# The creative processes of design and writing in education

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*In the end we are all Chinese* (Deleuze, 2001, p.97)

## Abstract

*Recognising the significance of a created object is a critical moment that brings together numerous concerns of the artist. This presentation will look at this process in light of teaching creative writing and design. The designer will develop a highly insightful perceptivity that will mould future projects. What is this perceptivity and how can we explain it? What uses does it have in education and how should we teach it? The creative writer will enter a self-reflective labyrinth of memories, imagination and language that generates further possibilities for their work. What are the implications of these processes and how can they be taken seriously in education? This paper will debate the resultant non-assuredness of the creative processes in design and writing to produce a philosophy of education based on affect.*

## Introduction

The non-assuredness of the creative processes in design and writing is exactly what often makes them difficult propositions for normative educational approaches. Foucault (1995) has expertly detailed how the prison system has produced the 'normal man' through Discourse and surveillance procedures. These are backed up and maintained by the workings of the state-system, which has put into play notions of criminality and deviance that may be translated through normative action that is 'scaffolded' by the state into laws and precedents that divide and subjugate the normal from the non-normal. A similar process has been taking place in education. However, the normal man, to be potentially locked up and taken away from extraneous influence, is not the objective of the educational machine. Instead it aims to make 'learning normal' - that feeds into notions of training, discipline and the state-run values of instrumental reason played out in the workings of science and institutional funding. These aspects of contemporary education may complement or contradict the non-assuredness of the creative processes which this article will debate. So how can we think through this notion of creativity so that it may be used to push educational theory and reform? The suggestion here, and the object of the argumentation that follows, is that 'normal learning' may be circumvented through a development in affects as a basis for a philosophy of education to be applied in this instance to the teaching of design and writing.

Design and writing are good examples of teaching practices where affects have influence due to a mixture of personal and global factors that might impinge upon their teaching. In contrast to purely emotional reaction to things, which is subjected and bounded by notions of 'the self' or 'the subject', affects may run on an impersonal and universal level (Fiumara, 2001). They are also deeply embedded into the ways in which we apprehend phenomena, in fact eliciting desire (Noddings and Shore, 1984) of a subject and for an object in a more profound way than just feeling for something. When we design an object we will engage with affects through the learning of the skills involved with the subject area and the practice of the design techniques. If we write something meaningful, we also have to engage with the affects that are incorporated into the field of apprehension, and the communication of this apprehension. This paper will look to combine these two creative moments and use them to designate an effective philosophy of education that opens up the practice of working with affects in education. This is not 'normal learning' driven by repetition into the enforcement of habits, explicit educational methods and 'how-to' books. This is philosophy put to use and working to make education spontaneous, exciting, surprising and delightful.

**Affects**

When Freud (1953) discussed affects in his interpretation of dreams, it was clear that he was talking about a "mood or tendency that is a determining influence on the dream," (p. 627). He analysed various dreams that patients related to him, examining the symbolic and metonymic figures that these dreams represented. Affects appear in all these dreams, not as constituent parts or a comprehensible whole, but as a means to joining together the expression of the patients with their particular emotional states. As such, anxiety, pain or paranoia could permeate the dreams as affects without being named by any of the patients. In the role of the analyst, Freud took it on himself to name the affects in the dreams, and to discuss the various ways in which the patients have articulated these affects through their monologues. It seems to me that we are in many ways in a similar situation with respect to education and creativity. There are various blockages, neuroses and potential misunderstandings with respect to articulating the creative processes that happen through learning. These problems spring from the fact that education and subjectivity are not unified or cohesive activities. This is Freud's point of introducing the Id, Ego and Super-ego into the analysis. These factors are representative of a disunity which is also a mode of abundance that always exceeds the disciplinary regimes and discourses of the state. We therefore need to expand the range of affects from connective devices that serve to make the unconscious analysable, and include the complex social plane on which contemporary educational practices work with creativity.

To find such as notion of affect, we need to turn to the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1994) and the way in which this has been taken up in, for example, contemporary feminism. This is because these poststructural thinkers have disavowed the psychological basis of affect, and endeavoured to make affects mobile and without the dualism of the analysed-analyst. Deleuze and Guattari (1977) have worked to remove the Oedipal and Elektra interpretive templates from the dreams of the analysand. As such, when we look for affects in education, we cannot place ourselves in the role of examining the emotional moods or tendencies of a particular student or cohort. We must admit that our own emotional proclivities are as much a factor in any analysis as the perceived phenomena involved. So, for example, when we observe a grade nine painting class with students disengaged and seemingly using the colours and brushes to make random splodges of graffiti, what are we really expressing when we write up our report about this situation? The affect of rebellion expressed through this creative action should include the dissonance and factors of control that are already present in the school. It must take into account the peer relationships that might be shaping and altering the creative processes. There should also be room for the lived experiences of the subjects, such as their home life or the influences of the media. The report needs to be inhabited by the writer's perceptions of their reception in the art room and the ways in which the class have reacted to their presence. In summation, the report should not so much be a diagnostic of 'a lack of creativity' caused by behaviour management problems, but - according to an expanded notion of affect to understand the creative processes in education - be about becoming:

> Becoming, while happening in a gap, is nonetheless an extreme contiguity within [the] coupling of two sensations without resemblance, or, [it could be figured as] a light that captures both of the resemblances in a single reflection. It is a zone of indetermination, as if things, beasts, and persons endlessly reach that point that immediately precedes their natural differentiation. This is what is called an affect (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p.173).

The important point here is that becoming is not only about the ways in which changes coalesce and emerge in the educational context - i.e. the outcome of the becoming; it is also about the complex processes included in the becoming. In a similar way to Peter Clough (2002), who has used affects as potentially constitutive of the social context of learning through the writing of educational narratives - the aspect of becoming that we may take from the notion of affect in Deleuze and Guattari (1994) may be fictional or resemble a narrative re-creation of real life. Therefore, we are not taking the position of determining
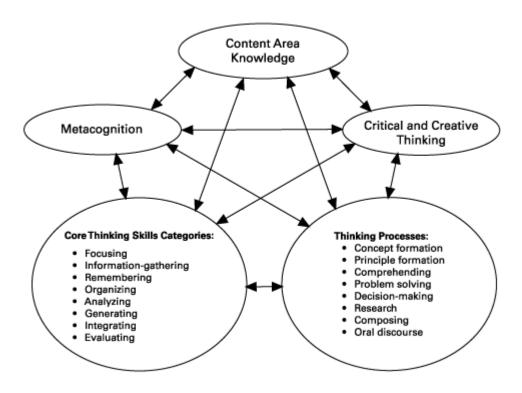
becoming as a necessarily factual or psychological account of events that aims towards teleology. What we are interested in are the events themselves. The affective analysis of events is a process of complex material unpicking of often tangled situations. In consequence, what emerges is a type of minor philosophy of education (Gregoriou, 2004). This attends to the movements of desire in education. It includes the bodies and processes that function in creativity and places subjectivities on a level plane where complex connections may happen through the action of the players. Affects populate these often nomadic wanderings and may be understood as being fused with energy and wholly positive. In this article they will be divided through a focus on design and creative writing and joined through an analysis of eroticism.

**The blank canvas and empty page: friend & foe**

If we translate the work of affect from Freud and Deleuze onto the field of creative design, we are presented with the problem of origination. It could be said that there is an insurmountable abyss that separates those who are frightened by the empty page, and those who are excited by the opportunity of giving visual, aural or written form to their ideas. The propensity to favour one or other of these positions results from working with affects. Those excited by the prospect of origination take environmental factors such as school rules, peer pressure and the rules of design, which might stop their production of creative ideas - and transform these factors into the motivation and energy to create. An awareness and working ability with respect to these specific factors in teaching and learning situations will lead to the development of pedagogies to foster creativity in schools and colleges. For example, the teaching of furniture design will be augmented and supplemented through a detailed and critical study of interior school environments. Furthermore, this task of fostering creativity through direct research is complex. This is because it involves attitudes and beliefs along with the contextual information of the field that the students should engage with to drive the project. These attitudes and beliefs will constitute in this instance the emotional reactions that the students will have to the specific college environment that might be ascertained through questionnaires and interviews. Therefore, creative design must also take these perspectives into account when dealing with the problem of origination, as emotions in the shape of affects and the environment may impinge upon the impulse to create and therefore block creativity.

Creativity *per se* has been defined as the production of an artefact that fulfils a specified purpose and is considered novel and ethical within a social context (Plucker and Beghetto, 2004). If evaluations of the creative value of an item are socially determined as this definition would seem to suggest, an individual can not make judgements about the creative worth of their work on their own (Cropley, 1997). Creativity therefore works through feedback loops connected to one's output. These loops may be manufactured by the teacher and the cohort as part of the working processes in creative design. To access one's creativity in a particular domain, an individual requires specific feedback about certain aspects of the work in progress across these feedback loops. They may be linked to Marzano's dimensions of thinking (Figure 1), where creativity is connected in a complex manner to metacognition, content area, thinking skill categories and the thinking processes:

## Dimensions of Thinking*



*Thinking skills framework used with the North Carolina End-of-Grade and End-of-Course Tests (adopted from Robert Marzano et al, *Dimensions of Thinking*, 1988).

Figure 1. Marzano et al. (1988) dimensions of thinking model

When the teacher as an expert in design is inserted into this feedback model, creativity in the student may be understood as an inter-connected system of thought across the zones in Figure 1. The teacher will supply content knowledge if necessary or research skills to obtain the essential details that drive the system of thought above. However, a problem still remains as to whether or not the designed product could be considered as significant. Signification is a critical and perhaps vital affect that includes the interiority of the participant (Boler, 1999) as well as the exterior effects of a working feedback system such as the one represented in Figure 1 that might give them words of praise or criticism. Signification therefore includes unconscious affects that can only be determined for a design object through engagement with the many associations, accidents and complex meanings that the designed object will create in the producer, the audience and the users. For example, a chair designed for a classroom may provide an ergonomic and comfortable addition to the space that would be appreciated by the teacher and the cohort alike, yet it could not be called an aesthetic object unless the meaning of the object reaches another level of synthesis and signification. This level provides a space where the classroom chair may enter the realm of fine art, and it could be recognised as portraying the symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) and control exerted by schools throughout history. These affects are distinct from those that might drive the knowledge and feedback system of Marzano's dimensions of thought (Figure 1).

The question of signification may also be connected to that of representation. When students see their work displayed in a professional manner in a public exhibition, they report a shift in their ability to engage with self-evaluation in relation to their creativity and their abilities as designers (Montuori, 2003). This translates into confidence when working with design tasks in learning environments. The connected and

whole process of designing, making and exhibiting – provides students with experiences that represent the struggles and potential risk-taking involved with major creative endeavours. Creative abilities are therefore enhanced through representation as an important next step to signification and the feedback model connected to thinking about a created object (Figure 1). Students should be given the opportunity to present their work, so that they get a chance to engage with the potential affects of design that may come about above and beyond the embryonic stages of task-setting and learning about possible solutions to design briefs. This will focus and help to constitute themselves as designers and teachers of design.

Completely open design briefs can be confronting for students, even with effective signification, representation and feedback mechanisms in place - as they may result in claims that they do not know what to make. This is due to the potentially dizzying possibilities that absolute openness provokes. Design pedagogy should therefore focus on more effective means when laying out a path for the creative act, which could be termed as a trigger stimulus (Strati, 1999). For example, in a metal work class students are asked to make an object that could be used in a kitchen that includes an element of twist with a size limit of 30cms. Students were also required to find natural examples of twists or twisted forms in artefacts. These forms were used to inform the object. This project therefore stimulates simultaneous and complementary focus and freedom. It also invites close inspection of twisted forms and alerts students to examples that they might not have attended to in the past. This way of teaching design, where a stimulus provides a convergent focus and freedom, has benefits in terms of student participation and the quality of the design work. It also relates to the philosophy of education through Deleuze's (1993) conception of *the fold.* The fold is an updated and relevant materialist representation of Leibniz's windowless monads that allows conceptual content to be placed in conjunction with physical reality and mathematical precision. In the example of the twist, the student may study the mathematics of the twist, whilst simultaneously realising that their own twist designs will respond to this study in some manner. The students will engage both in the synthetic work of making a twist and the analytical work of understanding twists. This produces a conceptual fold in their minds that they may use for design, and in teaching design briefs in the future.

In addition to the production of folds, if a student is to design and make an object for a kitchen from metal, they need to know the technical and mechanical skills of working with the material that are: cutting, joining and shaping metal. This constitutes an apprenticeship of the senses (Deleuze, 1994). It is the physical aspect of education that we may induce through purposeful habit and training (Dewey, 1922) – yet not to the benefit of 'normal learning'. This training is when the student must consider the function of tools and how they are used correctly. If you go on to add the contextual information that students need to know in terms of the prevalent design styles in society and how this reflects current ideologies, one may see how design pedagogy is an affective process involving complex incorporations. This is also because the student's attention needs to be drawn to the fact that an item made for sale should appeal to others. In many ways, it has to seduce its audience in order to stand out in the crowded market-place. So the student designer apprenticeship is personal and seductive, practical and affective. In order for students to develop as teachers of this subject they must learn across all these fields as well as articulating their processes.

The blank canvas and empty page are therefore contextual and effective stimuli - providing a potential synthesis of feedback, signification, representation and folds. Furthermore, design teachers need to address the possible problem of origination through their tendency to perform creative acts in education.


**Creative Writing**

The teaching of creative writing in schools suffers from many intrusions, interruptions and potentially destructive influences that may also stop the teaching of design. For example, the timetable may be seen as a rigid and unchangeable edifice against which no pedagogic innovation may alter the endless and clockwork circulation of hordes of children (Goodlad, 1984) round the school. What if you have managed to inspire a class, they are busily writing away, and the bell goes to signal that they should trot off to the next lesson?

Under what conditions are you able to work against the immense tide of conditioning that enforces the functional school day according to set parameters? Do you face the inevitable ire of the deputy-principal and several disgruntled parents arguing against the imposition of creative writing in their already crowded curriculum?

Firstly, the conditions that would allow you to work through the tide of opposition to get great creative writing teaching and learning done - are present in affects. This has been recognised in education theory, especially in the 1970s. Britton's (1970) theory argued that the affects of creative writing stem from the way in which we use language, and that is as a participant or as a spectator. The participant's role is one of being involved in the world in face-to-face interactions. Britton referred to this as expressive language, which we move away from and into transactional language when we want to know more and tend to explain, question, report, record and theorise. The second role that we take on in our use of language according to Britton (1970) is that of a spectator, where language is potentially associated with art, or a "means of evaluating and embodying individual feelings and experiences," (Murray, 1988, p. 12). The role of the spectator was also referred to by Britton as incorporating poetic language use, and in practice we move from one role to another in a complex and time-related way. This type of thinking about creative writing may be tied in with recent work in the philosophy of education that has conjoined the ideas of Gilles Deleuze with John Dewey (Semetsky, 2006).

Semetsky's argument is that Dewey's pragmatic constructivism may be paralleled with a Deleuzian mode of thinking about education in order to produce a new philosophy of education that prioritises becoming in the sense of working through enforced and restrictive regimes of power. The exact shape of this working depends upon the empirical evidence to hand, and the insurmountable odds that some institutions may place upon the recognition and usage of truly creative acts (Threadgold, 1997). It also determines the types of learning that will take place in the institutions, and even though this may be reconciled with constructivism *per se* (Murphy, 1997) the learning of creative writing will always take the shape of a complex and unstable sets of particular attributes, for example those expressed in rural and urban environments. These attributes include rebellion against the norms and socially enforced codes that might be present in the educational location due to the dislocation of abstract laws with place – in any case, the learning that happens with respect to creative writing will never be 'normal learning'. This is where the philosophy of education and arguments that we present signify critical responses and different through-lines with respect to 'learning to be normal'. Foucault's (1980) arguments against the imposition of power in the forms of discourse may lead to a critical discourse analysis of the normative mechanisms of the state through education. Deleuze and Guattari (1988) offer a subtle weaving of affective processes that nonetheless offer themselves through the immanence of power in the educational context as normalisation. For example, it would seem to me that the recent popularity of the *Harry Potter* series of children's literature books arises primarily because they represent an escape from the drudgery of compulsory and uniform education. The conservative writer J.K Rowlings has encapsulated the affects of rebellion in magic and adventure in the context of a British public school - and in so doing has created a seductive route for youthful desire. Her hero constantly comes up against the figuration of power in transformed contexts - he cleverly gets around these obstacles and constructs his own knowledge and means to salvation from a series of clues. The collaborative practice of creative writing is in a similar quandary in restrictive schooling environments, and must rely on any affects at hand to break the yolk of power-related regimes such as the administration or the enforcement of normative behaviour through punishment.

Creative writing may therefore be cast as a normative-breaking activity. This is perhaps why it has been characterised as bohemian and potentially subversive (Mellor and Patterson, 2004). It is in addition to these attributes the well-spring of many new and radical approaches to teaching and learning - such as those that have been encapsulated through the 'critical literacy' movement (Luke, 2000). If we take as fact the point that students may be taught to radically critique knowledge and power, and identify the construction of character and opinion as a happy past-time of certain elite groups, then the writing that comes about as a

result of this critique should be imbued with an explosive energy and force. For example, if the students study George Orwell's *1984* (1948) and are asked to write creatively in this vein about current events, they should be able to discern the ways in which language is used by politicians and commercial interests to get their messages across. In terms of literacy theory, this idea has been recently elaborated through the notion of affective literacy (Cole, 2007), where students engage with texts to promote critical mores. They learn about the idiosyncratic nature of writing whilst simultaneously finding ways to put their message across to a wide audience – this is the combination of the affects of language with the power of affects in critique to serve as a means of escaping enforced regimes of thought.


**Eroticism**

The most vital factors necessary to make creative writing and design work in education are time and the force of the practice. This is true in an intensive as well as extensive sense, as the subjective time of the imagination needs to be dealt with as well as the objective time of the educator. If we come back to the creative writing teacher who is achieving great advances with their students using expressive, transactional and poetic language in a complex way - this says something profound about the intimacy and subjective sense of time (Martindale, 1990) that the teacher has produced for their group, as well as the subsequent group force. This type of behaviour is often apparent in primary contexts, where the teacher has the students for the whole day and the design and writing projects that the group set out to achieve may be messier in terms of exact and precise timing and the group consensus. On top of this, educational constructivism (Hill, 2006) would seem to work in this context, as the classroom has the atmosphere of a community with active learning being reviewed and incorporated into the teacher's guiding plan, especially with respect to literacy development. This relaxed and open feel to education has been reproduced in some of the alternative places of learning such as Waldorf and Steiner schools (Iannone and Obenauf, 1999), who have taken constructivism seriously and do not enforce artificial and abstract reasoning onto the students until they are ready for it (Brown et al., 1991). Yet the pressures of secondary and higher education that are mandated through state-run systems seem to enforce the apartness of learning, and furthermore the tenets of constructivism often fall apart under pressure from the competitiveness of post-modern capitalism, that will never really allow community consensus and a luxuriant sense of time. What we need for this philosophy of education and the affects of this article are in fact stronger bonds to keep the creative acts of design and writing as whole in education.

I would like to suggest that these bonds may be preserved and moulded through use of eroticism. I flinch slightly when mentioning such an idea, as it has rarely figured on the educationalist's horizons, and there are many moral and social taboos around bringing up such a topic in a learning context. Yet it fits at this point in the argument in three ways:

1. In terms of educational constructivism, eroticism strengthens the central, bonding elements of the thesis in terms of creating the conditions whereby contiguity (Irigaray, 1993) may be achieved and the will to resist interference from administration and instrumental reason is heightened. It is not a move in the direction of humanism (Suler, 1980) or of completing a sense of the whole self in education that learns in holistic ways - but indicates the subjective principles associated with pleasure and enjoyment that may build upon the closeness imbued by creative acts and the subjective sense of time.

2. Eroticism works on the level of viewing, understanding and deciding what to do with the creative object. In terms of language, systemic functional linguistics has used this idea in terms of an appraisal system (Martin and White, 2005). This system offers a typology of the lexicogrammatical resources available to both construe and realise interpersonal dimensions of experience at the level of discourse semantics. This leads to a type of prosodic realisation that can be saturating, intensifying or dominating.

3. The third meaning of eroticism in this context refers to the Deleuzian philosophical notion of affect that he has derived from Spinoza. Philosophers such as Lloyd (1989) have taken this idea to infuse the mind with sexuality, as it leads away from desexed, disembodied ideas. In fact everything that the mind can think is tied to the body in this figuration of bodily ideation, so, for example, Deleuze and Guattari's (1977) body-without-organs reflects a body locked up and self-replicating in terms of producing streams of internal thoughts without external release. Creativity may also suffer from such internality if educators do not work on ways to celebrate and exhibit the creative productions of their students.

**Conclusion**

So why are we all in the end Chinese? This statement comes from Deleuze's (2001) discussion around a Chinese book on eroticism. In the book, the Chinese author looks at the ways in which erotic energies may be heightened and strengthened and not released through orgasm. This is a point of action in which we are all implicated. Once we allow the energies to diminish and to be dissipated, the impetus behind eroticism goes and the motivation to continue fades. The Chinese writer, in a matter-of-fact and practical way, looks to explain the workings of tantric magic and articulate the positive affects for the subject. The author latterly goes on to connect this *modus operandi* with military operations and the ways in which the energies of battle may be preserved and augmented through concentration on the joys of slaughter and savagery. Deleuze uses this example to discuss dualism in philosophy, and the ways in which we may provoke immanence and multiplicities through our thinking and writing. We may also use it to connect eroticism with education; or the intimate connection that we may create between the theory of design and creative writing with the actual pedagogic practices that happen in schools.

We are all Chinese to the extent that we can think this problem through to its ultimate conclusion. This process is also connected to our ability to live joyfully (Nietzsche, 1990) and not disparage those around us who might disagree with our point of view. The examples of creative writing and design are used in this instance as vehicles for this philosophy of education, and the ways of working as have been described above will surely hit hurdles and obstacles as they are implemented or discussed amongst practising teachers. Affects attend to the immanent aspect of teaching and learning as they are two dimensional prongs, accentuating both feelings and impact. Yet there are many teachers in the profession who have dutifully covered up and aligned their feelings and impact with curriculum documents and institutional rhetoric. These ideas will alas pass them by, and the affects float downstream, like so many television adverts impregnated with the horrors and neuroses of contemporary life.

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