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Carmel Hinchion Miss

University of Limerick, carmel.hinchion@ul.ie

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Abstract

The focus of this article is twofold: (a) It explores how autobiographical memory and future imaginings can be used as a resource for pedagogical understanding in Initial Teacher Education, and (b) The paper engages a methodological experiment where there is a layered reading of texts across time, 2008-2018. The paper presents, through a narrative analysis of autobiographical texts, the stories of two student teachers, Ciara and John (Text 1, 2008). These student teachers were in the early years of their undergraduate four-year programme in my university and I was their English Pedagogics lecturer. Later, I revisit these student teachers' narratives and read them under new interpretative conditions based on their salient and punctum effects, significant and emotional effects, on me as a teacher educator (Text 2, 2018). Then, theorizing with relevant literature, I consider how to foster conditions and methodologies of growth as student teachers engage their autobiographical memories and imaginings. Ultimately, my findings underline that self-knowledge is central in the pedagogical encounter of self, other and subject matter (Latta & Buck, 2008) and that working with evocative, creative and emotionally attuned pedagogy can support this process of autobiographical / pedagogical understanding.

Keywords

Autobiographical Memory, Future Imaginings, Pedagogical Understanding, Creative and Evocative Pedagogies, Emotional Attunement

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Autobiographical Memory and Future Imaginings as a Resource for Pedagogical Understanding in Initial Teacher Education

Carmel Hinchion
University of Limerick, Ireland

The focus of this article is twofold: (a) It explores how autobiographical memory and future imaginings can be used as a resource for pedagogical understanding in Initial Teacher Education, and (b) The paper engages a methodological experiment where there is a layered reading of texts across time, 2008-2018. The paper presents, through a narrative analysis of autobiographical texts, the stories of two student teachers, Ciara and John (Text 1, 2008). These student teachers were in the early years of their undergraduate four-year programme in my university and I was their English Pedagogics lecturer. Later, I revisit these student teachers' narratives and read them under new interpretative conditions based on their salient and punctum effects, significant and emotional effects, on me as a teacher educator (Text 2, 2018). Then, theorizing with relevant literature, I consider how to foster conditions and methodologies of growth as student teachers engage their autobiographical memories and imaginings. Ultimately, my findings underline that self-knowledge is central in the pedagogical encounter of self, other and subject matter (Latta & Buck, 2008) and that working with evocative, creative and emotionally attuned pedagogy can support this process of autobiographical / pedagogical understanding. Keywords: Autobiographical Memory, Future Imaginings, Pedagogical Understanding, Creative and Evocative Pedagogies, Emotional Attunement

An Autobiographical Note

My working life has centred on teaching and learning. I was a secondary school teacher of English and History, and Personal and Social Studies, for eighteen years in a large community school in the South of Ireland. Thereafter, I worked in curriculum change in the Irish National English Support Service (1998-2003). I have always had an interest in the Arts and the possibilities they hold for personal growth and enrichment through imaginative, creative and aesthetic encounters. I have also undertaken personal development and counselling theory and practice courses, with a special focus on mental health issues. Be it the Arts, the subject English or Counselling Theory and Practice, I am interested in personal lived experience and the meanings we make of our lives. This study relates particularly to my present work as a lecturer in Teaching, Learning and Assessment and lecturer in English Pedagogics in the University of Limerick, Ireland (2004-2020). I am interested in student teachers' experiences of learning to teach and the processes that shape their identity-making including my influence as their teacher educator. This article is part of a larger study on "Becoming a Teacher: Experience, Identity-making and Pedagogical Meaning" which is reported elsewhere and is ongoing (Hinchion, 2016, 2017, 2019; Hinchion & Hall, 2016). This study has two layers delineated by sections Text 1 and Text 2. Choosing a narrative analysis in Text 1 underlines the importance I place on personal experiences, contextual influences and the "vivid particulars" (Eisner, 1998, p. 3) of the everyday. Taking another interpretative stance in Text

2, theorizing salient and punctum effects in Text 1, underlines the value I place on appraisal of pedagogical practice.

Introduction

Sumara and Luce-Kapler (1996) write that we are “always at the intersection of remembered, lived and projected experiences” (p. 233) and that human consciousness achieves its “moments of awareness from overlapping loops of memory, present perception and future imaginings” (Sumara, 2000, p. 112). This paper is premised on this ontological understanding of experience and its recursive movement. Recently, I reread the narrative analysis I had done on education-related autobiographical texts which student teachers had produced at the beginning of their second year undergraduate teacher education programme in my university in 2008. Even though time has since passed, like revisiting a favourite novel or any text for that matter, new insights emerged as I reflected on these texts again.

In rereading the autobiographical accounts, I was struck by the power of the memories evoked by the student teachers and was also struck by my rushed engagement with these autobiographical texts in the classroom at that time. In this article I reflect on the conditions and methodological approach I could have fostered for student teachers’ growth then, and which I have developed in my pedagogy since that time. For the purposes of this paper I use a generative understanding of pedagogy based on the work of Latta and Buck (2008). They claim that pedagogy happens in the in-between space of self, other and subject matter and that it is a relational encounter. Pedagogy is not just a method of teaching but a perspective on the relationship between teaching and learning and the end towards which it tends (Dewey, 1938). This article is an expression of my understanding of pedagogy as a personal growth process in a particular context and for a particular purpose.

The focus of this article is twofold: (a) It explores how autobiographical memory and future imaginings can be used as a resource for both student teacher and teacher educator pedagogical understandings, and (b) The paper presents a methodological experiment where there is a layered reading of texts across time, 2008-2018. Firstly, I outline how I engaged a narrative analysis of the student teachers’ education-related autobiographical texts (2008) and I present this narrative as Text 1. Text 1 then becomes the data set for my second interpretation based on the concepts of the salient and punctum effects of texts on the reader, that is the significant and emotional effects of the texts on me, the teacher educator. I follow by theorising my pedagogical practice based on these effects. Text 1 (2008) is titled *Remembered Identity and the Pedagogical Imaginary*. Text 2 (2018) is titled *Salient and Punctum Effects and Pedagogical Theorizing*.

Even though this is a localized study it addresses a significant theme for teacher educators in relation to acknowledging, becoming aware, understanding, and critiquing the power of past experiences and future imaginings in learning to teach. The article gives some perspectives on “how” teacher educators can work with student teachers in relation to their education-related autobiographies. It is offered as another text for reflection and interpretation on the processes involved in becoming a teacher. Methodologically, it demonstrates how texts can be built upon texts across time. In this way texts never grow old and become artefacts and reifications for extending pedagogical meaning.

TEXT 1, 2008: Remembered Identity and the Pedagogical Imaginary

The first part of the article relates to how student teachers brought forward their autobiographical memories and expressed their future imaginings in the early stages of their university course. It sets the context and outlines the literature frame supporting this process.

Methodologically, it explains how narrative analysis was applied to the student data set of autobiographical texts.

Context

In Text 1, I focus on two student portraits, Ciara and John. These student teachers were part of a four-year undergraduate teacher education programme in my university from 2006-2010. They were learning to become Physical Education and English teachers. As their English Pedagogics teacher, I met these students in semester one and semester two, year two, preceding their first major school placement of six weeks. The aim of the module (English Pedagogics 1) was to prepare student teachers to teach Junior Cycle English (students 12-15 years approx.) in a secondary school setting (students 12-18 years approx.).

The class group for English pedagogy was just six students as there were other electives for the Physical Education cohort to choose from (e.g., Irish, Mathematics, Geography, Chemistry). In semester 1, September to December 2007, I asked these undergraduate students to complete two autobiographical assignments based on the work of Bullough and Gitlin (2001). At this stage, I had written consent from five of the six students to draw on their texts for research purposes. Ethical approval was granted for the research study in 2011. The following were the assignments:

Assignment 1: Write an “education-related” autobiography, a story of your earlier experiences of education. Identify the important people or ‘critical incidents’ that significantly influenced you. Consider your experience of school; what was it like for you? You may wish to give a chronological account of your education from family influences, to primary and secondary school education, and then on to third level. You might prefer to use a different structure so feel free to be creative. As you write, I would like you to think about your experiences and consider what they say about teaching and learning.

Assignment 2: ‘My Picture of Teaching and Learning.’ Prepare a visual representation of your understanding of ‘Teaching English’ at this time’.

I chose the work of Ciara and John (pseudonyms) for this article because of some powerful emotional moments described by them that were evocative for me in 2008, and again in 2018. Also, they have quite contrasting experiences which gave me different perspectives to consider. Focusing on two accounts, rather than five, facilitated a more detailed narrative of two student teachers across time.

Supporting literature

Britzman (2003) writes that student teachers have an established educational archive that they draw on when learning to teach. Through their long “apprenticeship of observation” in the classroom (Lortie, 1975) they have pervasive and powerful, implicit, and intuitive beliefs about what it is to teach, and how learning happens (Vinz, 1996). Their lived experience in the classroom has acted as a filter to understanding teaching and learning and according to Korthagen and Kessels (1999) these “private theories” are “embedded in gestalts” which are “holistic perceptions guiding behaviour” (p. 9).

Lipka and Brinthaupt (1999) claim that, from a teacher educator’s perspective, student teachers’ body of knowledge may be considered inadequate at this early stage. However, the

past stories and assumptions that student teachers and future teachers bring with them when they arrive in university must be acknowledged and understood (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000). If student teachers do not take time to remember and reflect on their past experiences of education, their private or “lay theories” lie unexamined and have the “subterranean influence” (Sugrue, 2004, p. 585) of making the world of teaching full of simple assumptions (Loughran, 2006) embodied through experience but not intellectualized (O’Loughlin, 2009).

Student teachers also imagine themselves as future teachers with certain characteristics and values as professional educators. These imaginings are created using “interpreted bridges between what is held in memory, what currently exists, and what is predicted about the future” (Sumara, 2002, p. 5). Britzman (2003) names this orientation towards the future as the pedagogical imaginary. These imaginings are necessary for the hopeful vision of a future teaching life and can be useful resources in thinking about teacher identity-making.

Pedagogy is also rooted in the public image (Britzman, 2003). There are mass produced images of teachers and teaching in popular culture. This gives shape to a “cumulative cultural text of teacher” (Weber & Mitchell, 1995, p. 1) in the “collective imagination” (p. 26). The cultural text of teacher inherited and popular understandings circulating in society are hugely influential on student teachers’ understandings and imaginings. Working “in relation” to the past and helping students to become aware (Vinz, 2000, p. 74) of who and what has influenced their education, and their insights on teaching and learning, was the motivation for the initial autobiographical inquiry (2007/8).

Narrative analysis

In 2008, I employed a narrative analysis of the student teachers’ texts based on Polkinghorne’s (1995) idea of creating explanatory stories from the data set. The data set included autobiographical writing (assignment 1), visual representation (assignment 2) and conversations with the student teachers using assignment 1 and 2 as prompts (January 2008). In the conversation setting with each individual student teacher I adopted an open framework by inviting student teachers to talk about any aspects of their autobiography and visual work that interested them, or that they wished to talk about. I intervened with some prompt phrases and questions to help elaborate the stories told. The research conversations, which five of the six students had consented to in written format, were between 40-60 minutes long, were taped, and were then transcribed in full.

The following table offers an overview of the data generation and collection process 2007-2008 leading to the creation of TEXT 1:

Remembered Identity and the Pedagogical Imaginary 2007/8
1. December 2007: Students write an autobiographical text based on the work of Bullough and Gitlin (2001). Pedagogical Assignment 1.
2. January 2008: Students create a visual text (their ‘picture’ of teaching English). Pedagogical Assignment 2.
3. January 2008: One-to-one conversation (40-60 minutes approx.) with Ciara and with John based on Assignment 1 and 2 above as prompts to the conversation. Taped and transcribed text.
4. June- July 2008: A Narrative Analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995) was then applied to the data set (1, 2 and 3 above). The writing assignment and image work, as well as the conversations, are shaped into a composite story (bringing together the varied elements) which describe and interpret Ciara’s and John’s remembered past of schooling, their early experience of their university course and their imagined futures as teachers.

When I read the autobiographical accounts, it was obvious that the student teachers had been guided by the assignment headings in telling their stories. In the Narrative Analysis process these headings created a predetermined structure or “conceptual hubs” (Eisner, 1998, p. 130) around which the stories could be told: “Family,” “Playschool,” “Primary School,” “Secondary School,” “Third Level,” and “The Pedagogical Imaginary.”

Working within these conceptual hubs required organising the story in particular ways. For example, when I met John for our one-to-one conversation (January 2008) he focused predominately on the bullying he suffered in primary school. Then, in conjunction with his written assignment I was able to include his taped words as part of his story of “Primary School.” Similarly, with the visual texts, their “picture” of teaching English (assignment 2), was extended and developed through the one-to-one conversations leading to the conceptual hub “The Pedagogical Imaginary.” I aimed to make transparent the studies authenticity but as Eisner points out (1998), “a swindler’s story can be coherent” (p. 53). To address this issue, I used student voice generously to provide “structural corroboration” (p. 53) in the narratives. By this I mean that the interpretations made could be connected to the student teachers’ words.

To ensure rigour and trustworthiness during the research process I kept reflective memos (Ely et al., 1997). Essentially these were reflective notes that teased out assumptions, posed questions or offered new information and insight from theory. For example, I noted the following question in a memo: “What do I include and not include in the student teachers’ stories. How do I write up the student teacher stories?” Reading the work of Ely et al. (1997), Eisner (1998), and Britzman (2003) gave me a pathway to proceed. These scholars, through examples from their interpretative research, gave me a representational structure. Particularly influential was Britzman’s narrative research on student teachers Jamie Owl and Jack August. I noted in one of my reflective memos: “I like this shape of representational text. It includes student voice and researcher interpretation together. It also deals with a small number of students like my own research -very thoughtful, draws on a substantial data set.” I continuously paid attention to the choices I made in the narrative analysis of students’ texts and used the reflective memos to offer me space for thinking these through.

In the next section, I present the stories of Ciara and John as derived from the Narrative Analysis.

The Stories of Ciara and John

Family

John does not make any reference to family influence other than offering in conversation that he is an only child. Ciara however describes a very loving and supportive home environment which “nourished” her and instilled “morals and values” which influenced her “belief system”: “On reflection I feel I was really able to develop cognitively and creatively because my parents created such a stable and encouraging environment and provided me with great opportunities.”

Her own good fortune comes into light relief when one of her friends had to leave school at fifteen because of financial constraints. She expresses great empathy for this friend from “a rough area” and a “large family” and values her warm and safe upbringing in comparison to a more fractured and troubled life. She acknowledges the importance of her awareness of backgrounds different to her own.

Early Schooling Experience: Playschool and Primary School

Ciara writes evocatively about playschool in her autobiographical account. At the age of three she relished the relaxed and friendly atmosphere of playschool and “was dying to explore” her new surroundings. She remembers learning the alphabet, learning to count, and loved having her work displayed:

I used to love having my work displayed on the wall. It gave me a sense of self-fulfilment and recognition. This continued at home when my mum would hang my “masterpieces” on the fridge! This recognition encouraged me to be creative and to enjoy what I was doing.

Ciara recognizes herself in these written fragments about playschool as someone who is secure, thrives on recognition of her efforts, is curious, a good worker and creative. Her emotional tone is one of happiness and excitement and she considers playschool to be “very similar to a family,” which helped her learning.

Central to the process of learning was the practice of play. She was engaged in her own learning with many stimulating resources to hand. One resource she will always remember is a doctor’s set:

It was a bright red plastic case with a white cross sticker. Inside there was a play stethoscope, bandages, and a plastic watch. I spent several hours wrapping up my friends ‘injuries’ and checking their heartbeat. It was just a game but I imitated how my mum had wrapped my bandages and how the doctor checked my heartbeat and it was this little plastic watch that helped me practice my numbers and eventually learn how to tell the time. Because I was discovering for myself (Jerome Bruner, *Discovery Learning*), I was able to transfer my knowledge into out of school settings.

In this descriptive section, Ciara describes learning through play and through that process a memory of a doctor’s set is evoked. The bright red case provided the props and prompts for imitative, experiential and discovery activities which would lead to learning. Ciara here describes the memory but also reflects on how knowledge is created. In brackets she smuggles in knowledgeability when she mentions the educational icon Jerome Bruner and displays for the reader her nod to appropriating propositional theory to practice.

Ciara authors a harmonious script for her primary school days also, “some of the happiest” years of her life were spent in primary school. Ciara draws on a lexicon of contentment and activity in describing this time of a “really relaxed atmosphere, excellent resources, loads of reading and painting, software games, library projects and computers.” She also mentions specifically being “called up” to the blackboard by the teacher to solve Maths problems:

Although the rooms were always filled with posters and pictures, some of the most important learning we did was on the blackboard. It allowed the teacher to assess our understanding and actively involve us in the learning. The only negative comment I would make would be that it was often embarrassing to have to go up if you didn’t understand but there was never a negative atmosphere.

It is noticeable that Ciara, similar to her playschool fragment, is bringing pedagogical reflexivity into her narrative of primary school experiences. Her identity as someone who is thoughtful about learning is finding its way into her discourse. She also recalls an approach to reading which she valued:

In Junior and Senior infants, we would have books read to us. I think this stimulated the imagination as we could visualize the story in our minds and words became powerful. By the end of primary school, we were reading several books a week.

John's script of primary school is very different to Ciara's experience. He makes no mention of playschool and his account of primary education is powerful in its discourse of insensitivity and brutality. From the beginning of his primary school days John struggled to get on well with his teachers and classmates. He sets himself up as a rebel and resistor of authority but writes, "I basically felt like an idiot most of the time." Scripted through John's voice the discourse of schooling evident, with the odd exception, is one of a harsh and authoritarian regime inept at caring appropriately for children. His account is peppered with powerfully emotive words such as "negligent," "diabolical," "terrifying," "difficult," and "horrific." An atmosphere of fear pervades his memories. He felt "scared all the time" and classes were run on a "mix of fear and shouting to induce further fear."

John experiences "crushing" bullying behaviour during his primary school years where the bully would "drag him along" during his break time. The affective hurt and anger he feels is palpable:

At the time I was being bullied every lunch time. After two months, I built up the courage to tell the teacher about this. I escaped my captors for a few seconds and found the teacher who was on yard duty. I told him my predicament, and his response was, "Ah, I'm sure they're only messing." He then turned his back to me and walked away and I continued to be bullied for 4-5 months. I don't think I ever felt as insignificant as I did then. He is a bloody fine Principal somewhere now.

John goes on to reflect on this situation imagining himself in the teacher's position:

If a student came to me in confidence and told me that he/she felt they were being bullied, I would find the bully and give him/her what they deserve. I think we need to focus much more on reaching out to students and not just be teachers but be a help to them to grow up through difficult times.

In this paragraph, John makes an emotive response to the bully without elaborating an understanding of such a response. He foregrounds the caring and supporting work that teachers should do but seems to separate it from his understanding of teaching.

A turning point came for John when he repeated fourth class. He emerged academically as "one of the best" and "things weren't so bad." John's identity as an intelligent student helped him negotiate a safe position for himself in school. He cites the positive effects of one of his teachers who made learning fun and showed care for all her students:

She really cared passionately about us, which showed in her talk to us before we left on the last day of primary school. She said, while crying, that she loved us and that we could be whatever we wanted to be if we put our minds to it.

In this respect, I think she was probably the best teacher I ever had. She was great.

Despite these loving and supportive moments, John's autobiography is remarkable for its discourse of emotional neglect and indignity. He is acutely aware of the degradation and humiliation around him and in this most distressing and provocative section he writes:

One of the worst incidences of this blatantly horrific teaching was when the quietest, best behaved girl in the class one day forgot her homework. She was brought up to the front of the class, ridiculed and made cry by the teacher. This was the first time Kate (pseudonym) had ever done anything wrong. She had no real friends. Later in sixth class some of the boys used to get up and dance in front of her making her blush uncontrollably, and, of course, the longer it went on the worse it got. Now I didn't know Kate after primary school, but she committed suicide in the last few years and I felt these incidents didn't help her. I mean, we can talk until the end of time about teaching methodologies and strategies but if a teacher can't even help a student out in the most fundamental of things like dignity, why are they teachers? This ignorance and incompetence really makes me angry.

This descriptive fragment emphasizes John's empathy for those suffering hurt and pain. Perhaps having suffered himself at the hands of bullies, he is acutely aware of the consequences for the victim and of the need for supportive intervention. His anger toward the schooling system and particularly towards teachers is palpable. He is exasperated at the inability of teachers in responsible positions to take appropriate action to preserve the dignity of the student. John's primary school experience carries forward into his future classroom where he creates a self-protective armour in his engagement with pupils and where at the same time to tries to allow pupil voice as an important part of his pedagogy (Hinchion, 2019).

Life in Secondary School

Unlike his very troubling discourse on primary school, John initially likes secondary school. He liked the different classes and variety. Even though John found a more stable sense of self in secondary school, he also felt bored and sometimes pressurized. He recounts a pedagogy of boredom in many of his subjects, including History: "Our History Teacher employed the same teaching style everyday where she questioned us about the previous day's topic, then explained the new topic and then we read the textbook."

John comments that in general his teachers "were very good people" but he was aware of "mastering the learning off of essays" for his Leaving Certificate examination which did not make for understanding or remembering concepts and ideas. He also felt pressure as a learner, especially in senior cycle: "In senior cycle, we only had two years and the emphasis was always on work, work, work. This made learning much less fun and more difficult. There was a whole different ethos of pressure and simply getting material covered."

Ciara found the move to secondary school challenging:

In contrast to my primary education, my secondary education was almost the complete opposite! I moved to another all girls' school that enrolled roughly 1000 students and had a larger number of teachers. Although the class sizes were the same as in primary, I did not feel the same sense of unity. In primary

school, I had the same teacher for everything, now suddenly I had twelve different subjects, twelve different teachers and a year tutor. It was overwhelming. I felt out of place and uncomfortable. I didn't feel I had the same bonds as in primary. There was little opportunity to establish a relationship with the teachers and so I did not feel the same sense of motivation. The learning environment was more competitive and more stifled.

Ciara captures a sense of discomfiture in this paragraph. She does not feel the bonds of belonging and unity that permeated her playschool and primary school experience. In using the word "stifled" she connotes a deadening ethos which confines her sense of identity as a learner who likes to discover for herself and who values creativity. Ciara explains her school's focus was on "academics and points" and it was "not an encouraging environment to be in."

Ciara's love of sport proved to be the sustaining force during her secondary school years, and she has good memories of her Physical Education teacher: "She made it just so much fun and used to teach us about the muscles and the heart as well. You were learning about how you were participating in these activities. It wasn't just running around for the sake of it."

Her love of hockey fulfilled her desire for friendship and connection with her peers and gave her a positive outlook from the general bleakness of school: "The only thing that got me through my secondary school experience was my after-school activities. From 1st year to 6th year I was actively involved in the school hockey team. It was the light at the end of a dark tunnel."

It is obvious from Ciara's script that she is now developing a reflective capacity to consider her remembered identity through the lens of a beginning teacher. She remembers pedagogical moments of note such as a Maths teacher who used the cartoon of the "Rugrats" with first years to help them understand Venn diagrams, "I will never forget Venn diagrams."

She also recounts a narrative of an English teacher who encouraged students to develop their own opinions: "When we studied *Macbeth*, and *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *Room with a View* for comparative studies the teacher valued our opinion and our questions. We shared our different views, and this led to us forming our own opinions with the help of other perspectives."

Beginning Third Level and New Pedagogical Awareness

Both Ciara and John find third level education quite a change to second level. According to Ciara, it demands you draw on your own academic and personal resources and your own motivation to put the necessary work in. John concurs stating: "Now the person who influences my education most is myself, this is the nature of college." Teaching is also something different to what he expected: "I thought Physical Education would be learning games and stuff. I didn't think we would be learning to teach. It never occurred to me."

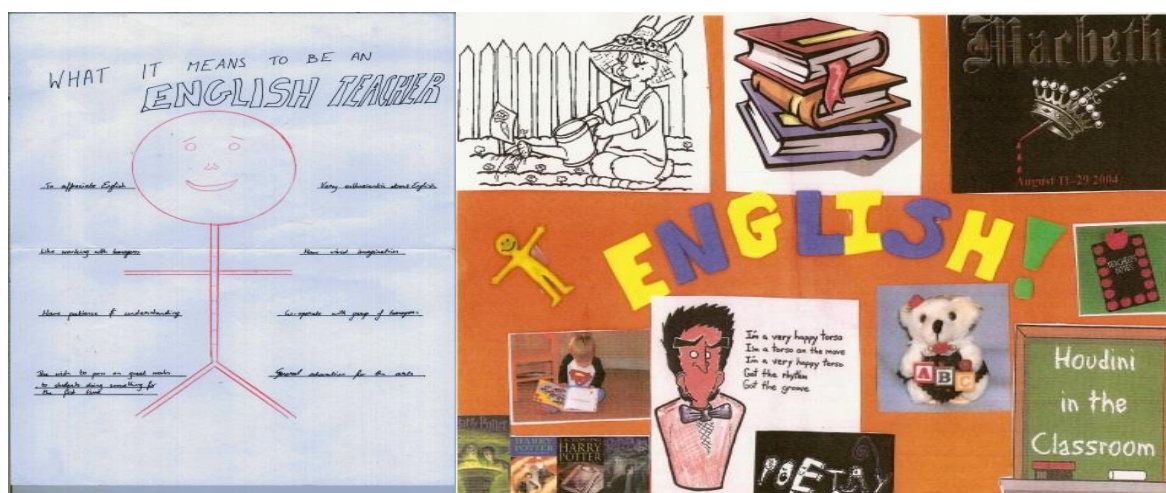
Both the one-week primary school experience of teaching and the in-house microteaching experience brought new pedagogical awareness to Ciara. Ciara reflects on her microteaching where she sees herself on video and notes she uses the word "excellent" fifteen times in the space of eight minutes, "I would never have picked up on this without seeing myself." In the following stretch of discourse, we see Ciara experiencing a dead-end moment with a pedagogical intervention with primary school students:

I put a picture on the board of a little furry monster and what I wanted them to do was to brainstorm ideas-to give him a name and say where he lived. Then some students would say he lived in a house. I would ask the student

“What colour is his house?” “Does it have bedrooms?” But after two to three minutes it started to go off on a complete tangent and I just had to end it then.

Here we evidence Ciara’s creative ideas, but she is not clear on what is the purpose of the furry monster in her lesson nor what was she hoping to achieve with her students. We see at this early stage the difficulty of framing learning in a lesson and the consequent pedagogical gap that appears. Ciara is becoming aware of pedagogical strategies and finds herself also evaluating lecturers thinking “Oh I wouldn’t do that, or I would do that in my class. As students, we talked about how lecturers taught us.”

“Fictive Identity” and the Pedagogical Imaginary



I borrow the term “pedagogical imaginary” from the work of Britzman (2003). Britzman talks about the dreams of newcomer teachers and their desires for the type of teacher they wish to become. Sumara and Luce-Kapler (1996) coin the concept “fictive identity” as students negotiate this desire in the knowledge of their past schooling experiences, college teaching and learning and their imagined practice on school placement. I draw here on collage work and poster work created by Ciara and John and on the one-to-one conversations I had with them (January 2008).

Both Ciara and John dream of “making a difference” in students’ lives. Ciara in her collage uses the metaphor of gardener to indicate nurturance and growth of her future students through the teacher’s careful tending. She includes pictures of books, like the *Harry Potter* series, to indicate her belief in the importance of reading, “it’s so exciting, so many different worlds you can access through books.” She includes a picture “of the dark and murderous play, *Macbeth*,” as an example of an influential text she studied in school. She also includes a picture of note-taking indicating that she values this as a way to learn. “And this is Houdini in the classroom because I would like to make magic happen,” she says as she explains her wish for learning creatively. Ciara includes a teddy bear holding an ABC block to highlight the importance of the fundamentals like grammar and spelling as these “cannot be neglected.” Ciara also believes in “the power of imagery for learning” and “the power of poetry to deepen understanding of life.”

Ciara draws on a personal growth model of English in the above description where students are nurtured, and imaginative worlds are opened. Her collage is set to a background of orange paper with large yellow and blue letters spelling ENGLISH across the centre. There is an excitement captured in the colourful word centre-arched in the collage, with an

exclamation mark making a declarative statement of possibility. To the left is a smiling yellow figure made of malleable plastic, with arms outstretched ready to embrace the joys of English. Some darker shadows do prevail especially in the image of *Macbeth* with crown, sword and blood, but overall there is a simple, childlike sense to the work. In fact, it is notable that many of the images, the rabbit, the teddy bear, the young child reading, the yellow figure, and the poetry rhyme are softly romantic and childlike in their tendency. There is an absence of the adolescent world in this collage, the world of their professional lives to come. The sense of the teacher's world as unproblematic is strongly established in the colourful and symmetrical presentation. The pedagogical imaginary is suffused with idealism and is perhaps rendered naïve by the inexperience of teaching practice at this stage in Ciara's identity formation. Ciara concluded by telling me: "I think this collage is vibrant and exciting and I would like to think that I would be dramatic in the classroom and I would make an impression on my students rather than being bland like everyone else."

John, in his poster, draws a simple stick figure with a smiling face to a light blue background. Surrounding the stick figure are statements of what it means to be an English teacher: to appreciate English, to like working with teenagers, to have patience and understanding, to wish to pass on great works of literature, to be enthusiastic, to have a vivid imagination, to have a general adoration of the arts. Here, like Ciara, John's words indicate a general philosophy of the subject as arts-based, underpinned by reading great works of literature and engaging the imagination. This poster is also idealistic and romantic in its thrust and it does not problematize knowledge or the building of relationships. In fact, the alone stick figure with smiling face, represents a simplistic understanding not fleshed out by the experience of teaching practice. Ciara and John's metaphors or conceptual systems indicate a 'fictive' world removed from the complexities of pedagogy and represented as a colourful, hopeful, exciting, impactful, teaching future.

Text 2, 2018: Salient and Punctum Effects and Pedagogical Theorizing

Context

In this section the narrative analysis of the student teachers' earlier autobiographical texts, Text 1, is brought forward in time. I now consider Text 1 in terms of the salient and punctum effects it had on me as a teacher educator and I theorize my practice with a new supporting literature frame. This leads to the creation of Text 2.

The following table offers an overview of the 2018 process leading to the creation of TEXT 2:

Salient and Punctum Effects 2018
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rereading of Text 1, the composite story of Ciara and John, throughout 2018. 2. Becoming aware of the salient (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011) and punctum (Barthes, 2000) effects of the text on me. 3. Reading literature to theorize these effects for example, the work of Professor Michael O'Loughlin (2009, 2015) on emotionally attuned pedagogy and the work of Professor Teresa Cremin (2009) on the effects of creative pedagogy for meaning-making and new connections. Exploring my own pedagogical practice. 4. August-December 2018: Creating a new text from Text 1 with new insights on the importance of autobiographical memory and imaginings work in ITE and the importance of evocative, creative and emotionally attuned pedagogy to foster pedagogical understanding.

Salient and punctum effects

Initially I used the concepts of salient and punctum effects to read Text 1 anew. “Salience” according to Schaafsma and Vinz (2011) is to focus on moments of resonance, on moments that linger and endure for the reader. Roland Barthes (2000), writing about photography in “Camera Lucida” uses the concepts “studium” and “punctum.” Studium relates to the intention of the photographer and its interpretation by the spectator through figure, face, gesture, setting, and actions, whereas “punctum” is like the accidental quality of the photograph “to prick,” wound or disturb the reader with touching detail and emotional connection. For example, a family photograph represents a moment in time with people in a particular setting and the viewer of the photograph reads this configuration. At times, the viewer, can be emotionally struck. For example, they may remember the suffering of a now deceased family member who is in the photograph, or some aspect of the photo creates an evocative emotional feeling for the viewer. This latter experience is the punctum effect.

Based on my initial and recent reading of John’s story, my punctum moments always relate to his struggle in the playground and his description of the young girl who was humiliated and shamed in the classroom. A salient moment in Ciara’s story relates to her playschool experience and her creative play with the red plastic doctor’s set. According to van Manen (1991) for human beings everything has atmosphere and in education, it relates to pedagogy and the way we are with children: “Pedagogy brings something into being” (p. 32). These salient and punctum effects from Ciara and John’s stories brought pedagogical atmospheres and tones to the foreground for me. Extending from, and alongside these responses, I read corresponding educational theory and my interest as a teacher educator focused on the inter-braided concepts of autobiographical awareness and development, the emotionality of teaching and learning, and the importance of evocative, creative pedagogies in Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

Theorizing practice in the light of salient and punctum effects

According to Lyle (2018) teaching and learning are autobiographical endeavours and are part of our embodied wholeness, grounded in our “personal history” (p. 259). Bullough and Gitlin (2001) believe that our autobiographies hugely influence our work as educators and as student teachers, and that our conceptions of ourselves as teachers are biographically and experientially embedded. Understanding our autobiographies then is key to understanding our teaching (O’Loughlin, 2009). Florio-Ruane (2001) reminds us our capacity to grow and move forward rests on a healthy relationship with the past. We carry our wound and even worse, our capacity to wound, forward with us (Hampl, 1999). As I read and reread the stories of Ciara and John, I began to feel the power of this insight quite forcibly. Having visited both Ciara and John on school placement in year 2 (2008) and year 4 (2009/10) some of their autobiographical experiences of childhood carried into their teaching spaces. Ciara’s practice focused on helping students to belong in a learning group and in bringing creativity to her teaching of English, much like her playschool and primary school experience. John carried forward a type of self-protective approach into his classroom, which had echoes of his suffering in, and resistance to, aspects of the pedagogical atmosphere he experienced in his primary school days (Hinchion, 2019).

Pinar et al. (2004, p. 522) write that we are always in a biographic situation and to grow as people we need to develop self-awareness and self-understanding. Developing approaches, skills, and techniques are all part of learning to teach but these must be embedded, fundamentally, in the rich human activity of connecting with others (van Manen, 1991). To know this process of connection, we need to connect with our inner lives, rich in love, joy,

pain, and struggle. When I think about my practice in the light of rereading Text 1, I realize that I do not give enough pedagogical wait time for students to consider their autobiographies, especially the area of emotional effect. Britzman (2013, p. 113) describes this evocatively: “An interest in the emotional situations of pedagogy is difficult to sustain, particularly when we feel we have to cover material against all odds, [...] and so rescue time from becoming wasted and meaningless.”

The question salient for me now in revisiting Text 1 is how I can integrate material/content with the emotional situations of pedagogy. In this regard, I am influenced by the work of O’Loughlin (among others) including an interview I undertook with him in January 2015. O’Loughlin (2009) is constantly struck by the absence of an emotionally focused-discourse in teacher preparation programmes and makes a case for a radical restructuring of teacher education and the structure of schooling overall. He advocates for what he calls an “emotionally attuned pedagogy” (p. 36) where schools are reparative communities and places of receptivity and sensitivity to a child’s emotions (p. 4). I borrow the concept of emotionally attuned pedagogy from him and engage with its meaning and possibilities for my practice.

Emotionally attuned pedagogy: Playschool and playground

Childhood memories can be a potent resource for pedagogical understanding. In Text 1, early childhood was like a magic playschool for Ciara and for John it was playground hell. John’s formative story underlines that the architecture of a play space is not always benign. O’Loughlin (2009, 2010) did not experience school as an emotionally facilitating place either. Like John, he was bullied and experienced anxiety and hurt. O’Loughlin felt he was unseen by his teachers and asks why his teachers were not “attuned to” his suffering:

Was it the case that the adults who supposedly taught us, just like the teacher in Chamoiseau’s *School Days*, were so out of touch with their own inner lives that they could not serve as containers for our anxieties, nor as attuned listeners to our spoken and unspoken-and perhaps even our unspeakable-narrative. (O’Loughlin, 2010, p. 3)

The same questions can be asked of John’s teacher. Why did he not understand John’s suffering and “see” John? Was it because he avoided emotional vulnerability as a form of self-protection? Did he know how to talk with others in their suffering? Is there such a focus on cognition and behaviour in schools that emotions are sidelined? What aspects of ITE prepared him to deal with vulnerability, emotional hurt, his own and others, and to have empathy in relating with his students? How then as a teacher educator can I facilitate these conditions for personal awareness of the emotional world of teaching and learning in my classroom? I share some possible approaches in the following paragraphs and sections.

Taking time to describe and understand the salient and punctum effects of student teachers’ own autobiographies is a possibility. In conversation between students and teacher, we could consider the feelings alive in these moments and perhaps dramatize the scenarios in a safe classroom space. Britzman (2013) encourages us as teacher educators to face difficult knowledge, that is “the anxiety made from broken meanings” (p. 109) which is part of our existential condition. Exploring moments of difficult knowledge-anxiety, doubt, suffering-as well as comforting knowledge-success, love, belonging, desire, can deepen our understanding of self and other. Both our memories and imaginings can serve as a resource for this work. Even though we are not counsellors or psychotherapists, as teacher educators we cannot erase difficult knowledge from the work we do. Clinical psychology students do deep, fine-grained personal development work as they prepare for their profession to work with people, student

teachers do not (O'Loughlin, personal communication, January 2015). If not fine-grained personal work akin to clinical psychology, at least in teacher education we can be explicit in developing opportunities for personal awareness and development so that we can embed techniques for teaching into personal growth processes. Techniques without personal growth processes resemble clothing without the person.

Another way to focus on emotional learning is through using drama conventions such as improvisational role-play. Embodiment through role-play is a powerful way to physicalize learning and to access feelings. It also extends understanding through different points of view. For example, the teacher's perspective in the playground might be explored in John's story, as well as the perspective of the bullied boy and his friends. This process drama, "emotion in action" and embodiment in first person experience, may generate new meaning and understanding (Dobson & Stephenson, 2019) where the gestural and kinesthetic life of the body becomes a learning site. The focus would be on attunement to underlying causes in relation to overt behaviours (O'Loughlin, personal communication, January 2015) and of thinking from "within the dilemma rather than talking outside of it" (Grainger et al., 2005, p. 201). As these student teachers are also learning to become Physical Education teachers some strands of their syllabus such as dance with its movement and rhythm could be explored for a development of bodily sensibility and sensitivity (Kontovourki, 2014). An embodied dance performance of the "emotional shape" or "emotional music" of Ciara's and John's story, or aspects of their story, could be created. Creative writing activities stimulated by the visceral drama performance or dance performance could further deepen learning (Dobson & Stephenson, 2019).

Creativity

In Ciara's story there is a strong sense of the importance of play and creativity as part of her identity as learner and teacher. Her descriptions of creative moments in her autobiographical texts have strong resonances for me. Salvio and Boldt (2010) drawing on James Britton's work of the 1970s write that teachers are responsible for the world they hold up to students. I would like to hold up the world of creative teaching for my students. According to Cremin (2009), creativity involves making, "making connections, making meaning, composing and communicating" (p. 15). It is not an event but a process which generates products of originality and value where the teachers are leaders of explorations rather than presenters of contents (pp. 16-17). As a teacher of English, I have many opportunities for creativity in my classroom (see Hinchion, 2016, 2017). In this article, I would like to explore how applying literary methods can bring new perspectives to exploring and supporting teachers' identity work (Huber et al., 2014) and pedagogical understanding.

Literary methods for autobiographical understanding

Elbaz-Luwisch (2002) uses literary techniques from poetry and fiction to develop autobiographical understanding. One way I have experimented with this since 2008 is by using "Word Image" methodology. A word image is a narrative account akin to a poem, capturing the essence of a story (Clandinin et al., 2006). I have done this exercise with Ciara's and John's written autobiographies (see Appendix A) as a way of learning for myself. Students could work similarly, which would facilitate a rereading and reconnection to the themes of their early memories and future imaginings, perhaps supported by drawings and conversation.

O'Loughlin (2009) indicates that there is a moral responsibility on the teacher educator not to manipulate student teachers' autobiographical worlds and to share their own autobiography with their students. This of course needs careful thought on pedagogical appropriateness for learning. In 2008, I did not share any autobiographical writing or image

work with my students. However, in revisiting the student teachers' autobiographical texts, I have also spent time remembering and reconstructing my own autobiographical memories and imaginings. I could share some of these with my students in developing opportunities for dialogue leading to learning. Related to John, my early schooling experience was not always benign. Both my students and I bring back-stories to college or school and these stories inevitably meet in the pedagogical encounter:

I remember.

I was 6 maybe.

The teacher lined us up to examine our tables- 1 and 1 are two, 1 and 2 are 3.

She put me to the end of the class line.

'You won't know it anyway,' she said dismissively.

When it was my turn in the line, I blurted out all the tables at high speed.

With her grey hair tightened in a bun and her sculpted face hardened

She looked astonished and said:

'I don't believe it. That was a great surprise'.

I kept my head down, out of breath and shy from the effort.

Isolated, shamed, unseen.

But now a statement of intent.

I am not defined

I can surprise

I am a surprise. ("Word Image", 2018)

O'Loughlin offers his concept of "evocative pedagogies" (personal communication, January 2015) through literature and film work to sensitize student teachers to layers of experience which they may not have. In this way, student teachers' personal history speaks to other narratives and they become aware of the texture of complexity in life (O'Loughlin, 2015). This is in keeping with Greene's (1995) belief that we encounter ourselves and develop empathy for others through reading literature and releasing our imaginations. For example, we heighten our awareness of the world and ourselves through poetic experiences. Reading Seamus Heaney's (2018) poem "The Rain Stick," as an example, the students and I listen to the music of the words and their lyrical cadences. We make a rain stick and play with sound effects in class as pebbles fall and swish against hard paper tubing. The world becomes sound and we find words and hear ourselves differently - cascading rhythm, dry fall, desert hot bamboo, imagined wetness, rain on the paths, backwash, shuffle movement, Irish weather. All sensuous delight, imaginative play and experience becoming larger (Sumara, 1996). As Maxine Greene (1995) writes we need to be wide awake to the sensuous and aesthetic qualities of the world so that we can experience and know ourselves differently and be fully alive:

At the very least, participatory involvement with the many forms of art can enable us to see more in our experience, to hear more on unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed. (p. 123)

Learning is fundamentally a personal growth process as our experiences are extended by exposure to varied interpretative practices.

Final Commentary

In this article, I have worked with student teachers' autobiographical texts as a resource for pedagogical understanding. Text 1 and Text 2 evolve around two different time-frames, 2008 and 2018. The 2008 text is a narrative analysis of student teachers' remembered past of schooling, their early experience of their university course and their imagined futures as teachers. In 2018, I bring forward Text 1, and theorize the salient and punctum effects it has on me and I appraise and theorize my practice in the light of these effects. Methodologically, I show that meanings are not closed off or fixed in time. Like life itself stories/texts can be reconstituted and retold under varied interpretative frames and conditions.

Powerfully surprising for me in Text 1 were the contrasting pedagogical atmospheres of the brutality of the playground for John and the creative ambience in playschool for Ciara. Also surprising for me were the simplicity of the images both students held around teaching English. It was these surprising moments which lead to Text 2 where I make a case for working more attentively and closely with education- related autobiography in ITE.

This study has its limitations, chief among them was the challenging methodological experiment which created two interconnected but separate texts. Pedagogy is layered and intricate and it was difficult to capture the richly complex process in clear and elegant words. Also, the study is small in scope, is contextually focused and carries the imprint of the researchers' interests, values, and limitations. It also carries her pedagogical orientations. In this way it is partial, selective, and personal and does not have correlative impact. However, localized studies can have an "instrumental utility" (Eisner, 1998, p. 59) by offering perspectives and opening dialogue to others in the field of education.

From this study, and from my experience as a teacher educator, I am convinced that student teachers need opportunities through our classes, and through dedicated modules (for example modules on personal development, literature and the arts, performative drama, dance and movement, basic counselling skills), to develop autobiographical self- awareness and knowledge in small group settings (15-20) and in atmospheres of emotional attunement with creative purpose. Appropriate time, conditions and methodologies are required to achieve these aims. This desire has implications for my own practice as a teacher educator, for educators in the field of education generally, for schools of education, for teaching councils and for all relevant bodies overseeing policy and reform agendas in ITE.

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Appendix A

Word Image

Ciara-

Family, nourishing, stable, warm.

Instilled morals, values, beliefs.

Not like my friend who had to leave school at fifteen- rough area, large family, financial difficulty.

My “masterpieces” were displayed on our fridge.

Home, full of encouragement, opportunity and creativity.

Bright red plastic case with white cross sticker,

Inside a play stethoscope, bandages and plastic watch.

Wrapping my friend “injuries” and checking their heartbeat.

Learning through imitation and practice.

My work is on display and I am recognised.

Like a family here too.

Playschool.

Primary school, some of the happiest years of my life.

Posters and pictures filled our room.

Reading, painting, software games.

Solving maths problems on the board in an encouraging atmosphere.

By sixth class reading several books a week.

Visualizing stories and knowing the power of words.

Stimulating my imagination.

Secondary school, no sense of unity or family here.

Twelve subjects, twelve teachers.

Overwhelming.

Competitive, academic, stifled.

I felt out of place and uncomfortable.

Physical education and after-school hockey sustained me.

Learning Venn diagrams with a “Rugrats” cartoon.

Learning how to give opinions in English class.

Looking back with a pedagogical sense.

Always a need for belonging and creativity.

Now third level, change and a reliance on personal resources.

Seeing myself as a teacher.

Pedagogy,

Evaluating lecturers,

Struggling with pedagogies: remember creating the profile of a “furry monster”.

Didn’t know my purpose or how to develop this exercise.

I dream of making a difference.

John-

I am an only child.
Primary school was a struggle.
Rebel and resistor of authority, but
I basically felt like an idiot most of the time.
I felt scared all of the time.
Fear.

Dragged along the yard by a bully at lunchtime.
Crushing.
After two months I built up the courage to tell the teacher.
Ah, I'm sure they're only messing said the teacher on duty.
Negligent, diabolical, terrifying and horrific.
Insignificant.
He is a bloody fine Principal somewhere now.
Anger.

Fourth class reprieve.
Emerging academically and my teacher
Cared passionately about us.
We could be whatever we wanted she said.
Hope.

But always memories of indignity and ignorance.
We can talk to the end of time about teaching methodologies but
If a teacher can't help a student?
The despair.

Secondary school, a new me.
Different classes and variety.
Boredom too, reading and questioning style.
I knew how to learn off essays.
Senior cycle, and the pressure of exams.
But renewed.

Third level.
Relying on myself.
It never occurred to me that we would be 'learning' to teach.
New awareness.

I dream of making a difference.

Author Note

Carmel Hinchion is a lecturer in Teaching, Learning and Assessment, and lecturer in English Pedagogics, at the University of Limerick, Ireland. Her research interests include student teachers' experiences of learning to teach and their developing identities as teacher, English Pedagogy and qualitative research methodology in education. Please direct correspondence to carmel.hinchion@ul.ie.

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