

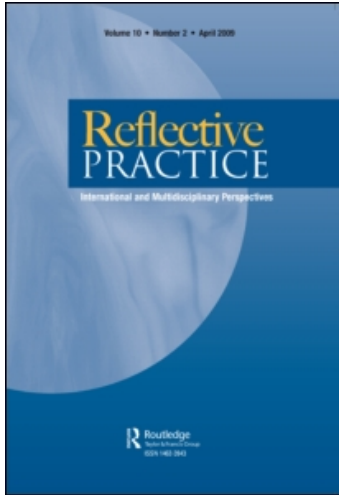
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'Reflect' - is this too much to ask?

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‘Reflect’ – is this too much to ask?

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This paper intends to highlight some of the findings from a Preparatory Pilot Project (PPP), which has acted as a catalyst for further research to inform my professional doctoral thesis. The overall aim of my research is to understand how reflective dispositions can be developed in Early Childhood Studies students in order to create a reflective learning community and culture. The objective of this PPP is to understand Early Childhood students’ perceptions of reflective practice. A small-scale inquiry was undertaken which set out to establish how reasonable it is to expect first year Early Childhood Studies undergraduate students to demonstrate their understanding of the concept of reflection. This paper relates others’ views of reflective practice to the data collected through the method of focus group discussions. Students’ perceptions of reflection were used to establish why there was a difference between the expectations of tutors and the students’ approach to reflective practice. The findings suggest that a combination of reasons, including assumptions being made about students’ understanding of the concept of reflection; pedagogical cultural shifts challenging students’ transitions into HE; the recognition that self-awareness and understanding of self as a learner is necessary; and the diverse nature of the Early Childhood field of practice all played a significant part in the divergence between tutor expectations and student performance.

Keywords: reflection; reflective practice; early childhood; focus groups

Introduction

This discussion paper is predominantly based upon the activities undertaken for a preparatory pilot project to inform my doctoral research, and was conducted during the academic year 2008–09. This project (Hanson, 2009) has provided me with evidence to make changes to the pedagogical approaches taken with first year Early Childhood Studies (ECS) students, and many more questions to investigate.

My own reflective diary entries and the students’ voices, through quotations from focus group discussions will be used to illustrate key points raised within this paper. It is not my intention to present a completed study, but to give an insight into my experience and demonstrate the relevance of preliminary investigations in establishing a baseline for further research.

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This project has acted as a pilot for my ongoing doctoral research, which investigates how reflective dispositions can be developed in undergraduates and how a reflective community and culture can be encouraged.

There are several drivers behind this inquiry – my own educational grounding and fundamental belief in the value of reflective practice, the recognition through informal observations that most first year ECS undergraduate students do not understand the concept of reflection within the higher education context, and my recent discovery of the work of Stephen Brookfield (1995), which has been influential in changing my thinking about the reflective process.

As an educator, reflection is an integral part of my own practice and therefore it is easy for me to make assumptions about it being a natural, intuitive part of the learning process. It is not until we research different concepts that some of our habitual assumptions are challenged. My teaching career started in 1996 in primary education and I always believed that I was a very reflective teacher. It was not until I moved to a lecturing post in higher education that I realised I had taken a very superficial approach to reflective practice. This was highlighted to me when one of my pedagogical beliefs was challenged. An example follows.

Developing reflective practice through questioning existing assumptions

One of my beliefs as an early years teacher is that using play within the classroom enables young children to learn and develop (Moyle, 2005). My belief was grounded by information based within an educational framework encompassing the concept that play was a tool through which the curriculum could be taught. This could be considered to be one of the hegemonic assumptions that Schon (1983) referred to. I based my practice upon this premise and for years believed that I was providing a truly play-based learning experience. My reflections at that time (only recently recognised) were guided mainly by my workplace and the government's agenda to achieve targets. I can now see my reflective practice was somewhat 'ritualised' as Boud and Walker (1998) would describe. I went through the motions of what I believed was reflective practice, yet rarely experienced what Brookfield (1987) described as the inner discomforts or what Boud and Walker (1998, p. 192) saw as the 'uncertainties, discrepancies and dissatisfactions which are central to reflection'.

A career move into higher education brought with it new insights. I worked with a colleague who had a sociological perspective on play, and our reflective discussions made me realise that what I considered to be play-based learning was in fact more activity based learning. My whole understanding and perception of play was challenged and my position shifted. Once looking through the lenses of my colleague and theorists from alternative disciplines to education, and therefore using more than one lens to inform my practice, I realised that my understanding of play was limited (Brookfield, 1995). This acted as a catalyst to examine my ability to reflect and I questioned the depth of my previous reflections. My reflections upon this serve to demonstrate my reflective disposition and that reflective practice is never constant, requiring continuous reviewing and restructuring of existing beliefs. This new self-awareness of the potential to make assumptions has served me well for this inquiry into ECS students' perceptions of reflection.

Reflection and the Early Childhood Studies student

A reflective disposition is essential for students to become effective Early Childhood practitioners and for me in facilitating them. Without it, practice can become stale and lack the skills to address the diverse and complex needs of children and families.

Findings from research by Sylva et al. (2003) (The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education [EPPE]) project, established a need for a qualified Early Childhood workforce who could demonstrate the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge that the then government recognised as being essential for all early years workers to possess (DfES, 2006). This brought an overdue appreciation that Early Childhood practitioners need to 'move beyond a demonstration of technical competence and be expected to engage in critical reflection' (Reed, 2008, p. 163) if they are to ensure children, their families and the wider community receive provision and care.

Early Childhood practitioners are advocates of their practice and can only gain strength of advocacy through rationalising their practice based upon values and principles. These values and principles are strengthened and adapted through critical reflection, as Brookfield (1995, p. 265) commented: 'Not to be critically reflective is to be blown about by the winds of cultural and pedagogic preference'.

Accountability for actions is often the driving force behind the need for rationalisation through reflection. Professionals are answerable to all stakeholders involved in their practice – employers, students, children, funding and/or governing bodies etc. Depending upon the culture of the workplace, there could be reliance upon self-initiated quality assurance as an indicator of performance. This could be managed through the generation of our own feedback through critical reflection (Shepherd, 2006).

Brookfield (1995) stated that having a grounded belief in what we do and what we value is fundamental to gaining credibility as professional practitioners. Having a means by which to justify actions and beliefs is important as it enables a feeling of empowerment and of being valued. If we do not question our practice and beliefs there is a danger of remaining static in thinking and action, as Loughran (2002, p. 35) stated: 'Experience alone does not lead to learning; reflection on experience is essential'. This reflects Brookfield's (1995, p. 7) thoughts about the length of experience being insignificant in the development of 'insight and wisdom'; he says that 'Ten years of practice can be one year's worth of distorted experience repeated ten times'.

Reflection upon practice helps us to find meaning and make sense of what we are doing (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998). Making sense of what we are doing requires us to understand ourselves. This can, eventually, be a cathartic process; however, the journey can be somewhat uncomfortable unless we travel with others who can support and help. Within the field of Early Childhood education and care, relationships with others and being part of a learning community, co-constructing teaching and learning experiences, are viewed as important in understanding children's and families needs. Rinaldi (2006) emphasised the importance of the ongoing collective dialogue with self and others, listening to others and being listened to. This means that involving others can create a transformational effect without what Moss (2008, p. xiii) described as 'constraints of predictable outcome and received wisdom'.

A reflective methodology

The consideration of my educational values and beliefs and my personal philosophies about seeking understanding and meaning from my experiences, enabled me to establish my position as a researcher. Crotty (1998, p. 2) discussed the need to build

research around a personal philosophical base and around the purpose of the research project itself in order to gain 'stability and direction'. I can identify with Crotty's premise as it is important for me to believe in what I am doing, and that it is in the best interest of all involved. However, I do believe that my philosophical stance is continually evolving and as such my position may shift over time. Day (2002) discussed looking at the different facets of oneself to establish how the research may be influenced, and our own 'worldview' is constituted by these differing facets which in turn have been influenced by our experiences in life. As such I see my position as a 'social constructivist', being determined by my experiences and how I have made sense of them. I recognise that my own background will shape my interpretations of my findings (Creswell, 2007).

The centrality of students as the participants of this inquiry underpins my social constructivist philosophy as it supports the concept of knowledge being constructed from interactions with our environment and the people within that environment (Bruner, 1960).

The factors determining my motivations to follow a specific line of inquiry are invariably influenced by my personal drive to improve my own practice and, in turn, make a more effective learning experience for students. This is why my position as a researcher is embedded within the very nature of the research itself. Critical reflection enabled me to identify the 'problem' to be investigated. Therefore, to investigate reflection itself is not only going to serve to answer questions about my students' ability to use it, but also help my own understanding of it. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007, p. 19) explored how we can '... use ourselves as a key to our understanding of others, as a way of finding out about ourselves, an anthropomorphic model of people'.

Carr and Kemmis (1986, p. 83) determined the difference between the 'interpretive' tradition of social inquiry needing to seek 'understanding, meaning and action', compared to the scientific notion seeking 'explanation, prediction and control'.

This research inquiry is set in a UK higher education institution, where human behaviour and events occur; I will be the primary instrument in data collection; the data generated from this research will be narrative and not numerical; the focus of the research will be on students' perceptions and experiences, and generalisations will only be made within this particular context (Creswell, 2003, p. 198). These distinguishing features determine a qualitative, interpretive paradigm.

Dialogue with others about their experiences and reflections strengthens and unites developing concepts, theories and practices. Freire (1970) believed that dialogue 'is essential to human liberation and transformation' (cited in Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 890) and he used 'study circles' or 'focus groups' to engage people in dialogue. Students' discussions were used to establish their understanding of reflection. Focus groups provided an opportunity to explore group characteristics and dynamics as well as exploring the nature and effects of social discourse. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) outlined the benefits of this method:

Focus groups, ... afford researchers access to the kinds of social interactional dynamics that produce particular memories, positions, ideologies, practices and desires among specific groups of people. (p. 904)

Another advantage of the focus group is that it can encourage participation from students who feel uncomfortable being interviewed individually. It can also reassure

individuals that they are not ‘to blame’ for negative feelings and experiences; if others feel similar, they can realise that it could be something else at fault – and in revealing such issues can be empowering (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 302). Using existing groups (students from the same cohort) means they can readily relate to each other’s shared experiences and each other’s comments will be related to actual incidents within their shared university life (Kitzinger, 1994). It made sense to use a method that was already familiar to participants as they were encouraged to make sense of their experiences through a ‘learning group’ process within the remit of their course programme.

The research context

A group of seven first year undergraduate students studying Early Childhood Studies (ECS) were involved in three focus group discussions. These took place within a period of six months. The first discussion (November 2008) was based upon defining what they believed ‘reflection’ meant. The second discussion (February 2009) was based upon the thoughts of Stephen Brookfield (1995) in his book *How to become a critically reflective teacher*. Students were introduced to Brookfield’s ‘four lenses’ theory during a mandatory lecture, and the focus group participants were asked to read part of his book in preparation for the second focus group discussion. The third and final focus group discussion (May 2009), was based upon how far they felt they had developed their reflective dispositions and understanding of reflection, within the research period.

Ethical considerations were made and permission gained from the institution’s ethics committee. My exact intentions were explained to all participants and their consent was given to use quotations from their discussions to demonstrate issues and key points raised. Anonymity was assured as far as was possible.

The data from the focus group discussions were analysed and interpreted using a thematic approach. Themes emerged from each discussion and across discussions that enabled me to gain a much better understanding of why there appeared to be a contradiction between tutor expectations upon students’ ability to reflect and what the students were doing in practice. This process became natural and organic as each discussion revealed perceptions and ideas from the students that either challenged or contradicted my existing understandings of student perceptions.

Tutor assumptions

From the very first focus group and throughout the research, it became apparent that students had little understanding of the concept of ‘reflection’ within a learning context when they first embarked upon the degree programme. They had not consciously thought about it before, and this highlighted the need for tutors to examine their assumptions about students’ understanding of pedagogical approaches that underpin the Early Childhood discipline. The quotes below indicate that students had different perceptions of the concept of reflection, and they had only needed to revisit their previous literal interpretations of the term ‘reflection’ since starting their degree:

... last year I did photography, we had to do like about textures but also like reflection. So obviously you would go in to take picture of like water or mirrors or something that would actually reflect. And coming here reflection is kind of like, I think kind of writing down feelings or like assessing like what you do next time. So you would put down your

feelings and be like, oh next time I would do this. There's different meanings for it. (ECS student – focus group member 1)

I see reflection as kind of evaluating yourself, just to use a different word which I'm more familiar with because I don't use the term 'reflection' in anything else other than of a mirror until I came to uni. I evaluate my work or I look at what I could be doing better but I've never used the word reflection. (ECS student – focus group member 2)

This discussion enabled me to gain an understanding of the assumptions tutors sometimes make when using terminology. It is easy to forget how different some students' previous experiences are from the new one they are embarking upon. Students have to adapt their existing understanding of 'learning and teaching' to a different approach.

Rogoff (2003) discussed the impact of prior socio-cultural experiences upon our current dispositions. My own experience of a predominant transmission approach to learning prior to higher education influenced my inability to be critical with information. Accepting information as the truth and not questioning its validity or researching alternative views was a characteristic of my statutory education. I recognise similar characteristics and pre-dispositions with these undergraduate students, and acknowledge that it takes time to make the transition from passive recipient of knowledge to active participant within the learning process.

According to Kolb (1984, p. 41) this experiential approach to learning is 'the creation of knowledge through the transformation of experience'. This transformation of experience is reliant upon the learning context being meaningful. Some students have come from educational experiences that make the assumptions that knowledge is acquired from receiving facts and information from a more knowledgeable other. Successful learners are acclaimed for their ability to 'rehearse and repeat' information (Hase & Kenyon, 2001, p. 2). The transition from this learning and teaching method, to one that relies upon individuals developing a personal perspective on relevant issues, can cause disequilibrium. I concur with Park (2003) who stated that:

Students who actively engage with what they are studying tend to understand more, learn more, remember more, enjoy it more and be more able to appreciate the relevance of what they have learned, than students who passively receive what we teach them. (p. 183)

The influence of the Early Childhood pedagogy

The Early Childhood pedagogy is based upon the premise that childhood is a 'social construct' (Woods, 2005, p. xii). The same pedagogical philosophy underpins the social constructivist approaches taken with Early Childhood students. The Early Childhood student cannot avoid being influenced by societal issues, not least the research that forms the basis of professional values and attitudes within the profession. Early Childhood professionals are socially and institutionally 'patterned' (Schon, 1987, p. 32). This patterning occurs from a combination of elements – personal values and beliefs, cultural and societal and institutional influences. These elements develop a set of values that underpin what is determined as 'good' practice.

Reflective practice is reliant upon the existence of a constructivist approach to learning. If students have not previously experienced this they will find difficulty in adapting to a reflective pedagogy. Therefore, reflective dispositions require nurturing within the influential transition period of starting an Early Childhood Studies programme.

Sometimes our assumptions of students' previous learning experiences can prevent us from understanding students' existing knowledge and the ability to adopt new learning approaches.

Brookfield (1995) recognised the difficulties cultural barriers can create when encouraging a reflective disposition and community. He elaborated by citing an example of cultural influences within the teaching profession which can have a 'silencing' effect on professionals. To discuss teaching with others in a way that might identify 'incompetence or powerlessness' could be admitting failure Brookfield (1995, p. 249). This type of cultural perspective is the kind I can equate with these students. Becoming actively engaged in the learning process and taking responsibility for their own learning experiences requires a cultural mind shift for most undergraduates who have come from a culture of textbook learning and, in the words of a personal tutee, being 'spoon fed' information.

I was first introduced to the work of Brookfield through my doctoral programme of study. Brookfield's (1995) model of critical reflection involves using four lenses through which to view experiences. These four lenses provide a stimulus to support professional development as they offer a reminder of the importance of viewing experiences from different perspectives. Perceiving something through personal perspective and drawing upon an 'autobiographical lens' is probably the most instinctive method of reflecting upon experience. However, Brookfield is clear in setting this lens within the boundaries of our profession, which guards against delving too deeply into personal and emotional experiences, which could require counselling support. Boud and Walker (1998, p. 194) supported Brookfield's view and discussed the problems of not contextualising our reflection and reflections becoming 'self-referential, inward looking and uncritical'. One of the students identified this as a potential problem for her:

I think I'm worried that my reflections up until now have been maybe too personal, too emotional and I think I'm slightly, not worried but concerned that this type of reflecting – I can't be that emotional, I've got to learn to kind of ... I actually think that's where the critical bit comes into it that it's less emotional now and more academic and more like formal. (ECS student – focus group member 3)

Another student felt there was a necessity and unavoidability about relating her personal emotions to her reflections:

I feel I have to feel emotional about something to be able to reflect on it because it has to be something that I think about. And like most of the reflecting that I think I've done, especially recently has been based on negative things that have happened, I think. So for me it has to be ... There has to be that emotional element for me to be able to reflect because if I detach myself from it there's no reflection, you know, I can't gauge how I'd do anything differently. (ECS student – focus group member 4)

The diary entry below illustrates how this student has moved forward in their understanding of and the value of reflective practice. This student has reflected upon her experience, evaluated the meaning of her experiences and become more self-aware and self-understanding about the value of reflection:

- 'S' came for a personal tutorial and I asked her whether she was finding 'reflection' easier to understand now she was at the end of her first year.
- 'S': My first practice experience was boring. I didn't think anything significant happened, and I didn't know how to reflect upon it. I've now been on a series of placements in different settings and I can now see the significance of my first prac-

... because I can compare it to my others. Even the things I took for granted and thought were boring are not. Just because the supervisor was always calm and organised didn't mean there were lots of reasons why she was like this. Since seeing a not so organised setting I can now reflect back and think about why the first was good and make comparisons. I'm starting to understanding reflection a lot better now. (KH Reflective Diary entry from tutorial with student (S) May 2008)

Jasper (1963) saw the necessity to personalise reflection and viewed self-reflection as containing three elements: self-observation, self-revelation and self-understanding. Self-observation enables us to examine our own practice and be aware of the influences upon that practice; self-understanding requires analysis of related situations and assumptions we hold about the issues concerning the content and context for reflection. Self-revelation can identify some otherwise hidden realities of our practice that have appeared from an honest evaluation of our self-observations and self-understandings. This practice enables us to become more self-aware, which in turn enables us to be more conscious and critical in our personal and professional life (Yip, 2007).

How do, or indeed can we acquire a reflective disposition and why is it a difficult concept for students to understand? Dewey (1933, p. 11) stated that:

Reflection ... implies that something is believed in (or disbelieved in), not on its own direct account, but through something else which stand as witness, evidence, proof, voucher, warrant; that is, as ground of belief.

This suggests that to reflect we first need a belief, which is usually shaped from our existing knowledge base, take a critical stance, and question the validity of that belief using evidence to uphold or challenge it. This process involves a critical thinking approach and an ability to question our own values and assumptions (Argyris & Schon, 1996). We cannot assume that this belief or value base already exists. This may seem obvious, but is certainly something that is not considered enough when asking students to demonstrate their ability to reflect.

By reviewing and critiquing our principles and approaches as practitioners we can then test their 'accuracy and validity through discussions with students, colleagues and literature' (Brookfield, 1995, p. 30). The students, colleagues and literature are the contexts for the remaining three lenses through which Brookfield sets the ability to critically reflect. The combination of the four reflective views can provide a more objective and holistic perspective through which we can make sense and adapt our thinking and/or practice.

Ghaye and Lillyman (2000, p. 108) discussed the importance of building 'reflective-conversational communities'. Brookfield (1995, p. 35) reiterated this mode of reflection by encouraging the involvement of reflecting through our 'colleagues' lens'; he said that using colleagues who are experiencing similar things to myself, as 'critical mirrors', enables me to 'check, reframe and broaden my own theories of practice'. Freire (1996, p. 69) viewed dialogue as an 'existential necessity' and believed that it is an act of creation involving humility and the willingness to be open to the views of others. Making use of student peer learning groups, which followed the principles of the of focus group discussion forums, enabled students to develop this community learning philosophy as a pedagogical tool. One of the students made the following comment having been asked whether she thought the discussion groups were effective for developing reflective thinking (Focus Group Discussion 3):

I'm constantly reflecting. And that's only since coming here ... this has helped a lot more though with critically reflecting as well.

'Because?' (KH)

I think because last time we discussed what critical reflection was, and I think just because you had more input from other people it was a more in-depth conversation, so you actually managed to figure out what we actually do to critically reflect. So it helps us a lot, and it's helped me a lot more in lectures if the lecturer said about critical reflection ... I understand a lot more compared to the rest of the group. [who had not been involved in the Focus Group discussions] (ECS student – focus group member 6)

Can we truly be self-reflective and reflective practitioners until we are able to see what we might not like and understand ourselves? How do we do this? Coming to understand ourselves as part of the process of reflection is dependent upon wanting to, and being able to, evaluate our experiences. Reflective practice needs to be:

... a judicious blend of sensitive support and constructive challenge. It is about being professionally self-critical without being destructive or overly negative. (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998, p. 3)

The student quoted below recognised the discomfort of self-discovery having read some of Brookfield (1995), (Focus Discussion Group 2):

Like the sentence when he says, ... it's the 29th page, it's at the end of the paragraph that starts one of the problems. It says down the paragraph it says, indeed the whole idea of systematically searching out assumptions is often deliberately avoided for fear and for what it might lead to. So it's so true [laughs]. I was sitting and I read it a few times and yeah it's so true the fear when you discover yourself. Although you talk to other people and they tell you things about you, but I don't know, it's different when you read it. (ECS student – focus group member 7)

Reflections upon this research

Ixer (1999) related reflection as a social construct. He cited the work of others, including Kemmis (1985), who demonstrated a social dimension in their models of reflection and action research. This 'moves away from the individual element of thought and action' and instead views the reflective process as 'socially, historically and politically influenced' (Ixer, 1999, p. 519). This relates to the theory of constructivism. The constructivist underpinnings of Schon's (1983) theory of reflective practice are also recognised by Kinsella (2006). She suggested that considering constructivism helps in the understanding of reflective practice as one of the basic constructivist principles that 'all knowledge is constructed, at least in part, through a process of reflection' (Kinsella, 2006, p. 279). Therefore, if students' previous educational experience is not framed within this social constructivist approach to learning, how can we expect them to be reflective?

As time, research and society evolve, so my identity changes. Being reflective and developing reflective dispositions in students is not without personal risk. Being able to view ourselves and critically review our action and thoughts, threatens changes to our identity. This requires an initial security with our self-identity to have the confidence to continually recreate new identities in light of our experiences and reflections. Ghaye and Ghaye (1998, p. 6) viewed the process of reflection as 'sense making...linked with how we see ourselves'.

Concluding thoughts

This discussion has revealed a number of issues to be considered when planning for the development of a reflective learning culture:

- Acknowledging the potential problem of contradiction between preconceived tutor assumptions and student existing understandings.
- Supporting transitions from one learning experience / approach to another.
- Nurturing development of self-awareness and learning identities.
- Developing a professional stance – values, beliefs and principles about the care and holistic development of young children and supporting students' ability to link their theoretical and practical experiences.
- Creating a classroom culture of trust and collaboration – a community of learners.

Early Childhood Studies involves the development of knowledge and understanding in the holistic needs of children and their families. This requires students to gain understanding of multi-disciplinary working and values. In this instance the tutor team for this course consists of professionals from social welfare, education and health. This is an ideal community for critical reflective discussion as our individual experiences and 'normative frames' differ, which creates opportunity for creative debate and challenges our existing understandings. This multi-perspective discussion is modelled to students throughout the course. For example, through our modules several definitions of play are offered that are sometimes contradictory; this is not to confuse students but to enable them to gain an understanding of the different perspectives of principal concepts. It is not until students have the chance to see these concepts in practice that they can establish their own stance.

By providing opportunities through discussions within lectures and peer learning groups, students can be explicit and visible about their existing perceptions and critique the 'specialised practice' they find themselves part of. This specialised practice has been 'handed down from within the [early childhood] professional discourse' (Kinsella, 2007, p. 399). Schon (1987) makes us aware that by taking stock of our 'tacit frames' that inform our practice, they change in accordance with the current thinking of that profession, changing to shape our practice. By ensuring that we are 'explicit' in identifying our frames through strategies such as peer learning groups, we then allow for an expansion and evolving of existing personal frames to adapt from other people's personal frames. As Kinsella (2007, p. 399) stated: 'Becoming aware of [more] tacit frames creates awareness of more possibilities for action'.

If we consider that pedagogy in Early Childhood 'operates from a shared frame of reference (a mutual learning encounter) between the practitioner, the child and the family' (Moyles, Adams, & Musgrove, 2002, p. 9) and in addition is influenced by a multi-professional nature, it is not surprising that our students struggle to combine these perspectives in their reflections.

Students will require support given the complexities of Early Childhood Studies, and the possible changes to a constructivist learning paradigm. Developing reflective dispositions is key in enabling students to develop as competent professionals who can affect change for improvement in quality provision for young children, and we need to make sure that we are enabling them to do this.

A critical stance is required to make thorough sense of our experiences. Brookfield (1995) can offer us some support in this process. Brookfield claimed that the only way to become aware of and scrutinise our existing assumptions is to ‘view our practice from different perspectives’ (Brookfield, 1995, p. xiii).

It is hoped that students graduate as advocates of Early Childhood. It is important that they have the confidence to voice their beliefs and principles. Through continual reflective thinking they will have the disposition to act as agents of change for the improvement in the quality of provision for young children and their families.

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Notes on contributor

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