possible to identify a number of recurrent themes in the literature on reflection. At its simplest, critical reflective practice involves analysing one's actions, identifying those actions that work well (as well as those that do not work well) and introducing changes in order to improve practice (Forde et al, 2006). For John Dewey, arguably one of the most significant educational theorists and philosophers of the twentieth century, reflective thinking can be understood as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends" (Dewey, 1933: p.9, cited in Kember, Wong & Yeung, 2001: p.10). In other words, reflective thinking and practice involves movement, "uncertainty, unpredictability [and] questioning (Bolton, 2005: p.3). It is a dynamic and evolving process (Norton & Campbell, 2007) that is circuitous and has no end point.

Despite the fact that reflection has the potential to enhance student experiences and make a significant contribution to personal and professional development, it is not without its critics. In part, this is due to its ubiquity in a range of professions, so much so that it "has almost become clichéd" (Forde et al, 2006: p.66). Although numerous, there are two critiques of current thinking on reflective practice that we would like to address because we feel teaching and learning via memory work and group discussion, as we did on this module, actually addresses some of these critiques. First, reflective thinking, and Schon's work in particular, has been criticised because of its emphasis on the individual and self-reflection (Kember, 2001a, 2001b). One way of overcoming the tendency towards individualism in reflective thinking is to form critical friendship groups (Day, 1999; Campbell & Sykes, 2007), which are simultaneously supporting and challenging and are "based upon practical partnerships entered into voluntarily, which presuppose a relationship between equals and are rooted in a common task of shared concern" (Day, 1999: p.144). The equality and mutuality of the relationships in the module seminars was founded on the students' shared location as students and their shared concern was, in a practical sense, the completion of the module assignment. In this way, they were able to move beyond narrow *self-reflection*, although that undoubtedly did form an important part of the process, towards a more collaborative and integrative mode of *group reflection*.

The group versus individual approach to reflection highlights another criticism of reflective thinking. It has been suggested that reflection can be overly introspective, leading towards passivity rather than activity and, therefore, does not necessarily result in change (Campbell & Norton, 2007). We would present two counter arguments to this accusation of introspection and 'navel gazing'. First, we are in agreement with Mitchell and Weber (2005:p.4) that "there is nothing about focusing inwards on the individual that necessarily precludes simultaneously pointing outwards and towards the political and the social." Second, in the design and delivery of the memory work activities on the module we drew on Norton et al's (2004) notion of 'going public', or making one's private reflections public knowledge, as the basis of good practice. At its simplest, 'going public' can involve discussing and sharing ideas with colleagues. Engagement in the group discussions in

seminars can be seen as a form of 'going public', whereby sharing reflections on our childhood memories promoted dialogue, collegiality and collaboration and, as we shall demonstrate below, offered possibilities for change, development and evolution (Norton & Campbell, 2007).

Going Public: Reflecting on Students' Stories

In this section we will discuss some extracts from students' assessments including some of their childhood memories which relate to a particular reading which they were assigned and also some of their reflections on the readings, their memories and their ideas about putting some of the conclusions into practice in work with young children². What is noteworthy about the memory activities in the students' assessment was the commonality of their childhood experiences. Although there was diversity according to key social demographics such as gender, age, class and the geographical location that students grew up in, it was possible to identify a number of recurrent themes in their memories and subsequent reflections.

Experiencing a Lack of Control

Perhaps the most frequently cited reflection on their childhood was the observation that much of their childhood was characterised by 'lack' – lack of control, lack of voice, lack of visibility – as the following extracts illustrate.

Extract 1

adults are one of the main causes of children's oppression, children are often not seen by adults as individuals but as extensions of themselves. This is one of the main problems and ways in which adults oppress children by projecting certain expectations onto children that can't be achieved the same way as adults.

Extract 2

Some of the [seminar] group had friendships due to being actively encouraged by their parents, whom were friends; regardless of their willingness to be friends. There were recollections of protests to the parents, but the parents would insist that the children could be friends, if they just played nicely. Waklser, (1991), highlighted this scenario, "Forced Association with Children" as a 'Hard time' that children face during childhood.

Extract 3

Don't talk with your mouth full. Use your knife and fork 'properly'. Wait for everyone to finish before asking to leave the table. Don't answer the phone at the table.

Extract 4

² It should be stressed that informed consent was obtained from all students prior to carrying out any extraction or analysis of student's work. Furthermore, the data collection was carried out in full compliance with the relevant sections of (1) the 'Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association (2002), (2) Edge Hill University Framework for Ethics and (3) the Edge Hill University Research Ethics Committee's 'Ethical Guidance for Undertaking Research with Children and Young People' (2013).

During the seminar, we discussed the hard times that we had all experienced as children and thought about the ways in which we overcame these hard times.... I noted that there were themes in the hard times within our seminar group just like Waksler noted in her study and the common themes specific to our seminar group were: not being able to join in with older siblings; having to eat food that you did not like and being made to participate in lessons or clubs that you did not enjoy. Many of the students in the group nodded in agreement and remembrance when listening to other student's stories.

In much the same way that Waksler's study had served as inspiration for us as lecturers, it was a reading that the students returned to during their reflections. The centrality of Waksler's research findings in the students' narratives illustrated the ways in which they were drawing on and making links with "stories of the world and their own stories" (McDrury & Alterio, 2002: p.34) This was evident, not only in the frequent references to Waksler's findings which she, interestingly, referred to as stories, but also to the fact that the students' assessments seamlessly moved between individual memories and shared memories and between the personal pronouns 'I' and 'We'.

Developing Strategies to Overcome Control

In keeping with Waksler's research findings, the students recalled and reflected on the strategies they developed to deal with the lack of control that they felt in their lives. In so doing, they were drawing on their own experiences as "a way to knowing" (McDrury & Alterio, 2000: p.35) what it really means to talk about children as social actors and meaning makers.

Extract 5

When children use their pocket money for foods they have not been provided with by their parents such as sweets this is recognised by adults and adults realise that children will eat unhealthy food with or without their control. This relates to children resisting their parents messages around good and healthy food and highlights that children will still want to gain the pleasure they do from eating sugary and sweet things as treats although children recognise that they do not and should not eat these sorts of things for every meal time.

Extract 6

One of my own hard times that I experienced as a child was when my mum sent me to ballet lessons every Saturday. She always said about how she wanted me to grow up into a dancer. However I hated ballet lessons and couldn't bear the thought of going to them and would do anything to get out of them. I felt I had no rhythm like I had to left feet and I felt so out of place watching all the young pretty girls dance around beautifully as all I wanted to do was be out in the street with my friends running round. I used to get really stressed and agitated when I had to go to ballet, I would try and

come up with a new excuse every week as to why I couldn't go such as my legs were sore or I wasn't well, I would even go to the extreme of putting wet newspaper under my eyes so I had dark circles and throwing water down the toilet to pretend I was being sick.

'Stories of Experience' and 'Stories of the World': adult/child dichotomies as embodied realities

The task of remembering and reflecting on their childhood experiences also created the space for students to critically consider the position of children in relation to adults. The process of telling their stories about feeling a lack of control illustrated the impact of assumptions about childhood incompetence and immaturity on their own lives. As a consequence, the construction of the adult/child dichotomy and the unequal power dynamics that exist between children and adults became real and embodied. Recalling their feelings of anger, embarrassment and injustice at adults' actions when they were children and hearing similar experiences reported by others, resulted in some students concluding that children's lives are structured, consciously or not, in such a way as to reinforce the adult/child dichotomy, both in the family and the 'socialising' institutions and mechanisms that children come into contact with.

Extract 7

Collectively in the group discussion, we recognised that hard times of childhood are attributable to being a child and we were able to recognise the lasting effect that a seemingly trivial event had on us as adults.

Extract 8

Many parts of children's lives and experiences are difficult and challenging daily. On daily occasions whether it's in school or in the home a child will most likely be asked to do or eat something they don't want to. Children are daily restricted and adults always say that they are doing it in the child's best interest but this can feel the opposite. Adults generally take full control over children's lives. Adults don't listen to children even though on a general scale children are more capable than adults believe and this serves a purpose of reinforcing adults/child dichotomy.

Extract 9

It was concluded that these hard times were common to everyone as they were attributable to simply being a child rather than specific societies, culture and family set ups. I also noted that children are much more competent than adults give them credit for especially in reference to self presentation, individuality and agency.

Telling Stories as a Method for Reflecting on Practice

To some extent, these recurrent themes came as little surprise to us given that our own story telling and analytical sensibility as lecturers had been underpinned by Waklser's research exploring the hard times of childhood and children's strategies for dealing with them. However, what we were not anticipating was that the students would utilise their individual stories and the stories they had heard from others during

their seminar to consider “the possibility of change in ourselves and others” (McDrury & Alterio, 2002: p.38). Although we had not asked the students to consider how the process of individual and collaborative reflection might open up possibilities for alternative futures with regards to early childhood education and care, a number of the students considered what impact understanding children’s cultural worlds from within might have on practice.

Extract 9

The predominant conclusion from this seminar seemed to be the significance of paying attention to each and every individual child and seeing them interpret and react to the world surrounding them - whether in real life or through play. This is fundamental as it helps us to grasp the true nature of childhood and adapt educational and child services to suit the needs of the child. For example, it may help the creation and implementation of future Government initiatives concerning the over-emphasis on academic content in nurseries. Research such as Corsaro’s hopefully highlights the importance of social and emotional care in nurseries which needs to be explored to help children in more personal ways, rather than using measurements of development such as the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Extract 10

Adults, however, may perceive children’s hardships as trivial but Waksler’s research found that hardships are very real and can trouble them throughout their life. This can have implications when working with children, as it is important to realise that practitioners need to listen to children, not dismiss their concerns as trivial and not impose our will on them.

Extract 11

The discussion in this week’s seminar was about how children can often use literature to help them through different situations. For example it could be used to help them get through difficult times such as being bullied. They could look at stories such as Matilda for this. The Matilda story line could help those children that feel as though they are different, for example, as it shows them that support from adults can be found. Matilda feels as though she is different from her family members and she seeks help from Miss Honey. This could encourage other children to look for help.

Concluding Reflections

In this paper we have presented some critical reflections on the teaching of an undergraduate module called 'Children's Cultural Worlds' offered to BA Honours Early Childhood Studies students. We outlined the interior approach to children's cultural worlds taken in the module, we discussed the teaching and learning strategy and we provided some examples of reflective work carried out by students.

In these brief concluding reflections we would like to suggest that the approach applied to the module together with the teaching and learning strategy employed has proven to be particularly effective in achieving a number of learning outcomes, some which we set out with at the beginning and one which was revealed to us as part of our *reflection on action* as the module proceeded.

Our aim at the outset was to devise a module which would encourage an analytic sensibility in our students, and we would like to argue that the approach taken in the module is a particularly effective method for doing this and for gaining access to children's subjectivities, understandings and cultural practices. By engaging with literature from key figures in the field who share a methodological commitment to understanding children's cultural worlds *from within*, students reflected upon aspects of children's cultural practices and gained an insight into how children experience the world and how aspects of it are constructed by them.

In devising the assessment as we did, with reflective exercises and seminars where we told stories of our childhoods, students considered the ways in which adult participation and regulation of children's cultural worlds might be experienced by them as an imposition. In so doing, students began to question some of the dominant assumptions about childhood and recognised the need to see children as active meaning makers in the construction and accomplishment of their social worlds, rather than as passive recipients of adult 'socialisation' practices.

Although we have all had experiences of childhood, once we become adults we are outsiders to children's contemporary cultural worlds and we become strangers to our own childhood. In the words of one student:

Extract 12

Memory work is often influenced by the current status of society. This means that when recalling previous events people often ignore other factors. For example, adults look at their hard times as children from their adult perspective.

As a result of the memory activities employed in this module, students recalled stories from their childhood which their adult selves had forgotten. When combined with the stories we were telling them about the importance of viewing children's cultural worlds from an interior position, some of the students created new stories about how they would like to see early years' practice developing.

In conclusion, we would like to suggest that by organising our course in the way described above, we have been able to encourage an analytic sensibility in our students which treats children as social actors with complex cultures worthy of study in their own right and students have developed self-reflective skills which, as we have demonstrated are a useful way of learning about key issues relating to children's lives. Surprisingly, we have also found a way of instilling in them an ethic for working with children in a way which realises the ideal of '*early childhood as a site for democracy, sustainability and social justice*' (QAA, 2014:4). It would seem to us therefore, that the analytic sensibility and the teaching and learning strategy discussed in this paper is of value for practitioners in the pursuit of reflective practice,

since if trainee practitioners were to have some exposure to this sensibility, it could help them to better ground their educational and other practical interventions in children's own understandings and could help them to 'start from the child' (Neaum, 2012) as much practitioner literature enjoins them to do.

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