# Beyond Cognition: Affective Learning and Undergraduate Education Student Engagement in Learning

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## Abstract

In this paper I report on a project designed to enhance student teacher engagement in learning by developing an explicit pedagogy of affective learning, traditionally ignored in teacher education as discipline-based studies have dominated the field. Strategies investigated are based on reading engaged on affective levels, intertwined with current approaches to academic reading, with metacognitive responses recorded by the students as part of student evaluation of their own learning. Reading has been structured around literature reading circles (affective reading component), and academic reading circles (professional reading component). The project uses strategy in relation to the identifiable stages in a teaching sequence which help students to realise a learning goal, so that they use learning strategies and respond to teaching strategies that scaffold their learning. The reading program pushes the boundaries of their discipline-based learning, engaging what Schön refers to as 'indeterminate zones of practice' as giving an affective dimension, having wider implications for student engagement in discipline-based units than straight academic encounters with discipline-based literature allows. The reading is designed to integrate discipline-based knowledge, the implications of this for professional lives, and the affective dimensions of professional practice. The results of this project indicate that, according to student evaluations, their capacities for self monitoring and self evaluation was enhanced at the same time as their own engagement with relevant literature deepened their understandings of issues that emerged from that engagement.

## Introduction

In this paper I report on a case study of pre-service teachers' (PSTs) experiences of teaching and learning materials designed to facilitate an affective engagement with their own learning as a first step to developing their skills in teaching and learning in affective domains. The literature in the field of teacher education in general and in Literacy and Literature education in particular emphasises technical proficiency and mastery of established teaching and learning strategies in classrooms. In doing so, it marginalises affective domains of teaching and learning. It is a situation that literacy and literature educators around the world face in their professional activities. My project, while it is undertaken in an Australian context, is consistent with scholarship from around the world, as European, United States, Asian and African teachers and teacher educators address affective and metacognitive issues of curriculum outcomes, interpretations, and implementations (Kryger & Ravn, 2007). Indeed, we see through the Japan NGO Network for Education (JNNE) publication (2008) that this is of some concern for Japanese educators, that is, for explicit engagement through reading by children. The life skills that it has addressed are given as 'creativity, judgment, communication abilities and emotion control' (JNNE, 2008, p.1), those dimensions of children's learning that are rooted in affective engagement with the materials they encounter as part of their schooling. JNNE intends to expand the project to examine ways in which its activities and focus may work in different countries in the world. It is not a local Australian problem

that I address, then, even though in this paper, I address new developments in curriculum designs across Australia as a case study I have drawn on those documents to indicate ways in which they have emphasised affective learning for children as a major feature of children's education experience. What is happening in this regard in Australia has echoes of similar developments in other countries.

As yet, there is a lack of literature that deals specifically with issues of what engagement in the teaching and learning of affective domains might mean for PSTs, so that teacher educators and PSTs themselves are in effect working with what might be considered 'motherhood' statements on the possibilities that new curriculum developments suggest. Currently, teacher educators, teachers and PSTs work with curriculum document descriptors without the benefit of any empirical studies to inform their interpretations and implementations of requirements for their classrooms.

> *Articles seem to be a more reliable source of info —HOWEVER I have learnt more from [this  book] than articles I have read in my Special Needs class* (Student evalution)

A review of the literature in this field shows little in the way of published research, which suggests that teacher education programs, indeed school classroom programs, have not yet caught up with such curriculum changes. They may be happening, but they have not become salient in public discussion or professional conversations. I argue that teacher education institutions need to equip PSTs with capabilities to put in place the affective teaching and learning which is embedded in new curriculum demands. I have examined ways in which a particular form of drawing on children's and young adult literature texts has enabled PSTs to examine, monitor and document  their own affective and metacognitive responses that focus on such teaching and learning.  I have developed a systematic and orchestrated set of learning experiences, arguing that such an approach enhances PSTs' engagement in learning. Rather than rely on happenstance, the teaching and learning design in this case facilitates an explicit pedagogy of affective learning. Strategies investigated in this research are based on reading engaged on affective levels, intertwined with current approaches to academic reading, with metacognitive responses recorded by PSTs and subsequently analysed. PSTs submit records of their own reading as part of their assessment for the units they are enrolled in, receiving marks for their reading as emphasising the valued nature of this sort of engagement on their part.

PSTs and I start with the curriculum documents that guide the acquisition of professional knowledge as it is engaged in systematic ways in undergraduate teacher education courses. PSTs are to become proficient in a number of domains, usually set out under rubrics associated with discipline areas of literacy, numeracy, science, physical education, health, social studies, history, perhaps foreign languages, and even some knowledge domains particular to a culture or society. As far as this project is concerned, the domains are spelled out in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2005), and this has been an important stimulus to the project's design and implementation.  An important feature of the new VELS curriculum is the incorporation of the dimension of affective learning, specified in the documents:

The Thinking Processes domain encompasses a range of cognitive, affective and metacognitive knowledge, skills and behaviours which are essential for students to function effectively in society, both within and beyond school (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), 2005)

The project takes up the focus thus articulated, engaging PSTs themselves on affective levels of understanding, ones that acknowledge the importance of cognitive appreciations and metacognitive knowledge as part of professional understandings, but which at the same time build on these so that PSTs themselves experience affective responses to the materials engaged. In doing this, I used the familiar form of reading circles in relation to literary texts, and joined these with reading circles in relation to professional or academic texts.

## Working the reading circles

In the first instance, PSTs read journal articles, chapters, books, or selections from books, for professional knowledge of their field. They are asked to comment on these in relation to their own developing professional knowledge on a weekly basis, and they are rewarded in this as the reading of the literature in this way forms a separate feature of the program for their assessment. This type of reading supplements, enhances, and deepens their appreciation of the information they encounter in lectures, tutorials, and workshops.

> *I prefer to read about people rather than facts. I find it easier to relate to people; it sticks in my memory better also* (Student evaluation)

In the case of this project, professional knowledge is English and all of its associated reading, writing, speaking and listening domains. As well, PSTs are expected to have acquired professional knowledge that comes under the umbrella term of Education, where they study teaching and learning theory and practice. This is not part of the curriculum documents for schools but an acknowledged essential feature of PST learning as they progress to full professional engagement as teachers. Those of us who design courses on the basis of this draw upon a number of important theorists in the field, and one that I have drawn upon for this project is Schön (Schön, 1987, 1990), in particular his concept of 'indeterminate zones of practice' (Schön, 1987, p. 6).

Using established reading circle protocols, each student agrees to read specified material, or specified sections of material beforehand, then play a specified role in the reading circle that focusses on that reading. No member of the group is left without a role to perform; each has a task that facilitates the efficient working of the group. No member of the reading circle is an onlooker, but may act in a number of roles suggested by Daniels (1994) and developed within the small group. This may be as the discussion director, the scribe, the illustrator, the connector, the summariser, the investigator (who may have to follow up on further reading for the circle), and even the devil's advocate (Dawson & Fitzgerald, 1999, p. 34). The roles are played out in relation to professional reading circles and those which focus on the literary works.

> *The article provides fact and information that I need* (Student evaluation)

PSTs, as part of reading circle protocols, document their responses to the text. The responses start out as individual ones as each member of the small group notes their responses to the reading engaged, and then presents these to the rest of the group for discussion, clarification, extension, and enhancement. Meanings are shared, possible interpretations are discussed, and practical implications for classroom practice are canvassed. These are recorded for the whole group, and then shared with the other groups of readers in the tutorial. PSTs in effect self monitor their responses to the reading engaged. They are guided in this with the use of a generic reader response sheet with open ended questions regarding the content of the material, suggestions of other works that deal with similar issues, and suggest ways in which the material they have been working with may be used when they write about, discuss or teach various topics. They articulate perceived alignments and misalignments with new curriculum documents, where descriptors of affective learning are given.

## The Project

The project is conducted in the various Language and Literacy units in the undergraduate levels in the P-10 Bachelor of Education degree at the University. Each week a group of students takes responsibility for identifying appropriate, relevant and timely journal articles for other PSTs to read in advance of the reading circle itself. They will also provide guiding discussion questions in advance, and they will be responsible for the conduct of that week's professional reading circle. The assessment for this takes the form of a combination of peer evaluation, self evaluation, and tutor evaluation.

This set of activities is premised on Emmitt, Komesaroff and Pollock's (2006) view of learning as 'a process of making connections, identifying patterns, and organising previously unrelated bits of knowledge, behaviour or activities into new (for the learner) patterned wholes' (p. 219). This does require a further elaboration, though, as knowledge does not just happen automatically. It is generated by the learner themselves, from information that may have been encountered from a variety of sources. Information is not knowledge, even if we tend to conflate the two in our designations of our own age as *The Information Age* at the same time as we call it *The Knowledge Society*. Underpinning the project has been a conceptualisation of knowledge as being quite distinct from concepts of information, that is, knowledge as intensely private and meaningful. Information is essential facts, perhaps data, gathered by means of reading, watching a film, perhaps a documentary, listening to others, and so on. It is a very public thing. Knowledge is when information or data is filtered through a learner's own experience and applied as a meaningful thing to that experience (Pennell, 1999), so that it is internalised and becomes the learner's own. It is a very private thing, and it must ever be so—once it is articulated, explained, written down, made into a film or a CD-ROM or whatever, it becomes information again. It is then up to whoever encounters it to internalise it and turn it into their own private knowledge (Zeegers, 2007, p. 244). Students in this program engage data and information, but it is data and information to be mediated by organisation and transformation through some sort of action on the students' part. There is a further emphasis on the private nature of the experience, as readers' engagements with literary works tend towards that same sort of private response.

Professional reading circles provide a focus on the knowledge that each PST is expected to have developed in the course of their preparation for professional life, certainly, but there is also an added dimension of an affective engagement with that

material. The material engaged in this program pushes the boundaries of PSTs discipline-based learning, engaging what Schön (1990) refers to as 'indeterminate zones of practice' as giving an affective dimension, having wider implications for student engagement in discipline-based units than more narrow academic encounters with discipline literature allow. The reading is designed to integrate discipline-based knowledge, the implications of this for professional lives, and the affective dimensions of professional practice designed a project with a view to improving PST engagement with affective learning as prescribed in relevant curriculum documents.

The reading circles have been adapted from what PSTs would already have encountered as part of literature studies (see for example Daniels, 1994). I have made further adaptations so that PSTs engage two types of reading. The first type that of academic reading circles (the professional reading component), based on Freire's (1970) model of 'culture circles' as a way of using reading as an empowering strategy, especially in relation to non-reading communities (see also Brown & Hayes, 2001). PST selections of professional literature has indicated their preference for readings that illustrate particular social, political, economic and professional considerations, and reading circle discussions are structured to facilitate a full exploration of themes that emerge, such as issues of inclusivity, cultural awareness and sensitivity, students with disabilities, ethnic considerations in teaching and learning, and so on.

This brings me to a second type of reading and reading circles, based on selections that I have made in response to those selections by PSTs. I have turned to literary works that may be used to extend their appreciation of those concerns as drawing upon affective responses that help to position them in the very situations that the professional reading material deals with. Policy documents, for example, will decry any exclusion of children from education. This is enshrined in such things as the *Salamanca Statement* (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1994) for the world in general, and in particular for my own State of Victoria in Australia in the *Guidelines for managing cultural and linguistic diversity in schools* (Department of Education Employment and Training, 2001). Yet it is when PSTs read a literary text in the form of a short story of a Muslim woman trying to help her daughter cope with the demands on her in a Western school and its Christmas celebrations (Forward, 1991), that point is brought home more forcefully when it is combined with a professionally engaged study of policy documents.

> *The story allows the reader insight into the child's world, the thoughts behind the actions, etc'* (Student evaluation)

It is important to note at this point that the reading circles do not occur in an isolated context. They are part of a wider context of professional and affective engagement. The reading and systematic study is further enhanced by a carefully designed system of professional placements in their teacher mentor classrooms in schools (for more detailed discussions see for example Smith & Zeegers, 2004; Smith & Zeegers, 2003; Zeegers, 2005; Zeegers, Russel & Smith, 2004; Zeegers, Russell, Davis & Menon, 2006; Zeegers & Smith, 2004; Zeegers & Smith, 2006). In doing this, PSTs range widely across the various fields of study associated with their chosen profession, and document not only what they learn, but also how they learn it. They are asked at the end of the program of reading to identify particular strengths in their knowledge, and also any shortfalls, to be accompanied by a strategy plan for dealing with any identified gaps.

Preliminary results in the form of independent and anonymous University-conducted evaluations of both the content and the teaching of the programs over the last four years have indicated a strong approval of the activities engaged. PSTs have in effect been using learning strategies and responding to teaching strategies that have been designed to scaffold their learning.

It is an approach, indicated by student survey results as being a successful one, which introduces students to a metacognitive response to the extraordinary scope and variety of literature on teaching and learning in relation to children in schools, a body of literature which has grown enormously since Rouseeau's (1762) *Emíle* centred the child in theories of education. It is a body of literature which stretches from this to other great scholars in the field: Dewey (1933), Vygotsky (1978), Piaget (1999), Erikson (1963), Gardner (1982), and so many others, who, even if lesser known, contribute a good deal to the field. This of course is part of what has become the truism that most of have been brought up with: 'Good theory makes good practice'. Good theory is the metacognitive dimension of professional practice that grounds it firmly in the context of relevance, timeliness and appropriateness. It is a principle upon which much of the program under discussion is based. The practice that PSTs engage as part of placements in classrooms thus is positioned on a solid theoretical base from which they may explore any number of options that open up to them as their understanding is expanded, deepened, and enhanced. The project builds on cognition-based engagement to develop metacognition and the affective.

## Possibilities for Reading

Woolf (1987) draws a distinction between reading for the sheer joy of it and reading for knowledge in her essay, *Hours in a library*:

> … learned man [sic] is a concentrated solitary enthusiast, who searches through books to discover some particular grain of truth upon which he has set his heart. If the passion for reading conquers him, his gains dwindle and vanish between his fingers. A reader, on the other hand, must check the desire for learning at the outset; if knowledge sticks to him well and good, but to go in pursuit of it, to read on a system, to become a specialist or an authority, is very apt to kill what it suits us to consider the more humane passion for pure and disinterested reading (p. 55).

Any avid reader of books will recognise the distinction being made here, but that avid reader will also recognise a false dichotomy. We read for different purposes, and those of us who indulge our passion for 'pure and disinterested reading' respond with an understanding that only those who are most happy when curled up with a good book can have. We will have found our own reading similar bisected as to purpose. But it is the learning part of the reading that holds a strong attraction for such readers, every bit as much as that delightful reading for pleasure. The dichotomy is not very helpful, for it suggests a joy in one that is absent in the other, and the learning in one that is probably absent in the other. We engage very different types of books for very different purposes. This project does not engage the reading involved as dichotomous, rather it sees it as complementary, overlapping, and enhancing cognitive or knowledge-building reading.

*Both articles and books provides you with the background knowledge and theory, whereas the book gives you examples of different behaviours* (Student evaluation)

## Aesthetic Efferential Continuum

The outcomes of the project confirm the proposition that to optimise conditions for developing their understanding, PSTs engage a program of affective reading that is intertwined with their academic reading, constantly monitoring and evaluating it. It further confirms  Rosenblatt's (1976) notion of an aesthetic-efferential continuum as an appropriate basis for proceeding.  Affective reading is constructed as aesthetic reading, that which is engaged for experience, and feeling, and thought. Like the concept of knowledge, it too is a very private thing. Efferential reading is engaged for more public purposes—predominantly for the acquisition of information to be retained after the reading has finished, perhaps for an assignment or a report or some such thing (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 445). The idea is similar in descriptions of different purposes of reading as those of Woolf's. The difference is that Rosenblatt does not present these as opposites, or mirrors of each other. Rosenblatt (1991) is at some pains to represent these as being on a continuum, and to stress that there is overlap; that these don't operate separately from each other. The point to be stressed is that PSTs, understanding this process through their own experience of it, are better positioned to engage both kinds of reading if they are to develop their teaching programs so that the full benefits of children's rich literary heritage may be had. This is indeed embedded in the curriculum documents designed to support such a full engagement with that heritage.

The idea has been taken up in the project as it is applied to PSTs as they experience that very thing for themselves, the better to be able to work with the concepts and strategies involved when working in schools. Experiencing the aesthetic-efferential continuum offers the possibilities of a 'unique transaction' (Rosenblatt, 1976) between the reader and the text, where, 'A novel or a poem or  a play remains merely ink spots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols' (p. 25) that touch the emotions and stimulate the imagination. One of the most successful book engaged in this process has been *The curious incident of the dog in the night time* (Haddon, 2003). This is a multi-award winning book that explores what it is to live with a form of autism, and it an exploration that is most powerfully realised in masterful writing. Student evaluations consistently highlight the powerful effect this book has had in literary reading circles in tandem with professional reading circles.

*[The] book explains the behaviour instead of stating the facts and brings it into a real life situation* (Student evaluation)

*As a teacher, reading both the article and the book would enable you to explore ways to cater for children with autism in the classroom* (Student evaluation)

*The article gives me a variety of information, however the book allows me to make sense of it* (Student evaluation)

*The book brings the information to life* (Student evaluation)

*It gives you a greater, more compassionate understanding of autism* (Student evaluation)

I have argued elsewhere (Zeegers, 2006) that the implications of such engagement with literature goes beyond considerations of personal and private development; that they have important wider social implications. Here I have drawn on the work of Jennings (2003):

> You can't beat up an old lady on the train if you have been into her life or someone like hers in a story. You can't push a boatload of refugees out into the sea to drown if you survived the terrors of the torture chamber and the unforgiving ocean as a fellow traveller-in a book (p. 56).

It is interesting to note that one of the student evaluations picked up on this idea as well:
> *NB The book is good as it allows us to feel more empathy for those who have autism. It's like the Paul Jennings quote about the old lady on the train. If we read facts, it doesn't have as much impact as relating to a person* (Student evaluation)

The evidence from this project is that positioning teaching and learning within an aesthetic-efferential reading continuum does not discard theoretical bases that are traditionally drawn upon for PST learning. An aesthetic-efferential reading basis for teaching and learning allows another set of discourses to be mobilised, those that emerge from studies of the sort of literature upon which Woolf (1987) bases her dichotomy and Rosenblatt (1976; 1991) her continuum.

In my analysis of the results of PST monitoring and evaluation of their own learning as part of the project, I have identified efferential and aesthetic reading as two complementary features of the joy of reading. In previous work I have theorised the benefits of drawing upon 'transformative aesthetic and empathetic engagement with literature' (Zeegers, 2006, p. 59). In this project, I have put the theory into practice by focussing on PST reading of narratives that engage the world of human relationships that interest not only the children that they will be teaching but themselves, living as they do in a social world whose dimensions go well beyond their professional concerns. What I have found is that the very joy that reading brings to readers may be extended to professional development and understanding. The joy that has traditionally had a narrow focus on literary texts—a joy that derives from satisfying that very strong human need for narrative (O'Donnell & Wood, 2004; Saxby, 1997)—can be combined with professional texts to produce a similar result. In effect, professional texts take on a form of narrative to be explored for personal as well a professional understanding. I extend on my previous work (Zeegers, 2006) which has represented the joy of reading as:

> the vicarious experience of lives in other times and other places; it is a stretch and exercise of the imagination; it is a means of developing empathy and understanding others; it is an escape from the reality of our daily lives; it shows how the world is, or was, or may be; it is a demonstration of how others have dealt with situations that may be difficult, or similar to, or different from our own; it is a means by which we may be inspired; it is a way of deriving sheer pleasure as we can laugh, cry, be outraged, or feel ennobled by engaging others' human experience (p. 60).

By this I do not mean that it is distinct from a knowledge-generating experience. I mean quite the opposite. I mean that the experience of this sort of reading extends, deepens, enhances and enriches the sort of professional knowledge that academic reading generates.

> *[Entering the profession] will have theory base as well as understanding how children display these characteristics through reading the books* (Student evaluation)

## Conclusion

The data is limited to PST self monitoring and self evaluation of learning and indications of satisfaction with the units in which the approach is used. Student anonymously give evaluations, conducted independently of me by the university and using quantitative measurements of the material they engage after all assessment is completed (so they are free to comment on the teaching they have engaged without the possibilities of any adverse consequences to themselves), over four years have consistently ranked this feature of their studies in the 4.5 to 5 out of 5 rankings. .Apart from this quantitative analysis of student evaluations of the quality of the teaching they have experienced in a given unit, there has been some scope for qualitative explorations that underpin the figures that emerge from those evaluations. I have sprinkled some of these accounts throughout, and I have found them to be informative in redesigns as the project proceeds from year to year. To know just how effective this has been in relation to professional practice in schools will require longitudinal studies of graduates, and it is by no means impossible that that this might occur in the future. However we can accept that where PSTs can articulate, reflect on and monitor affective and metacognitive responses as part of those 'indeterminate zones of practice' that Schön points to, they enter the profession with a greater capacity to include this in their own teaching practices. As Margetson (1991) points out, the process of discovery is not necessarily like Archimedes springing from his bath shouting 'Eureka', but it is not inexplicable, unpredictable and uncontrollable either (p. 40). It is more of Miranda-like response (Shakespeare, nd):

> O, wonder!
> …How beauteous mankind is!
> O brave new world,
> That has such people in't! (V, i).

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