From Slogan to Pedagogy

Teacher Education and Reflection at the University of Ballarat

Dr Margaret Zeegers, Rupert Russell and Dr Patricia Smith

WHAT LEARNING MEANS: Proceedings of the Learning Conference 2003

Edited by Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope

International Journal of Learning
Volume 10, 2003

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> …Until we see ourselves reflected we haven't the faintest idea of what the most recognisable part of us looks like (Miller, 1988, p. 12)

Why Reflection?

We do not propose to argue the case for reflection here, for this has been a constant feature of Education debate in relation to professional practice and field experience (Gore, 1993; Korthagen, 2001; Loughran, 1996; McIntyre, Hagger, & Wilkin, 1993; Risko, Vukelich, & Roskos, 2002; Schön, 1987; Smith & Zeegers, 2002; Tomlinson, 1995; van Manen, 1995; Zeegers & Smith, 2002), derived largely from the influence of the work of Dewey (1933). We are rather exploring the possibilities for the development of a habit of reflection in our First Year undergraduate students, many of whom are recent departures from the secondary schooling system, and many of whom are the first members of their families ever to have undertaking any sort of university degree (Zeegers & Smith, 2002). In doing so, we were not looking to define levels or types of reflection as canvassed in many of the works on reflective professional practice, but to more general notions of reflection as 'a process that may be applied in puzzling situations to help the learner to make better sense of the information at hand, and to enable the teacher to guide and direct learning in appropriate ways' (Loughran, 1996, p. 4).

Indeed, this is where we started with our students, in the third week of their course. We did not give them the usual Reading for the tutorial for the week; we put together a collage of a number of statements drawn from some of the writers in the field to emphasise the dominance and pervasiveness of constructs of professional education practice as based on the idea of the reflective practitioner. We wanted to give students a good reason for engaging a reflection process, but at this point all they had what were in effect slogans as to the importance of reflective practice. We asked them to consider the implications of such constructs in terms of their own present situation as pre-service teachers about to start systematic observations of professional practice as part of their Field Experience (Smith & Zeegers, 2002; Zeegers & Smith, 2002). It is important to note that they were going in as observers, in the first stages of engaging what will later become a fully-fledged Practicum. Our aim was at this early stage of their teaching careers to position them as active participants in the process rather than passive receptors of some sort of gospel of reflection delivered with evangelical zeal by their tutors and lecturers.

Professional Knowledge

This has an important further dimension. The modern professional needs 'to acquire much more than a store of knowledge in subjects that relate to their future profession', (Engel, 1991) and, as Engel further points out, much of current students' active professional practice will occur cover a good deal of the first part of the 20th Century (p. 17).We wanted our First Year students to develop a knowledge base, certainly. We also wanted them to be able to apply it in such professional contexts. We did not want our students to be like Miller's (1998) 'dim-witted Narcissus' who thought he was looking at someone else (p. 13); we have taken the view that it is essential for our students to understand what they are looking at, so that they can develop reflective understandings that are both purposeful and relevant, and thereby face up to what Miller (1998) characterises as 'both the vice of vanity and the virtue of prudent self-knowledge' (p. 13). We recognised the importance of anecdote in relating what they observed (van Manen, 1990), and did not want to trivialise its importance, but we did not want to get that sort of response that would tend to mirror the 'messy, indeterminate situations' (Schön, 1987) of real-life practice in their own writing. We had had too much of that undirected, almost whimsical writing in our First Year students' journals in previous years, as well as students' own commentary on this sort of activity in most negative terms in unit evaluations. In terms of developing our students as pre-service professionals, we needed a way of combining what we saw as having limited value with what is generally perceived as professional practice, and of engaging our students in shaping and influencing their own developments in this area. In fact, we needed to go beyond what we saw as slogans regarding reflection. We needed to teach reflection.

Successful Learners

A further dimension to all of this was our concern with regard to developing that knowledge base so necessary for all professional undertakings. While our students did not actually say it, we were aware of their expectations that we would train them as teachers, canvassing best strategies and methodologies for practical classroom application, so that they could be shown what is generally depicted as 'the one best way' to teach. Our position was that any teaching that we might do in this regard was, as Loughran (1996) suggests, 'inextricably linked to learning' (p. 15), and any modelling students encountered had to serve as more than opportunities for mimicry. We were looking for the development of knowledge as intensely personal and private, internalised and meaningful. Our unit is named Successful Learners, one that already existed at the University, and we made this concept our central focus as we adapted and integrated pedagogy and reflection. We explored ways in which successful learners are shaped, constructs that play their parts in such shaping, and we applied these not just to children in schools but to the very students who were studying all of this-our students. We were quite explicit in all of this at the same time as we set out our own intentions diagrammatically as part of opportunistic teaching of one aspect of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1997, 1999). Thus we had a constant referent to aspects of students' own reflective activities as part of their own becoming successful learners.

Why Pedagogy?

It may seem too obvious a question to ask, but it is important (Lusted, 1986). Lusted (1986) suggests this in the very title of his paper, taking up the issue of pedagogy as 'draw[ing] attention to the process through which knowledge is produced' (p. 2, italics in original). In spite of his representation of it as 'an ugly word in print and on the tongue' (p. 3), he represents the concept as part of active engagement on the part of the teacher and the learner, producing knowledge together:

> The concept of pedagogy…refuses any tendency to instrumentalise the relations, or disconnect their interactivity or to give value to one agency over another…it denies notions of the teacher as functionary…the learner as 'empty vessel' or passive respondent, knowledge as immutable material to impart. Instead, it foregrounds exchange between and over the categories, it recognises the productivity of the relations, and it renders the parties within them as active, changing and changeable agencies (p. 3).

We are not just looking at teaching here. We use the term pedagogy to capture not only the teaching of content, but also how it is taught, how a student learns, and the context of that learning (Ladwig & Gore, 1998). This implies a multiplicity of pedagogies, not least of which concerns itself with teaching reflection, and reflective writing. We look to pedagogy as it challenges notions concerning the construction of knowledge as something that can be transmitted in linear passages from knower to non-knower (Barron & Zeegers, 2002), and we looked to it to inform our own practice with our First Year students within weeks of their engaging their teacher education course.

Intentions and Means

Risko, Vukelich and Roskos. (2002) have suggested that goals and intentions are 'thick on the ground' when it comes to reflective practice, with descriptions of how this is to be done 'thin' (p. 135). We have taken up some of their suggested deficiencies in the literature and addressed them here. We embarked on a systematic, intentional program to cover the whole of the first semester as introducing students to a reflective habit, to be reinforced in Semester 2 as students engage ethnographic studies (Smith & Zeegers, 2003) to be followed by focussed problem-based learning approaches in what will be their Semester 3 and constructing their own professional practice program in their future Semester 4 (subsequent semesters are still under consideration at this stage). We looked to their writing and discussions, their field notes and their electronically-based discussions to reinforce and give scope to their reflective activities.

In such undertakings, students document and reflect on their activities: in the form of Journal writing; completion of specific report sheets related to specific visits to specific sites; formally reporting what they learn from these to others in the cohort via Web pages, Posters, PowerPoint presentations, and Project displays; weekly Field Experience meetings conducted along Seminar lines; weekly tutorial discussions based on debriefing activities; regular contributions to an electronic Bulletin Board to alert others to new materials found and web pages being

launched; and in 2003 at least, as part of a School of Education Revue (Sweet Llareggub*: A Reflective Revue of the PST Experience). We have been attempting to address such concerns as raised by Risko et al (2002) as to framing the activities as multiple types of reflection in their form, dynamic and dialogic in their character, and sustained and guided in their progress. We have witnessed some valuable insights from students, such as the one who whose reflective writing takes the form of poem:

> He sits there staring, pencil in hand
>
> Eyes glazed over in his own fantasyland
>
> 'I like red,' he says as he sits there staring
>
> While all the other kids are busy comparing.
>
> 'Joseph, ' I say, no response, no reaction,
>
> 'Are you going to do this sum of subtraction?'
>
> Still no response as he continues to dream.
>
> 'Joseph! Subtraction!' I suddenly scream.
>
> He looks at me startled and immediately writes.
>
> Later in the staffroom I bring up the fight.
>
> The teacher looks at me sympathetically,
>
> 'The Nurse came to visit last week', she said.
>
> 'Poor Joseph,' she said. 'He's going deaf'.
>
> My mother arrived, and ashamed, I left.[1]

This was done after the fifth day of the student's visit to the school. It was followed up with a further reflection: 'Can one be considered a bad teacher for yelling at a student with a problem one is unaware of [sic]? Perhaps one can, but there is always that aspect of the teacher who is aware enough of what happened for it register as impacting upon professional practice, and who is not afraid to acknowledge it as such. There are those among us who would set this down as a mark of a good teacher, surely.

We have the student whose reflections are put together in the form of a poster see Figure 1.

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[1] With apologies to Dylan Thomas
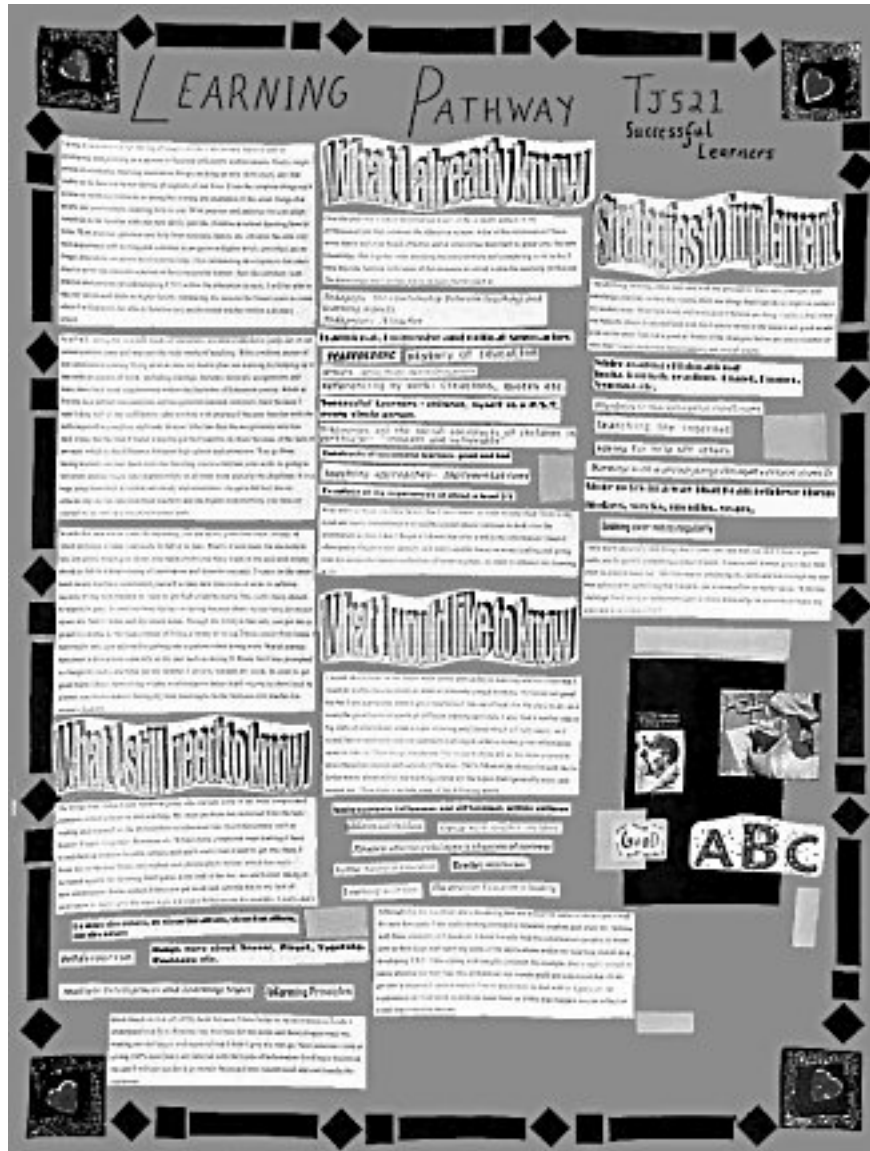
Figure 1
In one instance reflections were submitted in the form of a poster. *Photograph Rupert Russell.*

We also have the students who reflect on reflection itself:

> Initially I could not see the importance of reflection, however through field experience I grew to gain an understanding of the relevance and importance after a short time, part of my willingness to be open to new strategies in order to learn.

> Reflective writing I feel should be part of every teacher's daily learning. It has helped me in learning what I could do differently in my professional development and what worked well.

These last three examples come from student responses after their first eight consecutive visits to the same schools, and they tend to reinforce what we had assumed would happen as a result of our position regarding pedagogy and reflection. We would stress that we have assessment tasks and protocols associated

with each of these, however. We have not yet solved the problem of establishing a truly equal partnership in reflective writing and associated activities, for tutors are still assessors in this program. This of necessity places constraints upon just how meaningful any dialogue between students and assessors/supervisors/peers can be when each activity takes the form of some type of assessment task (Gore, 1993). It is a problem that needs to be acknowledged and tackled, and we have not yet found our way through it. One student who opted for interview rather than written reflection made two important points regarding the assessable feature of the program. One is that he felt that submitting written work for assessment would not have allowed him to explore his reflections in the sort of depth that the interview with a more knowledgeable other person allowed, that is, he felt the need to have someone in some sort of authority to engage such talk. The second point is that he felt that because he was knowledgeable himself, that the assessment component of the interview was no constraint on his reflections. This is only one person's point of view on this issue, however. It by no means suggests that we have resolved the issue, but it has pointed us in a new direction that we intend to take up in the next part of the program.

Work-in-Progress

The whole program is essentially a work in progress, to be closely monitored and evaluated as it progresses over the coming years, but we have made what we consider to be a significant start. That was three weeks into Semester 1 with reflective writing. A major innovation in this P-10 course at the University of Ballarat has been the introduction of Field Experience based on observation of classroom practice as early as possible in the teacher education repertoire (Smith & Zeegers, 2002). Such innovation has begotten others, and our introduction of reflective writing is a child of that begetting. We had started the lectures with a number of photographs of schools and schoolchildren in the past, asking students to engage constructs of childhood in this manner. We had bush schools, Gold Rush schools, city schools, schools with young Empire defenders practising with their rifles in times of imperial wars, and so on. We asked them to identify things not shown: girls, Chinese children, Indigenous Australian children; equipment; books, and so on. We were trying to have them develop a professional eye as to discourses and constructs that totalised and naturalised. We looked to the advice of Smith (1999) as to understanding the history of something as helping to understand an important aspect of normalising discourses. We also looked to the idea of photographs as well as verbal descriptions of phenomena and events as snapshots for focussed examination and interpretation. Introducing our PSTs to photographs from history books reinforced the snapshots idea, as well as giving them a basis for comparisons with the classrooms they were about to enter as informed pre-service professionals. We have reproduced some of the photographs we used see figures 2, 3, 4, & 5.
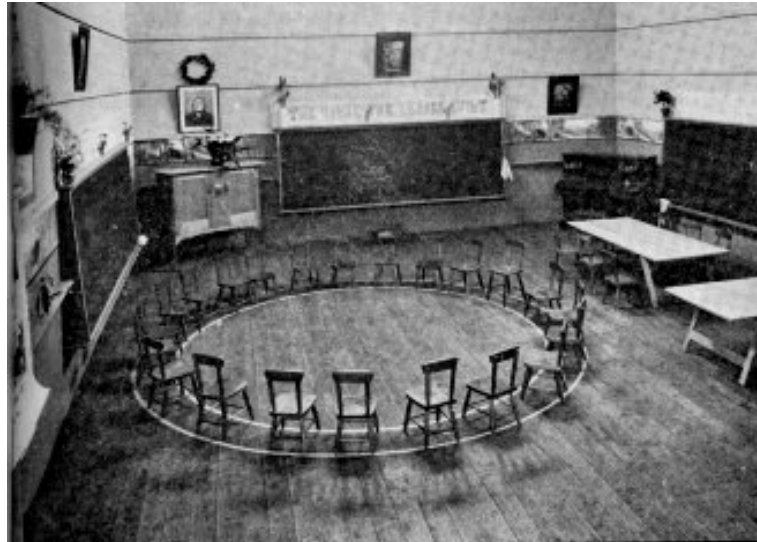
Figure 2
Rural School interior. Note the long, backless desks *(Blake, 1973 plate 3/7 p.214)*

Figure 3
Rural school interior J. Burnett. Note the absence of any Indigenous Australian and Asian children. *(Blake, 1973 plate 4/52b).*

Figure 4
Model Kindergarten room 1907. Note the rigidity of the circle configuration in this apparently radical arrangement of classroom furniture. *(Blake, 1973 plate 4/55b).*

Figure 5
Physical Drill at Bendigo High School. Those are not wooden guns! *(Blake, 1973 plate 5/12).*

Following such introductions, to model reflective writing, in Week 1 we gave them a Reading, an article that described the setting up of a nineteenth century school in Australia, followed by the author's reflective responses to it (Vick, 2001). We identified the different types of writing in various parts of the article, noting particular phrasing and tone, and the conceptual tools that Vick had used. We had no formal reflective writing at this stage. In Week 3, we gave each student a copy of a Victorian era painting: The Huntsman's Pet - Fox Hounds (Elsley, Circa 1900) see Figure 6.

Figure 6

The Huntsman's Pet - Fox Hounds Elsley, Arthur Circa 1900 *(allaboutart.com)*

Evaluating Reflective Writing

We asked for their first piece of reflective writing-what constructs of childhood/ boyhood/girlhood/servitude/gender and so on informed this artistic representation. We reviewed notions of social constructs, and discourses as tools to help us to identify them. We had asked the staff who were similarly committed to reflective writing as part of their own teaching and learning programs to provide models of what they would expect in such an exercise, but interestingly, none were forthcoming. We wrote our own, some deliberately terrible, with our own evaluations of them as evidence of reflection, and gave copies to the students before they wrote their own. We asked them not to submit these pieces as assessable tasks, however, asking them rather to evaluate their own writing as reflective or otherwise, just as we had done. We scaffolded this with a set of criteria and a scale, see Table 1. We would stress that we asked for their assessment of their writing, not of their reflection, discussing not only possibilities of idiosyncratic ways in which professionals reflect, but also how to make such reflections evident, taking up advice of Loughran (1996).

Table 1
Reflective Writing Scale

<div align="center">Indicators</div>

Level	Description	What is there	What is not there	Score
1	Describing – the facts only	of what has occurred	why it occurred	
		of what might occur–in future	why it might recur	
		of the setting	relevance of setting	
		of the context	relevance of–context	
		of those involved	thinking behind–processes	
		of how things–proceeded/concluded		
2	Advisory – suggestions only	what to do about it	why it would be– done	
		how to make it–happen/ stop it from– happening again	how it–could be induced/–stopped	
		how to allocate blame	motives	
		how to allocate–innocence	processes	
		rewards/punishments		
3	Justificatory – reasons only	reasons: why this/not that	options	
		excuses	responsibility	
		explanations	knowledge	
		fatalism	alternatives	
4	Critical – knowledge / understanding of successful learners	methods	unthinking ritual	
		strategies	mindless activities	
		approaches	unquestioned feelings	
		ideas / issues / –concepts / practices	untested beliefs	

Source: (Adapted from Korthagen, 2001, p. 56-57)

We had started with the possibilities for pedagogy that actual and conceptual snapshots provided, from our perspective. Now we asked students to investigate their possibilities as far as they were concerned as reflective practitioners. Most rated their writing as being somewhere in the Medium range, but a high number felt that their writing was between 3 and 4 on the scale. Another group rated their writing as very low on this scale, perhaps the whole exercise being too new to their experience.

This gave us an exercise upon which to build, and when they debriefed at subsequent tutorials, they responded to constructs questions in a generally positive and knowledgeable ways. We also gave them a number of their lecturer's journals to peruse, noting how reflection here was different from ways in which they may have decided to document such things, but that they were nevertheless evidence of legitimate and valuable material to inform that lecturer's activities. It also reinforced the value of such activities, seeing these as not just for First Year students alone, but that their assessors engaged in similar reflective practice in her writings, which could be reviewed and evaluated by the students as well. This by no means approached the problem of dialogic encounters between equals, and we are well aware of this, but it did show that we all reflect in some form or another.

Weekly writing was asked of them, with weekly group discussions of what they were observing, and their lecturer was doing a similar thing. We found that we were receiving deliberately reflective responses, tied to theories of teaching and learning as they encountered them. They wanted to revise earlier writing to reflect this development, and did.

Critical Moments

In the meantime, we introduced them to notions of critical moments-those things that happen in the everyday experience of the classroom and upon which a student coming into the professional might comment. We were trying to focus observation, and reflection, to articulate some of those things that are tacit in that experience such as Schön (1987) might characterise as 'indeterminate zones of practice'. Again, we set up possible scenarios (one child refusing to 'lend' to another, for example; a teacher somehow 'knowing' that a child was not quite up to par without ever having had a note from home, and so on), but we found that the students had plenty of their own to throw into the discussions. We had made more rapid progress than we had anticipated, so we presented another possibility for reflection. We gave each student a copy of a practising teacher's reflection on a critical moment in one of her days, reproduced below:

Teacher reflection: Honan

This is how the teacher herself reflected on the incident. Compare it with your discussion results. How close are you to this teacher in your way(s) of thinking?

One of the stories/memories from my own teaching can also be read in contradictory ways, depending upon the subject positions seen to be taken up:

The boy has been labelled, ADD

Requiring special treatment, consideration

He sits sullen at his desk

Refusing to work, to write, to obey

You will do what I say

This is my classroom

You will stay there until you have finished

No play

No lunch

No football

This is my classroom

In here, you do what I say

I sit at my desk

While he cries, and sobs, and throws paper and pencils around the room,

Until finally he scrawls something on the page

Only five minutes left in the lunch hour

No time to eat, or play, or go to football

You can go now I say

> *And remember*
>
> *In here you do what I say (Honan, 2001).*

We asked them to reflect on this reflection, and to assess their own reflective writing according to the levels of reflective writing (again we stress, NOT reflection) adapted from Korthagen (2001). This time we found an array of more confident writing than resulted from the Elsley exercise, incorporating much of what they had learned over the weeks, and more confident in evaluating it as somewhere between Levels 3 and 4. We did not find that group of low self-evaluations this time-not one student felt that they had not progressed beyond Levels 1 or 2. While all of this was happening, students had taken over the responsibility of preparing for and leading Seminar discussion groups, supporting the cohort's Field Experience activities in educational leadership roles. Their journal entries were accumulating, they were launching their Web pages for the rest of the cohort to learn from, the electronic Bulletin Board was becoming a valuable learning resource, and our scaffolding was becoming increasingly redundant.

Learning Pathways

It has been suggested (Loughran, 1996) those who find difficulty with such positioning as reflective practitioners have little sense of involvement in their own learning and are slow to become reflective; that shaping and influencing one's own learning is important in developing one's use of reflection (p. 19). One of the assessment tasks of these First Year Education students is to design their own learning pathway for the remainder of their course, as far as they can possibly determine such a thing at this stage of their development. Thus, they are being asked to identify their own Zones of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978), and to reflect on the sorts of things they need from more knowledgeable Others in helping them to achieve their identified outcomes. They may not stay on that particular learning pathway, but they will embark upon it with some sense of involvement in the outcomes that do ensue. Tremmel (2001) argues that 'Encouraging students to reflect does not just mean leading them to change their minds in the sense of changing perspective; it means, rather, trying to help them change the way their minds work so that they are prepared for reflection' (p. 93). Not all students have come along this path with us, perhaps still waiting to be told how to teach, and the one best way of doing this. They too are part of a work in progress, but indications so far suggest a certain level of success in the undertaking.

We finished the Semester with an opportunity for students to reflect upon their lecturer and tutors, part of systematic student evaluations of all lectures and tutorials. We asked them to comment specifically on our pedagogical considerations as to reflective writing. The result has been informative for us. Giving us a consistent rating of between 4 and 5 as to our achievement in obtaining student satisfaction with the unit (on a range of 1-5). We also presented our program in diagrammatic form (to reinforce topics on Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles) to provide them with something tangible with which to rate us (see figure 7 below).
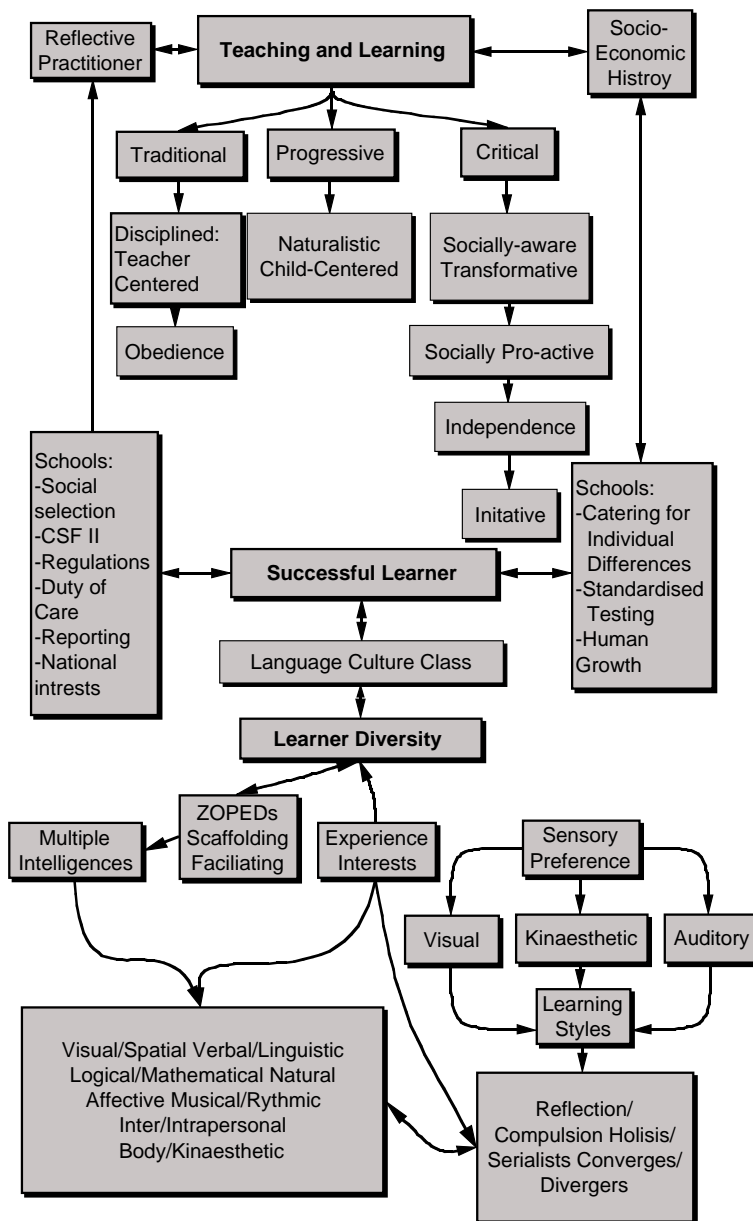
Figure 7

Diagrammatic representation of First Year teacher education program conducted at the University of Ballarat.

Conclusion

To engage students in reflection, then, we argue that it is not enough to make an announcement of a requirement of undergraduate or pre-service activity. It is more than publishing a slogan. It is a matter of engaging pedagogy, which is so much more that.

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