

Interrogating The Discourse Of 'Social Literacies' In An Era Of Uncertainty

Dr Andrea Allard

Dr. Evelyn Johnson

Deakin University, Melbourne, Victoria.

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Abstract

Originally, the term 'social literacies' was used to suggest the skills, knowledge and processes for addressing multicultural teaching and learning (Kalantzis and Cope, 1988). The meaning of the phrase has since evolved to encompass widely different concepts, including for example, social 'competencies', and/or citizenship education (eg. Arthur & Davison, 2000). Clearly the discourse around 'social literacies' is shifting in response to changing educational policies, both nationally and internationally.

In this paper, we examine how constructs of 'social literacies' have been and might be deployed. Building from a review of the policy, program and theoretical literature, we pose questions concerning how 'social literacies' might be used to interrogate and rework relations, especially those of gender and culture. Questions to be considered include: will the concept of 'social literacies' enable us to better understand the processes of identity and community formations in this era of uncertainty? Which knowledges and skills are

identified in the literature and positioned as critical in establishing 'productive' social relations/literacies? Additionally, we begin to theorise the degree to which such constructions of 'social literacies' might enhance and/or limit quality learning at the tertiary levels of teacher education.

Introduction

Over the last decade, feminist post-structural theorizing around issues of gender, socio-economic class and ethnicity has moved away from acknowledging these as fixed categories of difference to exploring how such identity formations might be better understood as complex, ongoing negotiated social processes. Earlier educational policies (AEC, 1987; MCCEEYA, 1997) recognised the ways in which identities play a significant part in how students come to understand themselves as learners and how teachers engage with notions of difference through pedagogical, curriculum and assessment practices.

Social education/social studies or what has evolved into the key learning area of Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE) has traditionally been a space to address questions of gender relations, cultural difference and socio-economic status. The foci on language and on 'society' and the interconnections between identity formation and cultural constructions seem central to the curriculum knowledge within this learning area. However, a preliminary reading of some curriculum policy documents suggests that gender relations and cultural diversity are largely absent from some States formal policy outcomes (Allard & Cooper, 2002).

Neo-conservative approaches that currently underpin educational reform movements both in Australia and overseas, with their focus on accountability and measurable outcomes, have diverted attention away from the significant social justice issues of the 1980s. As Gewirtz (1998) notes, social justice issues, including those of gender, have been taken off the educational policy agenda, and in the last decade have seldom received the resourcing, support, professional development or research necessary to adequately address these ongoing concerns.

Our own work in teaching and in research, however, has continued to explore how gender issues have been taken up in curriculum and policy areas (Johnson, 1998, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2002 d) and to investigate how gender and power relations (Allard, 1999) and young people's constructions of gender and culture (Allard & Yates, 2001; Allard, 2002) are enacted on a daily basis in the contexts of schooling. Underpinning these investigations are questions of how more socially just educational practices might be better addressed. Partly, because of our current context, we are particularly interested in examining this within teacher education courses.

Specifically, we started from the premise that there needs to be space within preservice teacher education curricula to explore the ideas of identity and difference; however, we also want to critique the simplistic notion that curriculum 'content' that takes up these issues can be taught unproblematically. That said, we also are interested in moving beyond critique to examine what pedagogical practices, indeed what learning environments, might work to produce better understandings of these ideas within a teacher education course.

For us, then, the term 'social literacies' is suggestive of the plural ways of thinking about identities and differences as these are constructed in and through social discourses. We started from a premise that the term offers a productive and promising way of thinking through what it means to work with plural notions of identity, difference and social justice. So guiding this project was the question: How (can) social literacies and the implied knowledge, values and skills contained within the term, be taught/learned for the purposes of social equity? And, if so, what are implications for teacher education?

Deakin University Faculty of Education's, 'Teaching and Learning Management Plan 2000-2002', states that Deakin Education Graduates are expected to be 'inclusive in their teaching practice. This means they will: Be aware of and respond to cultural and ethnic diversity; Work for equity for all for whom they are professionally responsible; Teach for the success of all students.' (p. 22). Currently, and in keeping with the above, a new pre-service teacher education course at Deakin University is being designed and implemented. We read this emphasis on 'inclusivity' as a call to better address questions of gender and cultural diversity and to engage with our students around issues of equity, diversity, justice and difference within the new course. At the same time, we are engaging in the process of renewal of the social education curriculum units in the primary and secondary courses. Thus, this seemed the opportunity to foreground these questions so that in the writing of new Education Studies Major units, and the new social education units, we might find ways to explore the above questions.

Additionally, within the Faculty of Education, an identified research priority is that of 'Quality Learning'. While this term can be highly problematic and suggestive of conservative educational discourses around 'quality assurance' and teacher 'accountability', in this paper, we want to examine how the discourses of social literacies might be read as elements of quality learning. In doing so, we also wish to consider how quality learning might be conceptualised differently in order to challenge the more traditional, neo-conservative interpretations.

This paper then attempts to track some of the key theoretical, policy and curriculum developments concerned with 'social literacies'; to identify some of the ambiguities and contradictions that arise in current conceptualisations; and to ask (how) might this discourse be used productively within teacher education courses? What are the implications for our own thinking and teaching?

Changing constructions of 'social literacies'

Kalantzis and Cope are credited with first using the term 'social literacy' in their groundbreaking work 'The Social Literacy Project'. Cope and Kalantzis (1988) defined the term by saying:

Social literacy is an ability to understand a complex and interdependent social world, and skills of active, confident social participation. (p. 37)

They argued the importance of such skills by citing the fragmentation of 'modern society...the need for individual self-reliance and the shrinking size and increasing transience of families' (p. 37) and alongside of this, the increasing complexity and interconnectedness of 'modern society'.

From its earliest conception then, 'social literacy' was constructed as a bridge between the suggested fragmentation of the 'social', in part due to cultural diversity, and the homogenization of the global 'village' created through the media, migration and the 'exchange of commodities and the sale of culture' (p. 37). The individual and the group were both addressed and held in relation to each other.

Kalantzis and Cope (1988) summarized the contrasting tensions by saying:

Our lives are shaped by forces which place individual and cultural differences side by side, and by forces which at the same time link us all together more and more. (p. 37)

In the context of a Federal Labour government that had, as a significant part of its political platform, the move to addressing 'multiculturalism', the work of Kalantzis and Cope (1988) was both timely and apt. Their initial focus for change was on the Social Studies Curriculum and specifically, on enabling children and young people to acquire

...the skills of social action. Without an ability to manipulate and negotiate the structures of industrialism and to handle the differences encountered in everyday life, people can be marginalised. Such skills are acquired through activities in which students learning social literacy make their own knowledge and gain experience in social action.... (p. 38)

Central then to this initial conceptualisation was that students were best taught the skills of 'social literacy' through an engagement in 'social action' that would in turn, enable them to produce their own understandings. Therefore materials developed and utilised aimed not only to be skill-oriented, but to also to tackle what the authors saw as the 'content-free' curriculum approaches of the time. Specifically, they were critical of curriculum that '...all-too-frequently preaches high educational ideals with little practical assistance.' (p. 38)

'Social literacy' was grounded in classroom based curriculum and pedagogical approaches that aimed to bring about better understandings of difference, including that of gender,

(multi)cultures and 'race' and to enable students to develop life skills to work for more socially just interactions.

In their later work on 'multiliteracies' as members of The New London Group (NLG), (1996), (a syndicate of ten international literacy theorists), traces of Kalantzis' and Cope's original conceptualisation can be found. Outlining some of the complexities of this new approach, Cope and Kalantzis (1997) argue that multiliteracies aim to capture the 'growing significance of cultural and linguistic diversity'. They suggest that just as English is now the

...common language of global commerce, media and politics, English is also breaking into multiple and increasingly differentiated Englishes, marked by accent, national origin, subcultural style and professional or technical communities.' (p. 469)

The need to negotiate 'crossing linguistic boundaries', together with the influence of 'new communications technologies', as well as the need to understand how 'meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal' offer the potential, the NLG argues, to transform literacy education. Cope and Kalantzis (1997) state that:

...the multiliteracies argument suggests an open-ended and flexible functional grammar which assists language learners to describe language differences (cultural, subcultural, regional/national, technical, context specific, etc) and themultitmodal channels of meaning now so important to communication.' (p 470).

In order to do this, the New London Group proposes a literacy pedagogy based around notions of 'Available designs', 'Designing' and 'Redesigned'.

It is outside the scope of this paper to elaborate on the complexities of their arguments. Suffice to say that earlier work on 'social literacy' is obliquely referenced in the New London Group's commitment to teaching literacies as a means to prepare students to participate in the globalised market place. However, perhaps not surprisingly given the group make-up, in the later work, there are significant shifts in where emphases are placed. These include a move away from social studies/social education curriculum as a site for change to that of literacy education; a focus on the plurality of 'literacies' that students now need to work within a 'post-industrial' world; and on theorising a pedagogical approach without attending to specifics of curriculum and/or pedagogy within local contexts. Prain (1997) in his review and critique of the New London Group's theory argues that the theorizing of 'multiliteracies' lacks a solid grounding in classroom based research (unlike that of the Social Literacy Project). In their response to Prain, Cope and Kalantzis (1997) acknowledged this and agree that the theoretical standpoint developed by the New London Group requires grounded research as a means to further test and develop the ideas.

Another critique that Prain levels at this new conceptualisation is that it works to construct

...future English teachers as participating in the normative crucial transformation of students' values and skills in ways that will have immense global, subcultural and ethical significance; and yet...in outlining pedagogical processes invite(s) a different conception of the teacher and learners as technicist code breakers pursuing their own interests, with the teacher as arbiter of difference. (p. 465)

Prain (1997) is also critical of the NLG's emphasis on learners developing the skills of 'critical framing' and draws attention to critiques mounted by a number of other theorists',

including Ellsworth (1989); Gore (1993); Lather (1991) and Turnbull (1993), as regards the ways in which 'critical literacies/pedagogies' can operate to identify and impose 'correct' stances in relation to ideological practices. Thus the 'universal' way of 'knowing' is once again endorsed over the multiple ways of making meaning. This is a point to which we will return. Also called into question is that a focus on developing skills in the 'critical framing' gives undue emphasis to the 'rational' over the emotive ways that texts (and discourses) work.

The NLG's work on multiliteracies nevertheless retains a focus on difference and of individuals learning to work with difference, alongside an emphasis on how 'globalisation' works as a homogenising influence in the lives of all. From our reading of this, the call for social activism is still (vaguely) present in the recognition that students need to be able to work multimodally in order to be 'empowered' in the globalised world.

Associated literacies as dimensions of the 'social'

Recent work on citizenship education in the United Kingdom also takes up notions of 'social literacy' in new and significant ways. The Crick Report, (1998) set out a rationale and an outline for addressing citizenship education within National Curriculum.

Crick defines citizenship education as incorporating the three interrelated elements of 'political literacy' alongside social/ moral responsibility and community involvement. Crick defines political literacy as

...[pupils] learning about and how to make themselves effective in public life through knowledge, skills and values... a term that is wider than political knowledge alone. The term 'public life' is used in its broadest sense to encompass realistic knowledge of and preparation for conflict resolution and decision making related to the main economic and social problems of the day, including each individual's expectations of and preparations for the world of employment, and discussion of the allocation of public resources and the rationale of taxation (p.13).

Values and dispositions identified as essential are those of:

...concern for the common good; belief in human dignity and equality; concern to resolve conflicts; a disposition to work with and for others with sympathetic understanding; proclivity to act responsibly: that is care for others and oneself; premeditation and calculation about the effect actions are likely to have on others; and acceptance of responsibility for unforeseen or unfortunate consequences; practice of tolerance; judging and acting by a moral code; courage to defend a point of view; willingness to be open to changing one's opinions and attitudes in the light of discussion and evidence; individual initiative and effort; civility and respect for the rule of law; determination to act justly; commitment to equal opportunities and gender equality; commitment to active citizenship; commitment to voluntary service; concern for human rights; [and] concern for the environment'. (p. 44)

This new conceptualization of 'political literacy' and the accompanying values that are to be endorsed as part of citizenship education emphasizes the role of the individual, the skills and disposition required to work within a network of social relations in order to construct a society that shares common values. While a useful document by way of identifying specific skills

and values deemed necessary for a civil society, what isn't addressed here are basic questions concerning how such 'values' are to be taught and assessed. What is meant by 'moral code'? Who is to decide what is 'correct' and what is not? How much does such a conceptualization rely on methods of surveillance to determine the 'good citizen', the 'productive' individual? The ways in which hegemonic assumptions concerning 'correct knowledge' operate as taken for granted assumptions, ie., that 'everyone' will know and share in a common set of values, is inadequately examined.

Scott (2000) highlights these issues in his response to the Crick Report. He identifies two main problems with Crick Report: firstly that the curriculum model proposed by the Crick Report is an outcomes based one and secondly, like the NLG's work, the pedagogical theory work required is yet to be done.

Concerning the problem of theorizing citizenship education within an outcomes based curriculum model, Scott says:

Learning outcomes are to be tightly enough defined so that they can be inspected by outside bodies such as OFSTED. Conversely, teachers are to be offered the opportunity to develop their own forms of pedagogy. The danger is that, if these outcomes are formulated in too restrictive a way, this opportunity is unlikely to be realized in practice. Evidence for the introduction of centrally imposed curricula would suggest that an outcomes model which involves close specification of behaviours, knowledge, skills and aptitudes which are formally assessed is in tension with curricula which emphasize breadth, holism and inclusiveness. In short, there is a tendency for assessment-driven curricula to focus on those aspects of the curriculum which can be easily assessed and to neglect those aspects which it is more difficult to assess. Furthermore, assessment-driven curricula restrict and limit the type of teaching approaches which can be adopted. (p. 4)

Like Prain's critique of the NLG's multiliteracies work, Scott is also critical of the lack of pedagogical theorizing of citizenship education/political literacy as set out in the Crick Report. He too suggests that teachers are again positioned as both arbiters of what counts as correct 'political literacy' and as providers of worthwhile experiences that will enable the students to develop their own understandings. About this he says:

Teachers, however, will still be forced to confront the dilemma of integrating a curriculum which stresses tolerance, respect for difference and a form of social literacy ...with a set of other experiences for children, which have been shaped and moulded by league tables, summative examinations, target-setting, transmission modes of pedagogy and strongly classified and strongly framed curriculum structures (Bernstein, 1990). In short, children's learning is always situated within ways of organizing and managing it. Unless these structures are sympathetic to the espoused aims and objectives of citizenship education, then it is hard to see how a coherent and meaningful set of experiences can be offered to children. (p. 4)

The tension/contradiction between 'teaching' tolerance and 'enforcing' conformity, valuing individual differences-as long as they are not too different, remains a central concern of working through and with social literacies.

In their recent writing about citizenship education, British educationalists J. Arthur and J. Davison (2000) respond to the Crick Report (1998) too. They acknowledge the earlier work of Kalantzis and Cope also. Arthur and Davison (2000) return to the earlier definition of 'social literacy' noting that this 'has not been a phrase in general usage in British education despite the recent fashion for the proliferation of 'literacies' such as 'political literacy'; 'emotional literacy' (p. 11-12).

The original focus on the individual making sense of 'difference' and on the development of social activism remains strong in the way they use the term:

Social literacy is concerned with the empowerment of the social and ethical self which includes the ability to understand and explain differences within individual experiences. (p. 14)

Most importantly here and in contrast to the more conservative readings of citizenship education, Arthur and Davison (2000) believe that an overarching goal of Social Literacies is to work toward a more socially critical society. They draw on the work of Paulo Freire to argue that individual empowerment is for the purpose of constructing a more socially just set of relations. They too are aware of the dangers inherent in seeming to endorse particular sets of values and beliefs over others:

...for the means by which children acquire social literacy can privilege some over others... by entering the dominant discourse, socially literate persons have avenues opened for them to the social goods and powers of society (p.16-17).

Acutely aware of the implications of this power/knowledge nexus, Arthur and Davison (2000) go on to explain why they choose to use the term 'social literacy' instead of 'social competence'. For our own purposes, we find their argument compelling. They say:

...the term 'social literacy' is used instead of 'social competence' as it provides a broader and more subtle approach to understanding in what ways the school curriculum plays a determining role in children's social maturation. How children develop their social literacy is intrinsically a contextual matter and is not something which can be easily traced in a linear or developmental fashion. The term 'social literacy' also reflects our position in relation to the model of citizenship we would propose: one which empowers, not just enables; one which is critical, not just functional. Further, we wish to extend the definition of social literacy as it has come to be known thus far and it is for this reason that we also draw upon the work of socio-linguists. The acquisition of social literacy is a complex process which is historically and culturally conditioned and context specific.

We hear the emphasis on social literacy as 'culturally conditioned and context specific' to offer the potential to recognise 'difference' (ie., gender, 'race', ethnicity) as socio-cultural constructions. The ways in which such identity formations might inform understandings of social literacy and how these might be addressed to empower students and promote social activism seems central to their argument here.

Arthur and Davison (2000) detail social literacy as encompassing three stages [in ascending order] of social perception, social cognition and social performance. A comparable typology is suggested by Unsworth (2002) in what he identifies as 'reflection literacy'. This too draws on the Kalantzis and Cope's notion of social literacy; Unsworth argues that this has a greater

potential for addressing social equity. He discusses how 'recognition' literacy as a first stage and then 'reproduction' literacy as a second stage, can lead to the more socially cognisant notion of 'reflection literacies'.

Slippage from Social Literacies to Social Competencies

In contrast with Arthur and Davison's (2000) choice and justification of the term 'social literacy' over 'social competence', within the Victorian schooling context, 'social competencies' has become a major focus. Just as the terminology differs, so too does the substance of what this area should address. The Social Competencies Unit, Department of Education & Training, in their recent publication, *Social competence: a whole school approach to linking learning and well-being* (2002) note that:

...although definitions of social competencies vary, there is broad consensus that it involves the ability to integrate the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural realm in order to establish, maintain and develop constructive social relationships (p. 7)

The list of skills that the 'socially competent student' will develop and use are detailed as:

- Perception and interpretation of social cues
- Recognition and appropriate expression of emotion
- Communication in a range of social relationships
- Constructive conflict resolution
- Self-management
- Responsible decision-making skills
- Flexible coping skills
- Social problem-solving

Additional identified skills include the ability to recognize and identify inter-personal problems, plan and implement solutions, monitor and assess outcomes; and to apply skills, verbal knowledge and cognitive strategies to promote positive relationships (pp. 8-9).

Importantly, social competencies are defined here as set of **teachable** skills although most of the ensuing discussion suggests the teacher does this is by role modelling "social and civic trust, tolerance of diversity, democratic decision making, empowerment, and the management and resolution of conflicts" (p. 11).

From a reading of this document, the conceptualization of social competency here appears to draw heavily on developmental psychology's construct of 'the child'. It presents a functional view of social relations, where specific (personal) skills such as conflict resolution, decision-making, and coping are emphasized with the assumption that if all students acquire these, then social relations will be adequately addressed. Specific 'values' to do with social relations/community are not named. The ways in which such social relations might be examined from a contextual or socio-historical framework are absent from the document. Also absent are explicit references to 'difference' or identity formations around constructs of

socio economic class, gender 'race' or cultural differences. The 'social activist' commitment that was part of original social literacy impetus and remains integral to Arthur and Davison's citizenship education brief is not part of this definition of social competence. The critique leveled by Scott (1998) concerning the problems associated with trying to teach about the social within an outcomes based curriculum, as already discussed, seems applicable to the model offered here too.

Finding the 'social' in state curriculum policy documents

Attention to the Victorian Social Competencies policy document seems necessary since state-based school curriculum discourses dominate Social Education in Australian teacher education. The standards based approach to education can be seen as part of the broader movement to quality learning discourses in education. In preparing them to work within state systems, we recognise that teacher education students need to be familiar with and attuned to these policies. Yet examining differences in how state-based curriculum documents take up issues of social relations/social literacies/social competence can provide useful insights into how curriculum itself operates as a social construct, where particular beliefs, values, knowledge and skills are endorsed over others.

Given our research focus, we find thought-provoking the research in Queensland around the New Basics application of Productive Pedagogies (2001). In contrast to other curriculum and pedagogical theorizing (eg., NLG, 1996; Crick Report, 1998), research on 'Productive Pedagogies' is longitudinal and classroom based. This framework identifies four dimensions that improved academic and social learnings in pupils. It is argued that each dimension needs to be present in every lesson.

According to the State of Queensland's Department of Education *Productive Pedagogies* (2001) the first of the four dimensions is constructed as: 'Recognition of Difference' and includes '*cultural knowledges*' ('when more than one cultural group is present and given status within the curriculum'; '*inclusivity*' ('is identified by the degree to which non-dominant groups are present in classroom practices'); '*group identity*' ('is manifested when differences and group identities are both positively developed and recognised while at the same time a sense of community is created'); and '*active citizenship*' ('is developed when the teacher elaborates the rights and responsibilities of groups and individuals in a democratic society and facilitates its practice'). This last aspect of the first dimension suggests to us the ways in which supportive classroom environments might also be rethought in terms of practice. Another of the four dimensions, that of 'connectedness', appears to offer a significant change and renewal in thinking about and working with 'the social'.

Also central to 'Productive Pedagogies' is the dimension of 'Intellectual Quality' including understanding knowledge as problematic ('presenting an understanding of knowledge as being constructed, and hence subject to political, social and cultural influences and implications'). This would appear to begin to address the issues raised earlier concerning how identified social 'values' and 'skills' are to be understood as contextualised and constructed socio-historically.

On our reading, Productive Pedagogies are a significant emergent trend across Australia. For instance, *Essential Learnings* (2002), the Tasmanian curriculum framework takes up related themes through its associated emphasis on 'values' education. The core values identified are: 'connectedness, resilience, achievement, creativity, integrity, responsibility, and equity' (p. 7). Along with a renewed emphasis on the teaching of values, this framework argues four 'essential learnings', one of which is 'social responsibility'. This is defined as 'building social capital, valuing diversity, acting democratically, understanding the past and creating preferred futures' (p.7).

Thus, comparing and contrasting different state-wide curriculum frameworks offers the potential to better examine how the 'social' might be addressed-and to highlight via the different emphases given this area, the discourses that operate in and through curriculum documents.

Alternately, some of the current national curriculum work suggests a very conservative reading of 'the social', especially when compared with the Crick Report (1988) in the UK. For example, the current citizenship drive exemplified by the document, *Discovering Democracy* places major emphasis not on Productive Pedagogies' 'active citizenship' nor on 'social responsibility' (*Essential Learnings*, 2002) but focuses overwhelmingly on the history and knowledge of the parliamentary system of government. This seems to lack engagement with contemporary notions of difference and identity formations, resorting to a very traditional understanding of what is required of 'citizens'. Notions of social literacies certainly do not feature here.

What does this all mean for teacher education?

In this paper we have aimed to map current discourses of 'the social' including the ways in which 'social literacies', 'multiliteracies', 'social competencies', 'political literacy' and 'citizenship education' might offer scope for addressing social relations within the schooling context. We have discussed selected examples by way of examining and critiquing current curriculum and pedagogical frameworks. In our introduction, we signalled our focus question as: How (Can) 'social literacies', and the implied knowledge, values and skills contained within the term, be taught/learned for the purposes of addressing social justice through education? And, what are the implications for a preservice teacher education course? We have ended up with more questions than answers. However, we see three key issues to be of special significance and in need of further examination.

Firstly, while a number of curriculum approaches discussed (eg. The Crick Report, 1998, *Essential Learnings*, 2002) emphasise the importance of 'values' as part of teaching for 'citizenship' or as an aspect of the 'social' education curriculum, how are 'values' to be taught? And perhaps, more to the point when thinking through a commitment to change for social justice, 'whose values' are to be endorsed? How essentializing and/or universalising does this focus on 'social values' become? How much does this serve to reinforce hegemonic notions of the 'good citizen' and/or the 'socially competent' individual? If we are to engage with the fluidity and multiplicities of identity formation, how can a particular 'set' of values be endorsed over others?

Related to the above but grounded in a different concern, how can we as teacher educators enable our teacher education students to become both knowledgeable about and 'critical' of current outcome based curriculum documents, (eg. Victorian Department of Education, SOSE Framework document) and help them to feel powerful enough to not only critique but also to work with current (and at times limited) conceptualisations of 'the social'? How can we utilise current state and national initiatives to enable them to be both 'inclusive' of difference and sceptical of the universalising doctrine that requires students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills via measurable outcomes? Where do other ways of making sense of the world, ie., the 'affective' enter into this outcomes/competencies based foci?

Thirdly, what pedagogical practices of our own might enable our students to become more 'socially' (culturally?) aware, knowledgeable about how gender, ethnicity, 'race' socio-economic status continues to impact strongly on children's engagement with learning and with the way they construct themselves as learners? How does one 'teach' for social justice? What kinds of experiences would enable teacher education students to begin exploring identity formations from a social activist position?

We plan to investigate these questions in differing but on-going ways. One path that we are investigating revolves around Social Literacies being conceptualised as elements of Quality Learning. Admittedly, this path seems to contradict our discussed impetus to rework social relations, given the dominance of narrow training discourses (see, for example, Bradshaw 1997). Yet, we have made this strategic move in the Faculty of Education by enlarging the category of what might be constituted as Quality Learning. Partly we have managed this strategy by adopting (for now) the prevailing tertiary policy definition of 'quality' as 'fitness for purpose' where graduate attributes are the ultimate test of quality.

This manoeuvre is aptly summarised by the Dean, Professor Shirley Grundy, who said at a Deakin University Research Priority Workshop Presentation on April 15- 17 2002:

What is being increasingly appreciated is that the developmental and cognitive explanations of learning are no longer adequate for new learning, for increasingly learning is not merely a matter of individual acquisition, but of communal, collective, collaborative engagement and meaning making. Quality Learning is as much a social event as an individual achievement.

Thus, we are pushing the conceptual borders of Quality Learning at Deakin to see if we can reclaim the social in the process. We have yet to determine our conclusions about the usefulness of conceptualising Social Literacies as an element of Quality Learning. However, we have tracked the shifting of discourses of Social Literacies in our mutual attempt to delineate socially inclusive pedagogies.

Correspondence

Dr Andrea Allard, School of Scientific and Developmental Studies, Faculty of Education, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, 3125. Email: acallard@deakin.edu.au

Dr Evelyn Johnson, School of Social and Cultural Studies in Education, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, 3125. Email: indigo@deakin.edu.au

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