

**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF ENGAGING
WITH ACADEMIC TEXT**

BY

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Abstract

Academic text is viewed in most university environments as a tool for supporting student learning which generates knowledge, skills and the capacity to critique ideas. Yet there is little research undertaken to understand early childhood education (ECE) students' experiences and beliefs of engaging with academic text. Therefore, in order to understand this specific group of students' text engagement practices and beliefs, this ethnographic research followed a group of ten third-year ECE students at Victoria University in Wellington New Zealand through one course of their undergraduate study. The researcher collected data using ethnographic methods (including a non-traditional visual participatory method of identity portfolio collages) to identify patterns which help understand students' beliefs and experiences of engaging with academic text. Based on social learning theories, the research examined the influence of student identity and cultural context on their motivation and interest in engaging with academic text. The study found that while this group of ECE students reported valuing academic text for a number of reasons, they were most likely to engage with assigned text for assessment purposes. The prevalent use of a surface learning approach, skim reading, when reading academic text also left students feeling frustrated with the reading they completed during their programme. Group expectations of reading mainly for assessment and a lack of text engagement by practicing teachers they encountered also encouraged these students, who hold positive reader identities, to limit their engagement with academic text. The results from this study indicate that students and educators can examine ways to increase student motivation to engage deeply with academic text on a more regular basis for students to achieve deeper and more meaningful learning experiences.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the topic

Traditional university study, across an array of curriculum areas, centres upon text, discussion, and lecture. In their tertiary study, students engage in a range of learning activities including listening, reading, writing and discussing ideas and concepts, with the aim that they will apply their learning to authentic work settings. Learning to be a teacher in many universities is no different, as the model of many teacher education programs centres upon melding both academic text which is dense with theory, with student experiences in the field, while undertaking practicums in schools or early childhood centres. Through such classroom conversations about text and experience a common aim is for students to learn academic content knowledge (curriculum), acquire teaching strategies (pedagogy knowledge) and form a professional identity of themselves as both a learner and an educator (Fishman & Davis, 2006). While traditional views of teacher education have focused upon cognitive processes for knowledge acquisition, contemporary research has discussed the importance of integrating a socio-cultural view of knowledge into teacher education programs (Fishman & Davis, 2006; Kelly, 2006). It is a commonly held belief that such teacher education leads to changes, in teacher attitudes and practices which improve student learning, but researchers continue to seek better evidence to link teacher education with student outcomes (Fishman & Davis, 2006).

While teacher education programmes for early childhood education (ECE) differ across countries and within every institution, the traditional aspects of reading, writing and field experience are common to many programmes. Initial early childhood teacher education programmes typically take two to four years of study, and the learning focuses upon children from the ages from birth to five. Noteworthy features of early childhood teacher programmes, as found in a 2000 study in Australia with 141 students, include the high proportion of female students to males, and high percentages of students who are working while studying (not necessarily in early childhood centres) (Farrell, Walker, Bower, & Gahan, 2000). Many international early childhood teacher education programmes, including within New Zealand, are undergoing governmental

enquiry to understand both the importance of early childhood teacher education, and the qualities that determine quality early childhood care (Blank, 2010; Dalli, 2010). As there is a growing desire to further understand early childhood teacher education programmes, and because the majority of students in these programmes are asked to engage with academic text, the current study examined how ECE student teachers engage with academic text.

1.2 Setting/ context

This section will briefly outline the New Zealand ECE context and Victoria University's ECE teacher professional programme.

New Zealand ECE has traditionally been seen as "leading the way" (along with countries such as Sweden, Iceland and Norway) in the ECE sector internationally (Duhn, 2010; UNICEF, 2008). The 2008 UNICEF report, *The Child Care Transition*, states that New Zealand has comparatively high achievement in ECE benchmarks within English-speaking countries within the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Duhn, 2010; UNICEF, 2008). Participation in New Zealand ECE is high as 95 percent of new school entrants have taken part in some type of ECE (Dalli, 2010).

The Ministry of Education has oversight of the early childhood sector in New Zealand which includes a variety of teacher-led and parent / community-led education initiatives. The Labour government set a goal in 2002 that by 2012 all ECE teachers working in licensed centres would hold a qualification such as the one awarded upon completion of the programme explained below. As of 2009, the new National government implemented policy which states that centres will receive additional government funding according to how many registered teachers they employ, with additional funding for centres that employ registered teachers only up to eighty percent. In New Zealand, a registered early childhood practitioner has both an ECE qualification and has completed an official registration process with the New Zealand Teachers' Council. The trend towards professional teacher status in New Zealand has been one of debate and contention among teaching professionals and government officials (Dalli, 2010). Previous to the funding cuts implemented by the National government in 2009, the ECE sector was affected by a "steady increase in demand for childcare services," as

well as the implementation of a “20 free hours” initiative by the Labour government in 2008 (Duhn, 2010, p.51). Changing legislation and transformation of the ECE teaching profession within New Zealand has led to the ECE sector being the topic of much political debate.

Victoria University, where this research was conducted, is a research institution of about 25,000 students in the capital city of Wellington, New Zealand. The Education Faculty’s goal as stated on their website is “to produce beginning early childhood teachers who are well educated and capable of engaging in continuing self development as multi-disciplinary professionals working in a diverse society” (Victoria University, 2010). The specific programme which the research participants were a part of is a full-time three year teacher education programme resulting in a Bachelor of Education in Teaching Early Childhood (BTeach in ECE). This group of students is one of the last groups participating in this particular three year programme as the university has now changed to a four year programme. The specific course, EPSY 315, in which this study focuses, remains as part of the new programme (this course is discussed further in section 3.3.1).

1.3 Rationale and outlining the issues

A 2011 report by Ako Aotearoa titled *Student engagement in New Zealand universities* provides one of the first major overviews of tertiary student engagement trends specifically within New Zealand. While this report includes survey data from all eight major tertiary institutions within New Zealand from 2007-2009, these data are in need of further in-depth investigation into student engagement practices. Ako Aotearoa (2011) states that student engagement can be defined as, “students’ involvement with activities and conditions that are likely to generate high-quality learning” (p.vi), and sees such engagement as essential for learning to occur. Globally there is a push to understand changing trends in student engagement as the world economy, technology and demographics (just to name a few) continue to change university life for students.

By working with a group of ten early childhood teacher education students at Victoria University, this research specifically sought to discover these students’ beliefs about and experiences with one of the main tasks in which they are asked to engage

with during their university programme; academic text. While some existing literature focuses on one important aspect of text engagement, understanding and improving students' reading strategies, very little research has been conducted to understand education students' beliefs about and experiences with academic text in order to see how students may utilize such skills (Cubukcu, 2008; Dornisch, Sperling, & Zeruth, 2011; McCrudden, Perkins, & Putney, 2005). Further research is needed to understand students' long term motivation for using such strategies and this study sought to address this gap in the literature. By understanding what it means for students to engage with text, students and educators can better understand students' experiences and thus consider how to encourage engagement in their learning.

As there is very little research completed with early childhood teacher education students in the New Zealand university setting, this research is also significant in how it adds to the body of literature which seeks to better understand the specific cultures of unique groups of students. Social learning theory seeks to understand how context and culture matter in a learning setting, and therefore calls for research to be conducted to understand the differences in groups of learners. While there are likely many similarities with learners across contexts, there are also likely differences distinctive to early childhood teacher education students in New Zealand. This research aims to further understand those differences.

1.4 Research aims and questions

In order to advance understanding of what factors effect student engagement with academic text and based on the theories outlined in the following chapter, the main questions this project seeks to address are:

- 1) What are the experiences of and beliefs about engaging with academic text of third year early childhood education students at Victoria University?
- 2) How does the student's identity relate to their perspective and engagement with academic text?

In order to answer the main questions of this study, a number of subsidiary questions are also explored, including:

1) What encourages or discourages these students to engage with academic text?

2) What value do these students place on learning through academic text in relation to both their current course, and their plans for the future?

1.5 Overview

This research was conducted over one university semester (July - October 2011) involving ten pre-service ECE teacher education students. In Chapter Two previous literature on learning theory, student engagement with academic text and teacher education programmes is examined. Chapter Three outlines the methods of this specific study illuminating the unique approach this study took to understand student perspective. An introduction to the participants in this study sets the research in context of these learners. In the following chapter, findings from the ten participants are outlined individually and then presented holistically. Data gathered from all research methods are examined to explore the research findings. In Chapter Five the study's findings are discussed in relation to the specific research questions outlined above. All questions are examined holistically and discussed in relation to existing literature as well. Major findings such as the effect of written assessment on students' reading practices, students' purposes for reading and their ability to help predict reading habits, and finally the importance of group dynamics upon students' reading engagement are discussed. The concluding chapter suggests ways for students and educators to implement this research as well as recommending further research to help build on the findings from this research.

1.6 Conclusion

Exploration of ECE students' beliefs about and experiences with academic text will promote understanding of one unique culture within tertiary institutions. As a distinctive group of students who are experiencing both the changing landscape of tertiary education and the ECE sector within New Zealand, these students are uniquely placed to give account of their experiences. Current research examining students' engagement with academic text is needed so that educators do not assume that these students experience learning activities, such as reading academic text, in the same way

that previous students facing different circumstances have. This research's attempt to explore students' experiences based on social learning theory also promotes taking a unique angle to explore cultural context and student identity on learning through text.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter will outline previous research in three main areas; learning theory, learning through academic text, and professional teacher development. The current research project has drawn upon the work outlined in this chapter and has informed the design of this study. The first section of this chapter (2.1) outlines a number of learning theories which are closely interconnected and overlap with one another in numerous ways; each theoretical position informs the research in unique ways. The learning theories which will be outlined in this section include: learning as an ontological process, learning as a process of professional identity, and social learning theories.

2.1 Learning theory

Learning is an ontological process of being and becoming (Jarvis, 1987, 2009). An ontological process is concerned with the development of one's being; ontology as such is a "theory of being" (Dall'Alba, 2009, p.34). Jarvis' (1987, 2009) sociological framework foregrounds experience as the beginning of all learning, and explains that through a process of being one transforms such experiences into learning. His understanding of learning incorporates a whole person, both body and mind, interacting with a social world, as "experience involves relationship between people and the socio-cultural milieu in which they live" (Jarvis, 1987, p.164). For Jarvis (1987, 2009), learning is both existential and experiential, and it happens when both body and mind encounter the world resulting in becoming a changed person. Jarvis (1987) also explains how not every experience results in learning, but that experience itself only offers the potential for learning to occur. His understanding of learning as experiential allows him to explain how "only in being can we become and in learning we experience the process of becoming" (Jarvis, 2009, p.29). He believes learning is thus the intertwining of being and becoming; he also describes it as the process of "human essence emerging from the human existent" (Jarvis, 2009, p.30). This research is based on Jarvis' view of learning because it acknowledges the role of both mind and body in learning through experiences (which are not isolated but socio-cultural events), and it recognizes that individuals are continuously learning to both be who they are, through becoming who they hope to be. This ontological view of learning encourages examination of how

students are both being and becoming while at university, as well as examination of how learning is both an issue of experience, and a change in knowing and identity (Jarvis, 1987, 2009; Levinson, 2007).

Dall’Alba’s (2009) notion of “professional education as a process of becoming” is consistent with Jarvis’ ontological and experiential view of learning (p.34). Dall’Alba and Barnacle’s (2007) work attempts to reconfigure how professional education is seen as they argue that, “Rather than treating knowledge as information that can be accumulated within a (disembodied) mind, learning becomes understood as the development of embodied ways of knowing, or in other words, ways-of-being” (p.683). This conceptualization of learning has potential to transform understanding of professional learning as it argues that professional or formalized knowledge (often taught at the university) is interrelated to informal knowledge which is shaped by our being in the world and how we understand our being in the world. In other words, Dall’Alba and Barnacle’s (2007) work does not see professional knowledge as separate from experiential learning, but rather sees all learning as happening through a process of becoming and identity transformation. Therefore, Dall’Alba (2009) suggests that by examining students’ identity, or how one sees him/ herself, it is possible to understand the resistance which learners encounter with becoming other or learning.

Cultural learning theories assert that what and how one learns is always tied up with context and one’s perspective of context. Ziehe’s (2009) cultural theory of learning seeks to understand how underlying convictions of culture, which most people are not aware of on a daily basis, can change the “typical” and therefore alter learners’ “motives, expectations and actions” (p.185). Ziehe’s (2009) theory highlights the importance of understanding culture and context in order to understand practice. Furthermore, Prosser and Trigwell’s (1999) significant piece of research examining students’ perspectives of learning within higher education found that not only is context important for learning outcomes, but students’ perspectives of their context greatly impacted student learning. Both Ziehe’s (2009) and Prosser and Trigwell’s (1999) work justify examination of specific learning cultures to understand students’ practices and learning outcomes. Further research that has found context (and student perspective of context) to impact learning is Ellis, Calvo, Levy and Tan’s (2004) study conducted to

understand how students learn through discussion. They stated that, “The quality of what students think they are doing and the quality of how they approach their learning have been found to be closely associated” (p.75). This research suggests that student perspective is shaped by context, and it is imperative to understand students’ perspectives in order to improve their learning outcomes.

While arguably interconnected to cultural learning theory, social learning theory has also informed this study’s research questions and methodology. Social learning theory seeks to examine how learning happens and is affected by interaction with others. Wenger’s (2009) social theory of learning underlies that “Knowing involves primarily active participation in social communities” (p.215), and as such his theory seeks to explain how learning happens in communities which are valued by the learner. Wenger’s (2009) work with adult learners suggests that by investigating a community of learners (and the values held by this community), one is better able to understand any potential learning that may happen in that community. While much of her work is primarily involved with children’s development, Barbara Rogoff’s (2003) examination of social and cultural factors affecting the learning process has also played an important role in social learning theory. Rogoff (2003) states, “People develop as participants of cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities- which also change” (p.3). Social learning theory thus allows one to see a learner as having agency in the learning process, but also acknowledges how learners are affected by the community in which they learn. Lave’s (2009) definition of learning as “changing participation in the culturally designed settings of everyday life” also asserts how one cannot be separated from the social world and therefore learning is always happening through a complex interaction with it (p.201). This research project is premised on Wenger (2009) and Lave’s (2009) social theories of learning that enable student learning to be examined in the context of interactions of a social world, rather than seeing learning (or failure to learn) as an individual activity.

2.2 Learning through academic text

This section will examine previous research completed to understand how students learn through academic text; including student engagement in learning, a socio-cultural view of literacy, cognitive and motivational aspects of reading, and reading strategies. All of the following research has helped situate the current research project by firstly informing the research questions.

2.2.1 Student engagement in learning.

To understand student learning, previous research has attempted to examine the numerous components effecting student engagement in the learning process. Ramsden (2003) states, "The quality of our students' understanding is intimately related to the quality of their engagement with learning tasks" (p.40). A major contribution to understand students' learning at tertiary intuitions, Prosser and Trigwell's (1999) research described students' approaches to learning in two qualitatively different ways; a surface approach to learning versus a deep approach to learning (p.3). A surface approach to learning means a student intends to complete a task, has an external emphasis on assessment, sees tasks as having unrelated parts, and fails to distinguish ideas reflectively. A deep approach means a student intends to understand, relates previous knowledge to new knowledge, and has an internal emphasis on learning (Ramsden, 2003). Ramsden (2003) explains that approaches to learning are concerned with both student goals when learning, as well as students' approaches to learning tasks.

Hazel, Prosser and Trigwell (2002) found that students will manage their learning orientation based on their perception of the environment's goals. As such, if students think their environment supports a surface approach to learning, students are more prone to adopt a surface approach; however, different students perceived the same environment in drastically different ways. Hazel et al. (2002) found the most indicative factor of students' perceptions was their prior understanding of a topic. Hazel et al. (2002) and Prosser and Trigwell (1999) also found that deep approaches "were more likely to be associated with higher quality learning outcomes" (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, p.4). Further research with learning approaches has found that students can adopt both of these strategies at different times and in different contexts (Ramsden, 2003).

Ramsden (2003) states, "It is also evident that approaches are related to how much satisfaction students experience from their learning" as deep approaches to learning equate to higher student satisfaction (p.53). However, Ramsden (2003) also reports that surface approaches to learning are common in higher education.

The 2011 Ako Aotearoa report provides insightful information into general student engagement trends within New Zealand. Having collected survey data from all eight major tertiary institutions within New Zealand from 2007-2009, this report provides one of the first major overviews of student engagement trends specifically in New Zealand. Slightly different from engagement in learning tasks, the Ako Aotearoa (2011) report examined student engagement as an "idea that specifically focuses on students and their interactions with their institution" (p.vii). Ako Aotearoa's (2011) report argues that student engagement is essential for learning to occur, and explains that while student engagement was traditionally viewed as "time on task," it has grown to consider much broader constructs such as students' intrinsic motivation to learn and students' lives outside of the classroom.

One of the major overall findings identified in the above 2011 report is that students reported "relatively low levels of involvement in active forms of learning" (p. xiii). This report defined active forms of learning as "students' efforts to actively construct their knowledge" (p.vii). Students also reported spending inadequate time on their studies or in their classes (p.xiv). The report states that almost one-third of students spend on average less than five hours per week in preparation for their studies, and the median result of students reported overall spending sixteen to twenty hours a week on their studies; rather than an expected minimum of forty hours a week for a full time student (p.40). The survey listed activities such as studying, reading, writing and doing homework when addressing class preparation, and found that such preparation was an indicator of student engagement. Ako Aotearoa (2011) also found that students who reported working in paid employment twenty five hours or less per week experienced no negative effect upon their engagement.

2.2.2 Socio-cultural view of literacy.

Previous research with academic text has also been considered. Much current reading research has taken a socio-cultural view of literacy, which integrates ideas about how language, culture, society, history and cognition all effect the ways in which one interacts with text and reading (Gee, 2001). One socio-cultural theory which examines how literacy practices are shaped through culture and are concerned with power relations has become known as “the New Literacy Studies,” (Gee, 2000, p.412). Gee (2000) argues that literacy is never general or self-contained, but rather learning language is a process of negotiating identity in a social group. By examining literacy values and beliefs of individuals, this theory seeks to understand how literacy is not simply a neutral tool for gaining facts and knowledge, but rather sees literacy practices as constituted through group norms and as a form of social power (Gee, 2000, 2001; Levinson, 2007). Boughey’s (2008) study in a South African university used new literacy theory as a way to see past dominant explanations, such as a lack of skill or proficiency, to understand issues students face in literacy learning. Boughey (2008) explains that new literacy theory “acknowledges that values and attitudes towards print, and the socially embedded understanding of the purposes of a text these values and attitudes give rise to, then result in multiple ways of engaging with texts” (p.194). Furthermore new literacy theory acknowledges that text does not have status, purpose or power inherent in the text itself, these components of a text are perceived only through context (Barton, Ivanic, Appleby, Hodge, Tusting, 2007).

The history of academic text at the university also adds to an understanding of students’ experiences with such text. Geisler (1994) and Guthrie (2004) argue that the ability to read and write have become commonly known as the basis of academic learning in developed countries since the Industrial Revolution when public education came into existence. Geisler (1994) and Guthrie (2004) also assert that while such literacy practices were originally used solely for religious and political purposes, when public education became mandatory for all students, the abilities to read and write were taken up as common skills which all students should learn. Used as a way to help the “common person” gain access to information, literacy skills have been the basis of public education. However, Geisler (1994) argues that when the university became the

certifying institution of “expert” knowledge and credentials, the university began to use professionalized literacy skills to separate experts from non experts.

A sociological view of the history of literacy thus seeks to explain how text has become a way to convey knowledge (Stierer, 1997). By separating experts from non experts on the basis of literacy skills, Geisler (1994) claims that many individuals leave university not trusting their professional knowledge. According to Geisler (1994), students’ experiences within education institutions and academic text often lead them to believe that they do not and cannot understand existing knowledge. These students therefore remain willing to look to the knowledge of others, and this situation then helps guarantee that expert knowledge will remain with professionals and will continue to justify professionals’ status, creating a divide in culture (Geisler, 1994). Geisler (1994) argues that universities as such encourage society to trade “everyday concepts in favour of the formal culture of books” (p.47). While a sociological view of literacy does not seek to ignore the ways in which literacy and technical, domain-specific language can serve a purpose for communication, it does seek to critically examine, and in some cases problematize, the ways in which literacy has been viewed as a neutral tool in today’s society.

2.2.3 Cognitive and motivational aspects of reading.

While the cognitive aspects of reading cannot be entirely separated from the socio-cultural components discussed above, research to understand cognitive aspects such as students’ motivation and strategies for reading have also been examined. According to L’Allier and Elish-Piper (2007), “Reading is an active process wherein readers use prior knowledge to understand new information” (p.339). L’Allier and Elish-Piper (2007) also discuss how reading can facilitate learning by helping students pose questions about their knowledge and experiences. Guthrie’s (2004) research on students’ literacy engagement found that reading is important for students as it provides an opportunity for integration of new information by “emphasizing content and comprehension equally” (p.8). Through reading, there is thus the potential to engage students in a process of inquiry to problematize experience and engage in an authentic learning activity (Elkjaer, 2009; L’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2007). Elkjaer (2009) outlines a

theory of learning by inquiry, explaining the need for students to transform and reflect upon experience by gaining new perspectives. By reading and discussing content, students are given a chance to turn experience into knowledge. Reading as such has become seen as a way for students to engage with new perspectives and challenging material in a personal and communal way; however, not all students may see reading in this way.

Previous research examining adult student engagement with academic text has explored students' reading goals or motivation for reading. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) define reading motivation as an "individual's personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading" (p.405). In their research they differentiate reading motivation from attitude which they link to "liking for a task," and reading interest and beliefs. Reading motivation research is rarely separated from research on motivation to learn (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Motivation research has recently focused on two primary goal orientations which students hold; performance (or ego) orientation and mastery (or learning goal) orientation (Dweck & Master, 2008; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Harackiewicz, Barron, & Elliot, 1998; Wolters, Yu, & Pintrich, 1996). Goal orientations are similar to the learning approaches discussed in section 2.2.1, however while learning approaches are concerned with both "why" and "how" students engage with learning, goal orientations are mainly concerned with the "why" behind their actions.

Guthrie & Wigfield (2000) and Wolters et al. (1996) explain that students who hold performance goals seek to demonstrate their performance in relation to others, while students with mastery learning goals seek content understanding or learning of the material. Meece and Miller's (2001) and McGregor and Elliot's (2002) research on student goals also highlights a recent distinction made by some researchers within performance goals; performance goals which seek to "demonstrate high ability" which have been labelled performance-approach goals and performance goals which are seeking to "avoid negative evaluations of ability" which have been labelled performance-avoidance goals (Meece & Miller, 2001, p.455). Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) stated, "Each goal orientation has implications for motivation, and most motivation researchers believe that the learning goal orientation is more likely to foster

long-term engagement and learning” (p.407). While some researchers, such as Wolters et al. (1996), have found that performance goals have negative learning outcomes, Harackiewicz et al.’s (1998) research points out that such conclusions may be premature as they found performance goals to produce positive results for some university students in some circumstances. Notably, Wolters et al.’s (1996) research was conducted with twelve and thirteen year old students rather than university students, evidencing that educational context effects the outcome of student goals.

Another commonly researched area within motivation is intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for a task. Motivation researchers have come to define extrinsic motivation for reading as reading for recognition or incentives, while intrinsic motivation for reading is aligned with one’s enjoyment of reading for one’s own sake (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Current research in this area has shown that these two motivations are not exclusive of one another as students can hold both types of motivation at the same time (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). While motivation research shows that students do not always adopt the same motivation or learning orientation in all learning contexts and tasks, there is some evidence that there is a reasonable degree of consistency in students’ orientation across time, however further research is required to confirm (Dweck & Master, 2008; Meece & Miller, 2001). Guthrie and Alao (1997) and Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) also found that there are ways for context to increase students’ motivation for reading. They suggest factors such as teacher involvement and interesting texts may increase student motivation for reading, but that this positive effect will depend on the level of student engagement.

Two other studies recently conducted on university students’ motivation for reading include Jolliffe and Harl (2008), and Derryberry and Wininger (2008). Jolliffe and Harl (2008) examined how first year composition students read and why, and they found that while only one-tenth of university staff members believed that first year students were prepared to read and understand university text, when students were consulted, they reported being quite capable and interested in reading (especially technologically based texts) even if not for class purposes. Derryberry and Wininger’s (2008) study found direct links between student motivation and text practices, but this research did not consider in depth how student perspective and motivation for reading are shaped.

Their research calls for further work to understand how university students perceive academic text and how they may be motivated differently to read it, especially if universities continue to base programmes around such text.

Research has also examined how reading goals and text relevance affect students' engagement with assigned readings. According to Lehman and Schraw (2002) relevance is "the extent to which text segments are germane to the reader's goals and purposes" (p.738). In McCrudden's (2011) research project with 38 undergraduate education students in New Zealand, he examined how specific reading instructions given to readers (e.g. direct reading questions) shaped students' reading goals and reading strategies. Regarding reading goals, McCrudden (2011) found that most students reported more than one goal for reading, but of the four thematic goals identified: assessment, build knowledge, augment lecture, and apply content outside of class, the "most frequently mentioned goals pertained to assessment" and to answering the study questions (p.13). He also found that students often identified building knowledge as a reason for reading along with answering the study questions, therefore he concluded that students "may have viewed the study questions as a means to help them learn" (p. 13). This research suggests that helping students shape their reading goals and aligning assessment with reading cues can encourage student learning through text and increase student motivation to exert effort with text. While his research was survey based and included the use of specific reading questions, it is necessary to examine in further depth student motivation to read when such questions are not provided. Further recommendations offered by McCrudden (2011) include conducting in-depth interviews with students to gain more information and linking students' responses to achievement data to better understand the effects of reading goals and strategies.

Previous research on text relevance, (Frymier & Shulman, 1995; McCrudden, Magliano & Schraw, 2010; McCrudden & Schraw, 2007; McCrudden, Schraw & Hartley, 2006; McCrudden, Schraw, & Kambe, 2005) has found that increasing text relevance can increase student learning and motivation with academic text. McCrudden, Schraw and Kambe (2005) differentiate relevant text from important text which they explain as text which "contains essential information needed to understand a text" (p.88). Schraw, Wade, and Kardash (1993, as cited in McCrudden & Schraw, 2007) found that students

first distinguish importance of specific text, and then they decide relevance in order to guide their processing of the text. Therefore these researchers found that by increasing relevance of text, students spend more time on the information and are more likely to grasp the information. This research demonstrates that students' goals for reading are powerful influences upon what they read and what they learn. Furthermore this suggests that assessment criteria which might provide relevance cues to students may motivate students more than important text segments within a text. Further data is needed to understand how relevance of text affects students when not given pre-reading questions to focus their goals.

Student interest in reading as mentioned previously, is different from (but not unconnected to) motivation for reading. Flowerday, Schraw, and Stevens' (2004) work differentiated situational interest which is "short-lived and context-dependent" with topical interest which is "personal interest, stable and content-specific" (p.95). Their 2004 study sought to see if interest in learning or choice of topic had more of an effect on student learning, engagement and attitude with text. Through an experimental design, they found that students' situational interest in reading had the biggest positive effect on student attitudes and engagement in reading while choice of topic had little impact. This research suggests that while many educators think giving students choices for reading is important, it is not indeed choice, but students' topical interest that matters.

2.2.4 Reading strategies.

Research on reading strategies used by students has also aided understanding of student reading engagement. One reading strategy explored in previous research is skim reading. This strategy has become topical to researchers as students are beginning to read more and more from a screen which enables scrolling and selective reading of text by using web links (Dyson & Haselgrove, 2001). Masson (1985, as cited in Dyson & Haselgrove, 2001) defines skimming as "sampling parts of a text whilst skipping other parts" (p.585). Skim reading is often a reading strategy used to reduce the amount of time one spends reading. Dyson and Haselgrove's (2001) experimental study to understand the influence of reading speed on the effectiveness of reading from a

computer screen found that when students were forced to read at a rate twice the speed of an average reader, their comprehension dropped. Their study, however, found that the type of information students could recall did not depend on speed of reading. For example, when readers knew they would be asked a range of questions after reading, they were able to successfully recall such information when both skimming and reading at a normal pace. Duggan and Payne's (2009) study to explore the effectiveness of skim reading found similar results. In their study students were able to gain an understanding of a text's main ideas from skim reading, however they were not able to facilitate inferences about the information. Duggan and Payne (2009) concluded their research by stating, "Where a deeper understanding of the text is required, it will sometimes be necessary to read not only the most important elements but also the micro-propositions that set the context and provide coherence" (p.242). While reading time is shown to effect reading outcomes, Reynolds' (1992) study found that reading time is not adequate for explaining student outcomes of reading. His study found instead that students who paid perceptual attention (noting individual letters and word lengths) while reading rather than conceptual attention (noting semantic content of the words) to text had poorer comprehension of text.

McCrudden's (2011) research which was previously discussed in regards to reading goals, also examined how students used reading strategies when engaging with assigned readings. His research found that most students used a combination of two broad categories of strategies, surface strategies which do not transform information for students and include things such as skimming/ scanning, and repeat reading of a section, and transformative strategies which helped students transform information into meaningful knowledge and include things like grouping information and paraphrasing information. McCrudden (2011) found these results encouraging as students need both types of reading strategies because as he states, "surface strategies are perquisites of transformational strategies in goal-directed learning" (p.13). This research suggests that further examination needs to be undertaken to explore when students use such strategies and if they use them appropriately.

Phillips and Phillips (2007) explored the reading behaviours of university accounting students and asked 172 students to keep weekly reading journals. They

found that students “initially approached the textbook with both optimism and apprehension” (p.29). Students who achieved the intended learning outcomes for the course reported reading to understand the material, while students who did not achieve the learning outcomes of the course reported reading to reduce anxiety. The students in this study reported using two main strategies for reading; reading slowly with concentration, and skim reading the material to get through it. Participants justified skim reading by telling themselves that they would return to the material later, however students who struggled with the course material often did not return to the text, while stronger students immediately sought outside help if necessary. Students who outperformed others also reported focusing on the learning objectives outlined by the chapter they were reading, while the underperforming students did not do this. Another reading practice discussed in this report was the difference in students’ reading focus when studying for exams. When reading close to exam time, students reported reading based upon exam expectations in a focused skimming mode. Phillips and Phillips (2007) concluded that these students read reactively letting their circumstances dictate their actions, and that “students’ textbook reading should be viewed as a motivated behaviour, with the specific motives varying across different groups of students and leading to different consequential actions” (p.40). All of these studies exploring reading strategies suggest that understanding students’ reading strategies can be helpful, however strategy use is complex and therefore not always an accurate predictor of reading outcomes.

2.3 Professional teacher development

Research completed on both pre and in-service teacher education programmes provides evidence of the need for further research to improve ECE students’ experiences of learning to be teachers. This section will examine existing research in this area, as well as identify specific gaps in previous research on teacher education.

While there is growing body of research to understand pre-service teacher education programmes, limited research has involved early childhood teacher education programmes in New Zealand university settings. Fishman and Davis’ (2006) research outlines the background of pre-service teacher education research and describes it as an

active and growing field. However, they state that the majority of research to understand pre-service teacher education has been conducted within the context of field placements. Kelly's (2006) work explores the challenges which teacher education researchers have faced in understanding the transfer of knowledge pre-service teacher education students are expected to undergo. Research has shown that teacher education students struggle to apply their learning at the university into their teaching practice (Kelly, 2006). This suggests that further research is needed to understand the processes which teacher education students are expected to engage.

In research conducted by Ludlow, Pedulla, Enterline Cochran-Smith, Loftus, Salomon-Fenandex, and Mitescu (2008), they recognized a significant gap in understanding pre-service teacher education in the lack of data from newly trained teachers about the adequacy of their teacher education programmes. Their research found that new teachers perceived their preparation as adequate upon graduation, but after one year in the teaching profession felt inadequately prepared to reflect on theories of teaching. Ludlow et al.'s (2008) research points towards a need to understand students' perspective of the professional learning and development they undergo in order to improve teacher education programmes.

While not conducted specifically to understand ECE or pre-service teacher education, Ako Aotearoa's (2011) report also briefly discussed how education students were found to be outliers in a number of engagement items at the university (p.13). Education students reported among the highest in categories such as students' involvement in enriching educational experiences, diversity and workplace preparation. This provides evidence that education students' experiences at university are unique to their programme and deserving of closer examination.

Research has also examined professional learning and development programmes for practising teachers. Early childhood teachers in New Zealand and internationally continue to undergo professional learning and development once they have started full time work, mainly through professional development workshops and programmes. Research undertaken with such programmes also provides evidence about areas which need further examination to understand professional learning and development for teachers. Nimmo and Park's (2009) research with seven American women, six of which

were senior members of an early childhood centre found that these early childhood teachers desired ways to be intellectually stimulated, but they also felt “intimidated, overwhelmed, and lacking in the required skills or dispositions” to engage with academic research or text (p.98). This research was supported by the work of van Wijk (2006) done in New Zealand to understand how practicing ECE teachers engage with published research. van Wijk (2006) found that teachers preferred face-to-face contact with researchers when engaging with text, and also favoured work done by practitioner-researchers rather than career academics. In order for research to impact teacher practices, “teachers say that research articles should have ideas and strategies to help them solve problems immediately,” and research findings should contain real-life stories and examples (van Wijk, 2006, p.67). van Wijk’s (2006) study found that face-to-face contact between researchers and practitioners helped teachers to cross the divide between academic text that “appears to be too theoretical, irrelevant, and unhelpful” and research which is engaging and applicable (p.67).

2.4 Links to current research

Previous research on student learning, text engagement and professional teacher development has provided an ample basis for further research. The research examined also offers valuable information to guide the current project. Learning theory suggests that understanding cultural and social factors effecting students’ identity of themselves may provide insight for understanding their experiences at university. Previous research with academic text suggests that examining in-depth readers’ goals and strategies can also provide helpful qualitative data for understanding students’ reading practices. Finally, past research about pre-service teacher education programmes evidences a lack of data for understanding ECE students’ experiences at the university. The current project aims to address these gaps in the research to add to this growing field of enquiry.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Methods

3.1 Paradigm

This research aimed to understand the experiences of, and beliefs about, engaging with academic text of a group of third-year ECE students. It sought to examine how the unique culture within the ECE programme influenced reading beliefs and practices. Another aim was to explore students' reading experiences and beliefs linked to their identity. These aims have driven the research methodology and methods chosen for this project.

The research used a qualitative methodological approach in order to examine students' experiences in-depth. Qualitative research enables one to explore and understand the "fluid, dynamic, situational, social, contextual, and personal" aspects of a specific group of people during a specific timeframe (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p.34). This in-depth approach also enabled the researcher to gain an "empathetic understanding" of these students' beliefs and experiences. Such an understanding in turn enabled this report to meet an additional aim: to represent student voice (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p.36). By examining a specific group of students to search for "patterns, themes and holistic features," this research aims to add to an academic body of knowledge about learning at tertiary institutions. But it does so with the understanding that this study will be specific to this group of learners at this point in time (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p.34).

3.2 Ethnography

Ethnography was selected as the appropriate research methodology for its ability to link the research questions and paradigm. The history of this methodology along with its current trends within educational research will be examined in order to further explain why this methodology was used.

The goal of the research to understand how the culture of ECE students experienced engagement with academic text led to an ethnographic approach. Angrosino (2007) defines the ethnographic method as "the collection of information about the material products, social relationships, beliefs, and values of a community"

(p.xv). Ethnography has its roots in anthropology and has traditionally been concerned with the “cultural” experiences of enduring and established groups (Angrosino, 2007). While it remains a contentious and evolving concept, Johnson and Christensen (2008) define culture as “a system of shared beliefs, values, practices, perspectives, folk knowledge, language, norms, rituals, and material objects and artefacts that members of a group use in understanding their world and in relating to others” (p.400). As such, ethnography explores the material and non-material aspects of a culture (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). While “culture” is traditionally thought about on a macro-level, societal scale, educational researchers have used ethnography to study micro-level cultures, such as the culture set-up within a single classroom (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). As this study sought to understand the experiences of a group of ECE students as a social construct, ethnography allowed the researcher to collect qualitative data from individuals, but with a focus on people as a collective group, not solely as individuals (Angrosino, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Ethnography seeks to gain a holistic picture of a culture (Angrosino, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Ethnography also asserts that understanding individuals’ perspectives is complex, and is best accomplished when a researcher attempts to “encounter the dynamics of the lived human experience” (Angrosino, 2007, p.2). Ethnographic studies seek to gain an insider perspective through placing the researcher in the participants’ lives. Or in other words, as stated by Vaughan (2001), ethnographers take “pleasure in being present by proxy” (p.45). Section 3.4 examines traditional ethnographic data collection tools to document how this methodology enables a researcher to encounter participants’ lived experiences.

Traditionally, ethnography has been used to study participants in their natural context. Visual participatory ethnography, however, is a growing trend within ethnographic research. It allows the researcher to engage with participants by asking them to construct images or artefacts in order to explore their experiences within a culture (Angrosino, 2007; Butler-Kisber, 2010; Pink, 2007). As Loveridge (2010) states, “there has been a move from doing research about young people, in which they are objects of research, to doing research which involves young people, in which they are participants in research or (co)researchers themselves (p.105). In sections 3.4.1 and 3.5.1 the visual participatory ethnographic method used in this study, identity portfolio

collages, will be outlined in more detail, but first an explanation of how ethnography has adjusted its methodological priorities to accommodate these trends. Pink's (2007) redefinition of ethnography as a way of experiencing culture rather than simply collecting artefacts about culture seeks to explain this trend. She defines ethnography "as an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture and society; rather than a method for the collection of data, ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture, and individuals)" (p.22). Seeing ethnography as a way to interact with culture allows researchers to explore cultures in a way which traditional ethnography does not. Visual participatory ethnography encourages interaction with participants, as explained further in section 3.5.1b. This allows a unique type of collaboration between researcher and participants, potentially fostering meaningful and helpful relationships.

Researchers have begun to argue that visual data can help access the lived experiences of others in a new, important way that supports the central aim of ethnography. Bragg (2011) found, particularly in her work with youth, that images "give a more privileged 'inside' perspective" than other methods allow (p.89). Butler-Kisber (2010) adds, "it is because qualitative researchers have been dissatisfied with traditional forms of representation, and because our world has become increasingly visually oriented, that attention has been turned to visual approaches in inquiry" (p.102). As society and cultures change, or more understanding is gained about the "visual" within culture, it is imperative that ethnographic researchers take on such tools. Visual participatory ethnography does not seek to replace words with images, but sees created images and artefacts "as an equally meaningful element of ethnographic work" (Pink, 2007, p. 6). This study actively incorporated visual participatory ethnography in order to utilize such insights about today's image-driven cultures.

Visual participatory ethnography enabled examination of students' identities and how they affected engagement with academic text; which was an aim of this study (research question number two). Collaborating with participants by making a visual representation of their experiences allowed the researcher access to data which may not have been encountered through traditional ethnographic data collection tools. This benefit will be described more fully in section 3.5.1c.

3.3 Participants

Ten third-year early childhood students at Victoria University participated in this study. They were selected because the researcher had recently tutored them (discussed further in section 3.3.2 and 3.8.2) and had a desire to understand their learning experiences. The next two sections (3.3.1 and 3.3.2) outline the criteria for participant selection, and the chart on page 61 outlines basic demographics of the participants

3.3.1 Students in EPSY 315.

This study tracked the experiences of ten students enrolled in Educational Psychology (EPSY) 315 (Learning Together: Young children and adolescents in early years settings) during the second semester of 2011. Nearing the end of their undergraduate study, these students were identified as being able to give an account of their experiences with academic text, and how their engagement with academic text may impact their future career aspirations. While there were three courses which all of these students were required to participate in during this specific semester, EPSY 315 was chosen because of its central focus on students being asked to read academic theory in order to understand and implement teacher practices. Academic text was thus a major learning tool for the class.

EPSY 315 is a twenty point course required for graduation in the programme. As listed in the course outline, learning objectives for this course were for students to:

1. develop advanced understandings of theoretical ideas that explain children's social and emotional development within a socio-cultural context;
2. explore these theoretical understandings in relation to practice in early childhood programmes and, in particular, with reference to the Te Whariki strands of *Belonging – Mana whenua* and *Contribution – Mana tangata*;
3. enhance their skills of critical analysis of developmental literature;
4. enhance their ability to identify the implications of research insights for their professional practice; and
5. be provided with opportunities to refine the articulation of their philosophy of practice/ theory of practice.

The course's delivery structure had five main components: 1) two-hour weekly lectures (mainly audio and visual material delivery for a class of approximately 90 students), 2) two-hour weekly break-off sessions called 'tutorials' (groups of 20-30 students), 3) individual weekly teaching placements/ practicums in ECE centres, 4) three written assessments (essay, course journal, and a portfolio of readings) and 5) a book of course readings.

Another intriguing aspect of this course that made the group suitable for this study was the cohesive nature of the tutorial group. This particular ECE programme is set up to keep students in the same tutorial group for the entire three years. This group had therefore been together for the previous two and a half years, creating a unique group environment that allowed the researcher to gain valuable data about the cultural and social nature of the group's learning. In order to access as many students' perspectives as possible, all twenty six students in the tutorial group were invited to take part in the study through individual information sheets and consent forms (see appendix A and B). Ten of the twenty six students agreed to participate in the study which required convenience sampling to be utilized. Therefore there is potential for a self-selection bias in the data.

3.3.2 Students who have existing relationship with researcher.

As mentioned, participants were also in part chosen based on the relationship which the researcher had developed as the students' tutor in the previous semester. The ethical considerations that arose from this relationship will be discussed in section 3.8.2. The researcher intended that her existing relationship would foster her ability to become what ethnographic fieldworkers often seek to obtain: the role of a participant observer, or "one who balances the objective collection of data with the subjective insights that result from an ongoing association with the people whose lives they seek to understand" (Flick, 2007, p.xv).

The visual participatory method supports the utilization of such relationships as it enables researchers and participants to discuss and interpret meaning together (Pink, 2007). It was consequently the researcher's goal to understand these participants' perspectives through this ongoing relationship and interaction with them. Given that a positive relationship built up with these students during semester one of the same year,

it seemed more likely than with a group of unknown students. The researcher's close age proximity and similar student-status with the participants may also have aided the study's goals to gain access to the participants' experiences and beliefs, evidenced by one participant who casually commented during a collage making session, "you totally get us and the student mentality". As this study also asked for a significant time commitment from students, having an existing positive relationship on which to build upon during the study may have aided the research by increasing and maintaining participant involvement (thirty-eight percent of the tutorial group were initially involved) with only twenty percent attrition resulting in a rich data set. However it is possible that this may have resulted from student interest in data collection tools, participant interest in being involved in research, or many other possible reasons.

3.4 Data collection methods

This study collected data through traditional ethnographic (formal interviews, observations of tutorial times, and examination of course documents) and non-traditional visual participatory (student identity portfolio collages) data collection methods (Angrosino, 2007; Pink, 2007). The researcher did not observe the students in their teaching placements in ECE centres due to the time limitations of the study, but the students did discuss some of their placements throughout the interviews. The researcher also attended five lectures to gain contextual understanding of the course through informal journaling. The researcher did not observe the lecturing or take narrative recordings due to ethical considerations for students who were not in the tutorial group, and also because it would have been difficult to observe the learning-in-action for the target students. Rather the researcher simply sat-in on these lectures to gain contextual information about the course. The researcher used these experiences to form some of the questions asked in formal interviews (such as asking students if they would generally go beyond the readings mentioned in lectures). The following sections outline the four formal data collection tools used in this study.

3.4.1 Identity portfolio collages.

The study used student identity portfolio collage, a visual participatory ethnographic method to both encourage student voice to lead conversation (rather than

being researcher led), and allow participants to collaborate with the researcher by creating an artefact to explain their experiences (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Nairn & Higgins, 2007; Pink, 2007). According to Bragg (2011), “visual methods are rarely used alone” due to their subjective and interpretive nature. As such, this visual data method was used in conjunction with interviews where students were asked to explain their collage to the researcher (see section 3.4.2 for more information about interview one).

Student identity portfolio collages are pictorial descriptions where the participants paste numerous materials (newspapers, magazines, photographs, etc) on a surface (in this case cardstock). Deriving from Nairn and Higgins’ (2007) study of university students’ identities and how these were being shaped by neoliberal policies and thought processes, the researcher provided resources for each participant to make a collage. While the current study design and shaping of research questions did not originate from Nairn and Higgins’ (2007) study, the researcher acknowledges that this reading is where she first came across the idea of collage portfolios. Each student then used these to tell stories of how he/she understood his/her experiences and identity as a learner and educator. For more specifics about what students were asked to include on the collage see appendix E. Collage was chosen as a visual data collection method as it has the potential to account for the complexity of situations and allows for depth and insight into understanding one’s experiences (Bragg, 2011). It is also a user-friendly activity that does not require fine art skills to make a meaningful collage. The collages will be discussed in the findings chapter of this report.

The collaging sessions were set-up as a small group activity during out-of-class time. They were arranged to be held during the participants’ most preferential times. Due to scheduling conflicts, the researcher decided to hold three collaging sessions over two days during the third and fourth weeks of the semester. The course coordinator and tutor indicated that these dates were good options due to course work. They also left enough time to gather student consent forms in advance. All collaging sessions were held on campus in a reserved room. One of the sessions was held on a day without scheduled classes for these students, and the other two were held during breaks on a day in which the students had both lectures and tutorials scheduled on campus. By holding the sessions on campus and working around students’ schedules, the researcher

hoped to create a comfortable space where students were encouraged to voice their opinions and experiences. Holding separate collaging sessions also seemed to aid the research process, as two new participants joined the study after the first session was held. Section 3.8.1 discusses the ethical concerns of having group sessions, as well as the rationale for offering students food and non-alcoholic beverages during this time. However, it is worth noting at this point that these refreshments seemed to help students in gaining a sense of comfort and excitement around the portfolio identity collages, evidenced by the numerous comments made about being thankful for the food and drink.

During these sessions the researcher provided glue and scissors for each participant, and ensured a variety of materials (multiple types of magazines, newspapers, university information, early childhood printed resources, international resources, children's books, etc) were available (see image 1 below for an idea about provided resources). Besides the resources to make a collage, participants were also given information and directions about this particular collage activity. In case students were unfamiliar with collaging, the researcher provided an information sheet which attempted to provide them an overview of collage (see appendix F). The researcher made herself available during these sessions to print anything (photos, symbols, etc) which students requested. Participants were invited to work on their collages outside of the scheduled times if they wanted more time or other resources (three of the ten participants chose to do this) (see appendix A, B and E for information given to participants about the study). At least three students commented that they were impressed with the amount of resources available for their use; one of the participating students stated in her formal interview, "there were heaps of awesome resources, like just the right words all coming out with it". She also commented during the collage making session, "This (making the collage) makes me want to be an early childhood teacher even more- reflecting and thinking, I could do this with the kids, too, especially on a rainy day". Such comments, and the fact that students were given the opportunity to participate in the study without making a collage (as explained to them in the information sheet, see appendix A; and participant collaging directions, see appendix E) yet no students choose to do this, affirmed that this activity was a positive experience

for the participants. Evidence that this was an appropriate adjunct tool for data collection with these participants is harder to verify as it is not possible to ascertain how the study would have unfolded without the collages. However, the researcher believes that by providing a positive, collaborative experience through the collaging sessions, the research data was enriched and participants were enabled to authentically share their experiences. Further benefits and limitations of the collages will be discussed in section 3.5.1.

Image 1: Some of the resources provided to participants during collage sessions



3.4.2 Interviews.

Interviews are often a part of ethnographic research (Angrosino, 2007). They are a way for a researcher to begin to understand what an experience means to an individual. Rather than simply observing a behavior, interviews allow researchers to ask questions to seek out the participants' understanding (Angrosino, 2007). While this study sought to understand students' experiences and perspectives, it acknowledges that students' quotes or explanations given during such interviews are not 'objective' accounts. Nonetheless, these are a form of discourse and illustrate the student perspective. This study utilized two formal interview rounds, discussed below.

Upon completion of their collages, the researcher scheduled (at their convenience) and completed with each participant a formal, audio-recorded, one-on-one interview. By using a semi-structured interview process, this study aimed to

accommodate student responses while also strategically collecting appropriate data to answer the research question(s) (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). In this interview students were first asked to share their collage stories, followed by a number of semi-structured questions. All participants agreed to take part in the first interview, which were carried out in weeks three through six of the ten-week semester (thus these were all collected before the two week semester break and before any assignments were handed in). These interviews were between twenty-five and forty-five minutes and were held on campus. For an outline, see appendix G.

In order to understand students' perspectives, experiences and beliefs of academic text across an entire semester, and after doing an initial data analysis of the first interview, the researcher decided to conduct a second interview with each willing participant. These interviews were about ten to twenty minutes in length, were again audio recorded and also held on campus (with the exception of one interview which was completed via email at the student's request because she had left town). In order to capture students' thoughts as close to the end of the semester as possible, these interviews were all done in the final two weeks (week ten and study week [or week eleven]) of the semester. Eight of the ten participants agreed to take part in this interview, which was held during two weeks in which students were turning in the second and third assignments for the course (students had already received marks and feedback on assignment one). For an outline of interview number two see appendix H. (Note: one of the participants said she was unable to do the second interview, and another did not get back in touch with the researcher.)

3.4.3 Observations.

The researcher also observed five tutorial times and collected narrative recordings. Observations are a crucial part of ethnographic research as the researcher attempts to become an observer participant of a group's lived experiences (Angrosino, 2007). As an observer participant, the researcher takes on a role that is "somewhat detached, interacting only on specific occasions, perhaps to conduct interviews or attend organized functions" (p.6). During these observations, the researcher had minimal interaction with students because of the time limitations, and because the

researcher sought to have minimal effect on the classroom out of respect for the tutor and those students who were not taking part in the study (Angrosino, 2007). Interaction with participants mainly occurred during break times, when the researcher allowed students to ask her questions. During these five, nearly two-hour tutorial sessions, the researcher recorded as many details as possible (including but not limited to class activities, participants' comments and actions, and the tutor's comments and actions) in each situation so that 1) no details of the social situation were taken for granted and 2) questions could be formulated about what was occurring in order to understand the students' perspectives of these events (Angrosino, 2007). The interactions with participants, and the narrative recordings provided extremely valuable data, which is discussed in Chapters Four and Five of this report.

3.4.4 Document analysis.

Analysis of course documentation, mainly the course outline and the course reading book (which contained most of the weekly assigned texts) was undertaken. Angrosino (2007) argues that by analyzing such documents the researcher is able unobtrusively to search for patterns and questions about materials which are a part of a group's lived experiences. The researcher mainly used these artefacts to understand the course set-up (assignment due dates, when and how readings were assigned) and as an aid in the interview process to recognize and understand participants' references to specific texts. While the course readings were not examined in depth due to time limitations, they provided insight into the type of material the students were expected to engage. These data will be discussed in Chapter Four.

3.5 Analysis of data collection methods

While section 3.4 has outlined how and why each data collection method was selected, the following section will analyze the benefits and limitations of each method. As visual participatory ethnographic data is a non-traditional method for data collection, more analysis of this method was made in this report than for the three traditional methods of interviews, observations and document analysis.

3.5.1 Analysis of identity portfolio collages.

The student identity portfolio collage was a critical data collection tool. It provided four benefits to this study: 1) it served as a tool for student reflection for interview preparation, 2) it promoted student agency in the research process, 3) it captured a holistic picture of student learning, and 4) it helped engage students in thinking about their learning. After the benefits of this method are discussed, limitations will also be addressed.

3.5.1a Tool for student reflection for interview preparation.

The creation of the collage served as a reflection tool preparing students for interview questions. Without prior reflection on their experiences and stories, students may have felt unprepared to reflect in depth on their entire three-year programme. Visual data is therefore an “elicitation tool” (Bragg, 2011; Harper, 2002). Images generate different kinds of conversation and provide a way to begin talking about particular topics. In this study the collages seemed to be a stimulus for the first interviews. The first interview with the collages seemed to permit the researcher to access the existing rapport she had with the students and therefore achieve depth in the majority of these interviews. Some students struggled in the second interview (which was four to eight weeks after making the collage) to reflect on the current semester when they came into the interview with no recently-completed reflection exercise. The second interview did, however, occur during a busy time of the semester for assignment due dates, possibly leaving the students mentally fatigued. Students were still, however, able to offer insightful information during these second interviews. Some students who represented metaphors, analogies or layers in their collages demonstrated further creative thought than required of them, which allowed them to share even more insightful reflection of their experiences.

3.5.1b Way to promote student agency and collaboration in research process.

The collage activity seemed to help students reflect on the content of the interviews, as well as help foster a collaborative relationship between the participants and the researcher. Although the collages in this study were completed individually, the activity was a shared experience where students and researcher shared space and

resources. This relationship and experience helped to break down some of the power structures inherent in the research process stemming from issues where the researcher is typically a more qualified individual than the participants. As outlined in the methodology section of this report (3.2), the intention of the research was to collaborate with participants in order to better understand their lived experiences. Pink (2007) states, “by focusing on collaboration and the idea of ‘creating something together’, agency becomes shared between the researcher and informant” (p.57). Because the researcher had been in a position of authority before the study, as their tutor, it was especially important for her to gain access to their lived experiences and perspectives for this study as a collaborator with them. The researcher wanted these students to see her in a different role than that of tutor, but also to see her as a researcher who wanted to work with them. The collaging sessions facilitated this breaking down of power barriers. It was an unanticipated outcome for the researcher to see how much this shared experience allowed for conversations between the researcher and participants which enabled them to see her in a new way. Participants freely discussed future plans, hobbies, partners, and weekend activities during these sessions, evidencing a high degree of trust. The collage activity did not erase the power imbalance inherent in the research process entirely. Students asked questions such as, “is this right?,” “is this what you want?,” demonstrating that the participants were aware that this activity was still set up and maintained by the researcher.

In addition to helping break down power barriers, the collaging sessions allowed each student to have an artefact to discuss with the researcher. This appeared to seemingly enable the students to have ownership of, and be more engaged in, the research process. Butler-Kisber (2010) supports the idea that “collages initiate discussion and provide focal points for delving more deeply in a relatively unthreatening way” (p.115). Students were encouraged to share their collage with the researcher at the beginning of the interview so that their experiences were forefront to the conversation. This structure enabled students to share the stories of their choice, and it required the researcher to listen to their stories first in order to understand their experiences. It was intended to encourage collaboration and allow students to guide the conversation so the researcher could effectively represent student experiences and

beliefs when answering her main research question. It also allowed the researcher to individualize interviews by probing students with semi-structured questions in order to explore their comments and stories. While the collage activity had the potential to “place the producers in more powerful roles, in which they can see themselves as creators or directors” (Bragg, 2011, p.97), there was no evidence that participants took on this persona.

3.5.1c Opportunity to capture a holistic picture of student learning and identity.

By allowing students to lead the conversation and reflect on experiences and beliefs that were important to them (not necessarily academic text), the data from this study potentially provides a more holistic, accurate and enriched picture of their learning experiences. Bragg (2011) discusses how visual methods can often represent “emotional, private dimensions of subjectivity and experience and issues that are hard to articulate fully” better than verbal methods (p.93). The visual collage process, along with the verbal interviews about their experiences, enabled the researcher to not simply take a one dimensional picture of what it means for students to learn or engage with academic text. The collages allowed her to consider aspects of learning and reading at the university that may have otherwise been uncovered. Notably, when initially discussing their collage, no students discussed academic text in significant depth as a tool for their learning. Instead many chose to discuss the process they went through when moving away from home or the journey into ECE, and the collage activity helped remind the researcher that students are going through unique challenges which do effect their engagement with academic text. These findings will be discussed further in Chapters Four and Five.

3.5.1d Way to help engage tertiary students in thinking about their learning.

While not a direct benefit of this study, one could also argue that this data collection method assisted participants in thinking about their learning. One excerpt from the researcher’s notes of the first collaging session included this statement from Inel, “Wow that was really fun, it helped me reflect, it was like professional development”. Bragg (2011) too found that visual data collection methods and “the practices involved and the company and interest of others help to generate new

perspectives, connections and thought processes” (p.95). By fostering thinking about their own learning and identity, the collages may have contributed to or shaped their learning, even encouraging them to engage in learning during their final semester of university and beyond graduation. Visual methods as a “tool for thinking with” encourage a type of reflection which is beyond the thinking that language stimulates at times (Bragg, 2011, p.95). Burns (2003, as cited in Butler-Kisber, 2010) stated, “the images enable meaning to travel in ways that words cannot” (p.104). As such, some of the thinking which students did during the collage sessions may not have been verbalized in the interviews, but nonetheless it may have fostered a new type of expression and thinking. Reflective practices and tools (such as the collage activity) are often promoted within teacher education, making this type of activity especially relevant for these students.

While the researcher found the student identity portfolio collages a beneficial and intriguing part of the research, there were limitations to this data collection tool and ways in which the researcher would consider altering the methods in future research. The two main limitations in some collages and interviews were: 1) a lack of deep thinking or reflection, and 2) limited direct connections to the research questions. Both limitations will be discussed below.

3.5.1e Lack of deep thinking or reflection evidenced in some collages.

While a benefit of the collages discussed above was that they served as a reflection tool, not all participants used as much forethought and reflective thinking as others, or were not able to articulate this thinking during their interviews. It is important for researchers to remember that what students express verbally or visually is not the full extent of their thought processes. Bragg (2011) explained, “it cannot be assumed that those who produce images will automatically be able to articulate or even recognize the insights and understandings implicit in them” (p.92). The researcher recognizes that this potential lack of deep thinking and articulation could have been in response to the directions given to participants about the collages. As the directions were open-ended and provided options, they may have been overwhelming or unclear, stunting insights that students would otherwise have had. Below is an excerpt from the participants’

collaging directions (full handout included in appendix E). It states what the students were asked to represent on their collages.

Excerpt from the collage directions for research participants

For this stage of the research project, please make a collage to **represent your experiences as a university student learning to become an early childhood teacher.**

Things you may want to include/ represent (either visually in your collage or audibly in your interview): (You do **not** have to include all of these- they are simply ideas)

- Thoughts, feelings, values of your experience at university and teacher practicums
- Particular experiences which were pivotal (positive or negative)
- References to specific people, objects, or resources which have impacted your experience
- Items which explain your identity as a learner or a teacher
- Your hopes and aspirations for the future and how these are tied or not tied to your university experience

These directions may have led some students to focus on one suggestion, typically solely the third bullet point, “references to specific people, objects, or resources which have impacted your experience,” rather than doing original thinking about what to represent. The researcher could also have accounted for this issue and possibly better evaluated whether the collage activity helped facilitate participants’ reflection. This could be done by asking participants how they interpreted the instructions for the collage activity.

While the activity was designed to allow students to engage with the questions in a personal way, the researcher observed some students who did not seem to take the time to read the collaging directions very thoroughly. Instead, they asked questions such as, “What are we supposed to put on here?” In order to foster higher level reflection, the researcher could have given more time for students to reflect before making their collage, provided more verbal guidance to participants to stimulate their thinking or specifically asked students to make a collage of a *metaphor* for learning to be an early childhood teacher, rather than simply to represent literal people, experiences, and objects. Asking the students to create metaphors may have allowed them to reflect on such ideas, but then to move into a higher order of reflection. This reflection could have been insightful for this research, though this new challenge may also have limited student participation in the collage activity as well.

3.5.1f Limited direct connections to the research questions.

As discussed in the benefits section above, the participants' collages helped the researcher explore some factors affecting their experiences at university. However, it may have been desirable to see further direct links from the collages to academic text. While the researcher did not want to require participants to discuss this topic, but instead to choose whether if it would be included, it was a challenge to then link the collage discussions to participants' experiences and beliefs with academic text. The researcher could have asked students to make a collage solely focused on their beliefs and experiences of reading academic text, but this may have meant forgoing more meaningful data about participants' learning at the university. The provided resources may have widened the gap between students' academic text beliefs and their collages. However, as participants were invited to take the collages home and include their own resources, it cannot be certain that the resources were the cause of this. One way the researcher could have avoided this uncertainty would have been to ask participants whether there was anything they would have liked to represent on their collage but did not for any reason.

While identity portfolio collage had both benefits and limitations, overall it was a valuable research tool which seemingly improved relationships between the researcher and participants, and deepened the data for this study. Chapter Four of this report will include pictures of all ten participants' collages as well as comments students made about these collages.

3.5.2 Analysis of interviews.

Interviews were the key data source for this study. They provided in-depth information about students' beliefs and experiences of engaging with academic text. A main limitation was the potential for stunting student feedback due to the formalized nature of a research interview and having a data recording device present. The researcher hoped to mitigate this by working with students with whom she had an existing relationship, but she is aware that students may still have felt uncomfortable. As students were asked to recount experiences across their three-year programme and not just recent events, there is also a greater likelihood that this subjective data included

inaccuracies of experiences. The final limitation of interview data is the researcher's inexperience. Interviewing is a challenging task in which researchers always have room for growth, but the researcher often found when examining interview transcripts that there were areas she could have probed to gain a deeper understanding.

An unexpected benefit of the interviews was the conversations between the researcher and participants before and after the formal recorded segments. As an ethnographic study, it was some of these conversations that gave the researcher a truly up-close, lived example of these students' perspectives. The researcher's notes of the first interview with one participant provide one such account when a participant asked what the researcher was finding in her data. After the researcher's initial reply that she was finding it interesting to hear about the two worlds which students were experiencing of ECE centres and university, the student's response was that she thought she would never go to university because she did not believe she was 'an academic.' Her experience was that at university students are 'forced' into an academic box, even though students question this given they learn in different ways. While the researcher did not include these observations in her final data analysis, these sorts of discussion helped the researcher make important decisions about the data collection process (such as deciding to conduct a second interview because of the sense that as assignment deadlines were approaching, students were faced with new challenges regarding academic text).

3.5.3 Analysis of observations.

While the observational data was important for beginning to understand students' experiences, it was difficult to gain an up-close perspective of these experiences from that data alone. The researcher found the interviews much more helpful for understanding students' experiences and beliefs; yet the observations were an important tool for gaining access to students' lives during their busy final semester of university study. It could be argued that access was successfully gained by the researcher as a participant observer of tutorial sessions. The students were willing to ask questions and talk to the researcher throughout the study. While having a researcher in their environment led to initial confusion on some occasions (the researcher was

occasionally asked by the participants or other students why she was doing the study), the novelty and trust built between participants and researcher resulted in disclosure of information which may not have been uncovered in all research relationships or settings (such as students revealing they have not read course material). The unobtrusive access of the researcher was also evidenced by the fact that students who chose not to participate in the study would interact with the researcher on breaks, and whenever the researcher would ask if she was able to sit next to a participant during lecture or tutorial sessions, she always received positive feedback. This suggests that the researcher was not an imposition on the learning environment. Overall, the observations were a way for the researcher to continue to build relationships with participants, as the observations positioned the researcher in the students' space in a positive and accessible way.

3.5.4 Analysis of document analysis.

Although a thorough analysis of all course documents was not possible due to time limitations, having access to the course outline and readings allowed the researcher important insight into students' experiences. The course outline provided an overview of the course and its aims, and helped the researcher understand students' schedules. A closer examination of all assigned text may have enabled the researcher to understand better the concepts, vocabulary and jargon these students encountered, as well as allowed her to ask specific questions about particular readings if students referenced them in their interviews. Although this further analysis may have helped explore students' experiences, it was not critical for answering the research questions.

3.6 Reliability and validity

Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, consideration was taken to ensure the research was consistent and stable (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Angrosino (2007) defines reliability in qualitative data collection as "the degree to which the process of research has been consistent and reasonably stable over time and across various researchers and methods" (p.60). Reliability was ensured by using a systematic fashion for notes and narrative recordings. Other ways in which the researcher sought reliability were through repeated regularity of observations and interviews and use of an audio recorder for accuracy. By audio recording interviews, the researcher was able to

re-listen to all data to check that questions were asked consistently and quotations were precise.

Angrosino (2007) defines validity as “a measure of the degree to which an observation actually demonstrates what it appears to demonstrate” (p.58). In order to ensure the interpretation of data was appropriate and that this research was trustworthy, a number of validity checks were put in place including: 1) participant feedback (or member checking) on initial data analysis, 2) use of verisimilitude (or low inference descriptions) in narrative recordings and data analysis, 3) data and methods triangulation, and 4) researcher reflexivity to avoid bias (Angrosino, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). A brief comment about each of these checks will be made below.

By seeking participant feedback on the data analysis, the researcher sought confirmation that the analysis accurately portrayed the participants’ experiences and beliefs, which was the main research question (see section 4.1 for more information on the member checks) (Angrosino, 2007). Verisimilitude is a test of validity which determines whether data is representative of participants’ beliefs and experiences rather than an interpretation solely by the researcher (Angrosino, 2007). Verisimilitude was controlled for through member checking by ensuring the researcher interpreted data using low inference descriptions which participants agreed with. Data collection methods were triangulated by including multiple data collection tools (discussed in section 3.4), and the data analysis was triangulated by the researcher basing key findings upon data which was uncovered through multiple data sets and methods. The researcher attempted to support main research findings with at least two data collection methods (see Chapter Four for these data). Lastly, researcher reflexivity was attempted in order to control researcher bias, and this was accomplished by the researcher discussing any personal experiences and interpretations with her supervisors and within this report (in the following paragraph) in order to acknowledge personal bias (Angrosino, 2007).

As mentioned above, one way to control for researcher bias is through a process of transparency where the researcher acknowledges in the research report any bias upon the data (Angrosino, 2007). While an ethnographic study allows for a researcher to interact with participants on a regular basis and to become an instrument of data collection (Johnson & Christensen, 2008), it is still important to practise researcher

reflexivity in ethnographic studies. Butler-Kisber (2010) argues that collage can also serve as a researcher reflexivity tool, and as such the researcher has included her student identity collage as a way of discussing her researcher identity (see image 2 below).

Image 2: Lacey's identity portfolio collage



This collage conveys the researcher's desire to exist as an educator and learner who pushes herself outside of accepted, conventional practice. This is conveyed by the large image in the middle of the collage with a black box around it, and the researchers' experiences and ideas mainly outside of this box. It also shows the researcher's aspiration for change in education to lead towards holistic development of students and society, conveyed by the right hand side of the collage. The collage also illustrates the researcher's mainly positive experiences of learning and education, and notably text, which have contributed towards her love of learning. This is represented by the left hand side of the collage. These main ideas have developed her lens in which she views this project and which motivated the researcher throughout. As this qualitative ethnographic data seeks to address the contextual differences which individuals bring to

an experience, readers of this research report should be aware of this researcher bias (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

3.8 Ethical considerations

This research was approved of by Victoria University's Faculty of Education Human Ethics committee prior to the commencement of this study (approval number SEPI/2011/34 RM18522). The following two main issues were discussed and addressed during this research: 1) treatment and protection of all human participants involved with the study, and 2) issues of researcher authority. Both of these issues will be discussed below.

3.8.1 Treatment and protection of participants involved.

The researcher identified treatment and protection of all research participants as the most important ethical issue to be considered (Angrosino, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). In order to protect participants, the researcher first explained to the entire class, through a five minute verbal presentation during their first tutorial (after gaining the lecturer's and tutor's permission), the project's goal of understanding a community of learners (issues of authority during the recruitment process are discussed in the following section 3.8.2). This was done so that students would not feel left out the study, but would instead be informed of the research goal. In order to protect participants further, the researcher sought students' informed consent by obtaining student consent forms before collecting any data (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The researcher gave out consent forms to all twenty six students within the tutorial group (see appendix B), and lecturers and tutors involved with the class as a whole (see appendix D) so that casual observations could be made within lectures. The researcher also sought to make it clear to students that interviews (formal and informal) would only be conducted with students who chose to participate. All students who participated are discussed in the final report, while those who chose not to take part were not included in the research process or report and any data from them, for example their actions and conversations, were not collected. The researcher also attempted to minimize her presence in lectures and tutorials as much as possible so as not to impede on students' learning.

Participants are also protected by the use of pseudonyms when discussing them or their data in the report. This helped keep data confidential, and participants were informed that this would be done (see appendix A and B) (Angrosino, 2007; Flick, 2007). Students' identities were also kept confidential by the researcher blurring any information on the collages that would give away their identity (required on only one collage). Participants' answers to interview questions were never discussed with other research participants, lecturers or tutors, and participants were told they could withdraw from the study at any time (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) (see appendix A and B).

Protecting students' time was an important consideration, given that these students had a full course load of papers during their final year. The researcher communicated conservative time estimates when inviting students to take part in the research, and allowed them to choose times which suited them. The researcher decided that in order to conserve students' time she would only ask participants to review the analysis of interviews, rather than full transcripts. This was done via email. The intention was to enable participants to examine more fully the researcher's interpretation of their beliefs and experiences, therefore allowing the research questions to be more adequately addressed. The final research report was also made available through email to all participants (Flick, 2007). In order to acknowledge students' contributions to this research, they were able to keep their identity collages (Pink, 2007). The researcher also provided pizza and non-alcoholic beverages at the collaging sessions. The researcher hoped this would encourage participation, without misleading students into participating. Thus all plans were pre-approved by the ethics committee to ensure their appropriateness.

A further consideration was the potential for students to face uncomfortable realities about their engagement with academic text. This was minimized by explaining to students that honest reflection on their experiences has potential to improve learning for other students (see appendix A). By making the final report accessible to students, the researcher intended that students could gain insight into their own experiences as well.

Another ethical consideration was that of holding group collage sessions. The group setting meant participants were known to one another and their collages could be viewed by each other. The researcher accounted for this issue by notifying participants of this and giving them the choice to work on their collage at home or in private (see appendix A and B). Arguably the group sessions did not negatively affect students' participation but rather encouraged and supported their participation. No student chose to work solely by herself, with most participants choosing to come to the session with a friend who was also participating. Being able to come to the activity in pairs potentially helped them to feel comfortable and to share ideas and resources for collage construction.

3.8.2 Issues of researcher authority and existing relationship.

As the researcher had an existing relationship with this group of students (as their tutor in the previous semester), the researcher anticipated gaining permission from the majority of students in the class in order to collect data, although the researcher did not want this pre-existing relationship to guilt students into participating in the research. This pre-existing relationship created a unique research dynamic. The researcher's positive relationships with these students fostered her ability to engage in the role of an observer participant. Some of the other potential negative effects of working with students whom she had tutored included: hesitation from students to participate based on grades previously assigned, and students' belief of the researcher as having a position of authority. The researcher decided to proceed with this group of students after taking into account the New Zealand Association of Research in Education's (NZARE) 2010 Code of Ethics section 2.5, which states that it is particularly important for researchers to "develop relationships based on trust and mutual respect," when questioning participants on their educational beliefs, practices and/or perspectives. The researcher tried to address the issue of authority in a number of ways (discussed as well in section 3.5.1b), one of which was through the recruitment of participants (also briefly discussed in section 3.8.1). Students were given space to choose to have no involvement in the study by the researcher presenting a five minute introduction of the project during the first week of tutorial, which was followed-up by the current tutor's verbal reminder the next week to turn in consent forms. Students were required to turn in consent forms to

a third party (a school administrator) to maintain their confidentiality, and to eliminate any power relations between the tutor, researcher or participants choosing to (or not to) take part.

3.9 Conclusion

The methodology employed in this study included traditional and non traditional aspects of ethnography. It was intended to be most appropriate for understanding the culture of this group of students and their experiences and beliefs of engaging with academic text. The researcher aimed to collaborate with participants to both empower them while also gaining a deeper understanding of their perspectives. By using four different data collection tools, it was intended that this study would uncover in-depth and valuable information about students' engagement with academic text. Limitations to the methods employed in this study were also discussed, and while the one-year time frame perhaps impacted on this research's ability to achieve full collaboration and understanding, the data uncovered in this study offers areas for further research to take place. The next chapter will present the findings of this research, and highlight patterns of students' beliefs and experiences of engaging with academic text.

Chapter 4

Results and Findings

This chapter outlines the key findings from this study and explains the process for data analysis. The chapter begins with the study's data analysis methods, followed by a brief document analysis. Findings are explored through individuals' data first, including an overview of each participant and her reading beliefs and experiences. These data evidence the varying complexity of the ten participants' reading engagement. Finally, the data is synthesized to locate patterns in reading beliefs and experiences across the ten participants. This helps to illuminate key findings such as the effect of assessment and participants' understanding of the learning process upon their reading engagement. The final section of the chapter examines reader identities in relation to academic text.

4.1 Data analysis methods

A descriptive and iterative qualitative data analysis method incorporating looking for patterns in the data has been used in this study (Angrosino, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). To this end, the exploration of patterns in the data, and, more specifically, patterns surrounding behaviours and attitudes towards engaging with academic text, was the focus (Angrosino, 2007). This type of data analysis is common for ethnographers as Angrosino (2007) explains; "analyzing ethnographic data is often oriented towards searching for patterns of behaviours, interactions and practices" (p. xiii). The researcher chose to use interim data analysis as a way to find patterns in her qualitative data as this type of analysis allowed the use of an exploratory process in order to identify key findings. To facilitate identification of these patterns, the researcher used coding and category systems which will be discussed further in the following paragraphs (Flick, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

The two main research questions, along with two subsidiary research questions, focused the attention of the researcher when identifying such important data and patterns during the data analysis stages of the project. As discussed previously, the two main research questions in this study are: 1) What are the experiences of and beliefs about engaging with academic text of third year early childhood education students at Victoria University? and 2) How does the student's identity affect their perspective and

engagement with academic text? These also included exploring two subsidiary questions: 1) What encourages or discourages these students to engage with academic text?; and finally, 2) What value do these students place on learning through academic text in relation to both their current course and their plans for the future?

The process for data analysis followed a semi-structured format in order to allow for preliminary patterns and codes to be identified and modified. After the first round of formal interviews and five initial observations, an attempt to identify initial patterns of exploring text engagement and student identity was made so that the researcher could decide the best data collection process and to structure interviews appropriately to seek additional understanding of these patterns. The researcher also decided at this point to not select specific students on which to focus the research data, although she initially thought this would be necessary; instead she chose to include all ten participants given that the number was manageable and substantially increased the data set. A second round of interviews was undertaken to further explore students' views of assigned text after the students had been eight to nine weeks into the course.

During the coding process, as recommended by Flick (2007) all interview transcriptions were put into NVivo, a data analysis programme, where the researcher initially identified nine codes in which to begin sorting the data to address the research questions. During the semi-structured process of data analysis and coding, the researcher's original master list which included nine codes was modified into thirteen main codes and twenty subsidiary codes for the final data analysis. All codes align with the research questions and the patterns identified from this coding will be discussed in sections 4.4 through 4.6 and in Chapter Five of this report. The final step of the data analysis was member checking with all ten participants. As these data examine student perspective (not the researcher's perspective), the final data analysis was emailed to all ten participants to ensure an emic perspective was achieved, or a perspective of the people in the community (Angrosino, 2007). Seven of the ten participants replied via email and gave agreement with the analysis of their data; this feedback was a positive indicator that an emic perspective was achieved.

As the data discussed in the remaining sections of this report includes data from students' identity portfolio collages, a brief look at how the researcher analysed the visual collage data is needed. In an effort to allow students to explain and interpret their collage, the researcher has relied mainly on students' explanations of their own images rather than attempting to analyse these images through her perspective. However, to understand and explore students' identities either as learners or readers, the researcher has attempted to link collage data to quotes from students. Visual ethnographer, Pink (2007), explained, "a different approach that begins with the premise that the purpose of analysis is not to translate visual evidence into verbal knowledge, but to explore the relationship between visual and other (including verbal) knowledge" (p.119). As such, in this study it was not the researcher's goal to translate the collage images into words, but rather to link participants' visual representations (collages) to their verbal explanations.

4.2 Document analysis

The researcher initially utilized course documents (course outline and assigned readings) to gain an overall context of the course content and reading materials. These documents enabled the researcher to gain a greater understanding of the students' responses and behaviours elicited through the interview and observational data sources. Due to time limitations, the assigned text was not analysed in depth, however the researcher did want to give some initial consideration to what types of text these students were looking at in this course. Such consideration aided understanding of these student's engagement practices with text.

Brief examination identified that there were thirty separate articles or chapters assigned in the course reader. Of these, one to two texts were identified each week by the tutor as most helpful for students to read. This suggests students were not expected to read every article in the course reader. Beyond the course reader, a recommended reading list of 48 additional articles was listed on Blackboard¹ which the students were encouraged to use for their assignments (although these articles were not necessarily discussed in lecture or tutorial). The text in this course was written from 1968 to 2010, and was published in six different countries: Australia, England, New Zealand, Norway,

¹ Blackboard is the online interactive learning system used at this university

The Czech Republic, and The United States of America. Authors included a number of famous development theorists such as Barbara Rogoff and Eric Erikson, as well as two articles from one of the lecturers of the course.

In the course reader, the table of contents was split into ten weeks, each week being labelled with a topic such as “Attachment relationships and the development of security,” with two to four readings under each week. The separate reading list which was supplied online for students who did not buy the course reader, and for students to refer to when collecting sources for their assignments, was also split into the same weekly topics so that students could easily identify which articles correlated with specific assignment topics. The readings in the course reader were copied from their original sources and therefore differed in font style and size. This affected the overall appearance of density of text and the number of pages in each article; for example, a large number of the A4 pages were made up of two separate A5 pages copied onto one A4 page. There were 273 pages of text in the course reader, and 288 pages in total (including blank pages and table of contents). The number of A4 sized pages of text per article varied from two pages to twenty seven pages (including reference pages). The average number of pages of these thirty articles in the course reader was 9.1, the mode number of pages for one article was 4, and the median number of pages was 8.5.

4.3 The individual students

This section describes the ten participants, and their identity portfolio collages. In order to understand the individuals in this study, more details are given below about each participant along with her identity portfolio collage. Data presented below synthesises information about each participant’s identity collage, all data from interviews conducted with the participant, and observational data if appropriate. These findings will be discussed in more detail in the remaining chapters of this report; however, the data presented in this chapter was crucial for the researcher’s analysis.

Similar to other studies in early childhood education (Nimmo & Park, 2009), of ninety three students enrolled in the EPSY 315 course, only one was male; however, this male student was not in the selected tutorial group, thus all ten participants were female. Three of the participants identified as being in the eleven to twenty age range,

and seven of them selected the twenty one to thirty age range. None of the ten participants had any teaching experience in an early childhood centre before entering the programme. While there were students enrolled in this course who were currently working in early childhood centres as part of their professional teaching development, the University had deliberately placed them in a separate tutorial group.

Although it was not a specific research question, seven of the ten participants mentioned that they worked part time during their full time studies. The type of work varied from occasional relief teaching, to regularly scheduled ten to twenty hours a week in retail positions. Therefore the researcher chose to include “current work status” as a relevant detail due to the time demands it adds to a students’ schedule and thus potential to change students’ reading habits (discussed further in Chapter Five). All names used below are pseudonyms, and they are presented in alphabetical order. No names which appear in the collages represent a participants’ name thus these names have been left in the collages. See Table 1 below for a quick overview of the ten participants, followed by individual overviews of each participant. While the chart below presents basic demographic information about participants, no information was gathered about the academic or reading skills of participants as this lay outside the scope of this research which was exploring students’ *experiences* with academic text.

Table 1: Overview of ten participants

Name	Age range	Previous training	Work status during programme	Goal(s) upon graduation
Amanda	21 to 30	Did 1 year of Psychology at Victoria University before this programme	Worked part time in a retail position	Amanda wants to get a job in an early childhood centre.
Brooke	21 to 30	None	Worked as occasional relief teacher a couple of times a month and as a nanny for 12 hours a week	Brooke plans to go overseas for a couple of years and then come back to New Zealand and get registered to work as an ECE teacher.
Caitlin	11 to 20	In secondary school did the Gateway ECE training course	Worked as an occasional relief teacher when requested	Caitlin plans to travel and work overseas (and partly in New Zealand due to her scholarship) as a nanny or early childhood teacher.
Diane	21 to 30	No professional ECE training but has 2 children of her own.	Worked part time in a retail position; 8 hours a week	Diane has a job lined up, and plans to teach and become a fully registered teacher.
Erin	21 to 30	Earned a certificate in being a nanny	Worked as a nanny for 15 hours a week	Erin wants to get a job and experience being in the ECE field for a few years, or to continue into her fourth year of studies to get her diploma in primary school teaching.
Fiona	11 to 20	None	Worked up to 17 hours a week in a retail position and was heavily involved at her church	Fiona will do a 1 year internship with her church and work to save some money so that she can then go help in an orphanage overseas, possibly Africa.
Gabrielle	11 to 20	In secondary school did the Gateway ECE training course	Worked as an occasional relief teacher 1-3 days a week or when requested	Gabrielle plans to get a job as soon as possible (she may have one lined up already) and to work towards managing a centre.
Hester	21 to 30	Did 1 year of Art History before this programme	Worked as a nanny for 9-10 hours a week	Hester plans to finish her degree, teach for 2 years and become a fully registered teacher. Other plans include a postgraduate degree in developmental psychology.
Inel	21 to 30	None	Did not have paid employment	Inel wants to get registered as a teacher as soon as possible, and in the long term she would like to have a home-based centre or work in a kindergarten.
Jessica	21 to 30	Did 1 year of Psychology at Massey University before this programme	Worked as a retail assistant 16 hours a week and as a babysitter for 2-3 hours a week	Jessica will try and find a job within a centre to start her two years of registration. Future plans include opening her own centre.

4.3.1 Amanda.

Image 3: Amanda's collage²



As evidenced in Amanda's collage, her changing identity and personality has brought her through the challenges of university study to give her more confidence as a professional. Amanda described her collage thus, "this is my whole personality, everything that I'm doing through Uni and what I focus on". She believes that during the programme she has become "a lot more knowledgeable" and has gained confidence. While she came into the programme after she "only got C's" in the psychology course, she now identifies herself as a teacher.

While her professional identify has emerged, Amanda did not see herself as an avid or dedicated reader: "I think that's been my one struggle through this whole course, is I'm not a dedicated reader". She, however, described herself as a fast reader, saying, "I can comprehend it (academic text) when I want to, but it doesn't come easily". Amanda did not believe that reading academic text was an effective way for her to learn; she explained, "I'm like a visual (learner) and I like to do things, I get more from my teaching placements". She stated, "I don't get anything out of them (readings)," and

² With minor edit to delete name of participant

some academic text is boring. Her goal in regards to the readings in the course was to “try to read them,” however, she did not generally read her assigned readings week by week; instead she read them for assignments mainly. She explained her reading practices this way: “I skip through the reading and just kind of take out headlines and just skim read it, but I wouldn’t read them in depth”. Amanda did report a greater likelihood of engaging with her readings as a focused Year 3 student: “If I do sit down to read a reading, I’m highlighting and I’m writing questions”. This was supported during observations of tutorial time when the researcher noted a number of occasions where Amanda asked her peers and the tutor questions, which she had written on a sheet of paper, about the readings. While she was not committed to reading at this time in her life, Amanda was not unhappy about the amount she read during her programme as she believes she read a similar amount of text to her peers. For Amanda, the purpose of reading academic text was “just something that we’ve always had to do,” and thus she indicated that she does not believe she will read academic text after the programme is over.

4.3.2 Brooke.

Image 4: Brooke’s collage



As evidenced in Brooke's collage, she found university to be a challenging and full experience, often leaving her little time for reading. She reported that her identity as a student was consistent throughout the programme, while also remaining a "distracted reader" throughout her three years of study. Brooke saw her collage as reflecting "just being a student," capturing things such as her move to Wellington. She said, "I had to adapt to it, it's quite different... that's why I put 'new home, new life'".

While Brooke saw value in academic reading, and plans to read and appreciate academic text in the future, she reported that she has not been motivated to read regularly during the programme. Brooke's motivation for reading assigned text has been challenged because they "take so long to read" and because "things overlap quite a lot". While she expressed disappointment with her reading in a number of ways and felt she "should" be doing more reading, she said that she reads when topics are completely new to her. Brooke did not believe reading was the most effective way for her to learn, especially when she was not familiar with a topic, preferring instead to first listen to her lecturers talk about the readings to give her an initial understanding: "I've probably learned more from the teaching experiences I've gone on than sitting in the classroom". During the programme, Brooke read for assignments, or as she put it, "I won't bother unless I need quotes for an assignment". She further explained her reading strategy: "You just skim read them until it comes to a relevant part, then I write down the quotes that I like and then will go back and read the quotes I like". Her goals in regards to the assigned readings in the course were "to start reading a bit more," and to "pick up my game a bit more;" however, at the end of the semester she explained that she had mainly read for assignments and she had not read weekly very often. This seemed to be the case during one tutorial observation, as the tutor observed her asking her group if anyone in the group had read and they replied "no". Brooke acknowledged that the purpose of reading was to "get a bigger knowledge base on the subject," and concluded, "I think once we're not so stressed out at uni and I have free time I'll read more, especially when I'm an adult".

4.3.3 Caitlin.

Image 5: Caitlin's collage



While Caitlin does not see herself as an academic, her collage reflects her growing enthusiasm for ECE and her positive university experience. She said she is “not that academically good when it comes to ... the hard-out writing, and hard-out research,” but she has gained a lot of passion for ECE through her degree. Referring to her collage she commented that many of the items are “important things” in regards to her decisions or her university experience, or simply things she loves.

Caitlin identified that she was challenged by academic reading and mainly read for her assignments. She explained that she tried to read the readings weekly and believed that she should do this, but she often found them hard to process. She identified herself as a skim reader, with a “not very good” reading level, and as someone who finds it “really hard to focus on reading”. She explained, “a lot of the readings I just don’t really find that interesting, it’s just lots of words, lots of big words, and it’s just something you take in but you can’t really use directly with children in practice”. However, she did value her learning through text when the readings were explained to her. As such, during one observation, the researcher heard Caitlin’s peers explaining the reading to her after she had asked a question about the topic. Caitlin explained the purpose of reading academic text was “to gain the knowledge of other people’s views

and ideas,” describing her practice thus: “I may skim over them when they say we have to, we should be reading them, but I don’t usually take in the information properly until I’m actually processing it and actually getting quotes and sort of writing it into my own assignment”. She reported that she believes her peers read more than her, but she thought they mainly used the assigned text for assignments and did not read weekly either. She said she did not have any goals or plans in regards to the readings in the course, and thus at the end of the semester she commented, “I pretty much just looked at them within the assignments that I was doing, and mainly under the topics that I was focusing on”. Caitlin’s future intentions with academic text include, “When I’m actually teaching in a centre I’ll probably refer back to them and do a bit more...so I can put it into practice, but at the moment it’s solely like I’m just trying to pass”.

4.3.4 Diane.

Image 6: Diane’s collage



Diane is a mother of two children and her collage represents the challenge she has faced as a working mother who is also studying. She introduced her collage by saying, “I’ve done this here (as she points out the structure of her collage) as a balancing beam because what I’ve always felt about uni... it’s always been like a balancing act between being a mother and being a teacher and being a student”. She said it has

“always been a dream of mine to be a teacher and also build a future for my family...I’ve got a goal in place at the end of the three years and that has really stood out to me”.

Diane did not identify herself as a reader as she reported not having an interest in reading outside of university. However, she claimed that she trained herself to read for her programme because she knew she had to. At the end of her programme she indicated she has found her assigned readings to be helpful and interesting. She explained how assigned readings had “opened my eyes a bit” and were “important for more information...because if you don’t read them then you don’t understand the lecture”. She stated that the purpose of academic text was “to gain knowledge about certain subjects” and that she found text to be an effective way to learn. Diane said that she enjoyed talking about her readings in tutorial and she generally read her assigned readings, or at least tried to read them week by week. During observations it was noted that she often tried to focus her reading group onto an appropriate topic, and on two occasions when she still had questions about the reading, she called the tutor over to her so she could ask specific questions. Diane explained her reading strategy in this way:

I sit there and read and highlight, but then I might go back if it’s a really interesting reading and I get into it, and then half way through it I may forget, or I feel myself getting tired, then I’ll stop and I might go back to it another day. But if it’s not that interesting and I’m just reading and reading and I have no idea what I’m talking about, I just don’t do it.

Diane claimed that “I think I could probably read more” however, she did not think that the majority of her peers did the readings. While Diane enjoyed the readings in the course, she believed that some of her assigned readings from other classes were difficult to relate to and “sometimes it’s hard to understand if they’re using jargon...some of it is a bit beyond me”. Her plans or goals in regards to the readings in the course were simply “to read them,” and at the end of the semester she said this about her reading goals: “I actually think I could have read more. My goals were to read, and I did the readings for the in-centre task definitely, but I didn’t really do too much further reading unless I thought it was going to relate to an assignment”. Diane reported that, to reflect on her

practice and for teacher registration, she will continue to read academic text after completing the programme.

4.3.5 Erin.

Image 7: Erin's collage



Erin's collage reflects her emotions and experiences of training to be an ECE teacher: "I did a collage basically of how I feel while I'm at university and how I feel about my studies of early childhood education". As reflected in her collage, Erin described her time at university as an "emotional bicycle ride that is never ending," and she explained how her identity has been shaped through her journey of leaving secondary school and completing her degree which has given her an inner strength, confidence, freedom, power, and electrifying thrills (both in an exciting and tiring way).

Erin reported that reading academic text was important for numerous reasons, and, therefore, she tried to read as much of the assigned text as possible. She identified herself as an exact reader who "reads to grasp things". She saw academic text as important and even crucial "because you need that data and information for the course;" She explained that reading academic text has many purposes:

It helps make sure that you are on task and you understand the course, and to give you knowledge of what's going on, or to give you more knowledge than the lecturer can tell you in the lecture of what she wants you to understand, and to buffer up your knowledge and give you more perspectives than just hers and, also if you miss a lecture you can sort of understand what page you're on for that week... you read for your assignments because you've got to do references.

Erin said, "I don't read every single week, but I do make a point of sitting down and going through my reading, and speed reading and highlighting and taking down the most vital notes so that the tutorial will make sense for me...I read to keep up". Erin was seemingly one of the most verbally engaged students during tutorial observations, as during four of the five observation times she was heard asking the whole class questions about the readings and assignments. One of the students in her reading group also stated that the week Erin was absent from tutorial she had still given her reading notes to share with her group. Erin said this about her reading strategy: "I love highlighting and grabbing key points. I'm a very visual, grab-it-all-while-you-can kind of person". Her goal was to read the readings each week to be ready for tutorial. She stated, "I really think that I'll have the majority of it (the course reader) in my head by the time the course is finished or by the time the year is over and assignments are done". At the end of the semester she commented, "In the beginning I was like, 'oh I'm studious you know, I can do this.' And then slowly as the assignments started dating...I will confess, I didn't stick to it when I was doing papers continuously. I couldn't. I would have just gone insane". Erin was happy with the amount of reading she did across her programme and believed that her peers' reading practices "all vary on assignments...the majority of us do our best to read and keep up". Erin's objective is to use academic text in the future "to better my information on my centre...to get myself going, to have inspiring ideas to provide to the teachers and to provide to myself".

4.3.6 Fiona.

Image 8: Fiona's collage



Fiona's colourful collage evidences her passion for diversity, and the dreams she has for herself and the children with whom she works. Fiona described the pictures on her collage as a combination of things which should be true of life or things that are important to her, while the words represent things she aspires to offer to children. A number of her dreams have come from her recent experiences, and she said this about her changing identity throughout university: "I'm such a different person to what I was when I came straight out of high school".

While Fiona identified herself as someone who loves reading, she explained that academic reading is not a passion of hers. She reported that if asked to read something in which she is not interested, she will most likely not read it; however she did read novels and Christian books. She thought her reading skill was good, reading was an effective way for her to learn, and believed the purpose of reading academic text was to "give you a broader idea of what a lecturer or tutorial is talking about". Fiona said that because she was quite busy, she did not read her assigned text weekly but mainly only for assignments. She explained, "I'm pretty slack, but when I get into them I learn a lot from them". Several times Fiona expressed frustration with academic text and jargon; for example:

Centre and university is such a different world. Like here you talk beautiful, then you go to the centre and it's so different. Yes you can apply some of the theories and everything, but you're not going to sit there and be like 'okay what theory am I going to use here?' You just do it, you know; you just go with your natural instinct. Some of the stuff is a bit useless, but you know, you gotta do it.

Fiona's goal in regards to the readings in the course was, "to use them with my assignments, 'cause they're pretty much our essays just with chucked in literature, so I guess just for that". At the end of the semester, she explained that she only read for assignments and could not pinpoint anything specific she learned from the readings. Fiona commented that she was "probably not" very happy with the amount of readings she had done during her programme, and she thought she should value them more, but she struggled to pick up her motivation to read them. She reported that her peers' reading engagement was "all at the same level, although a couple of them are way ahead of us". Fiona stated that she does not intend to use academic text after graduation, "unless I have to, 'cause I don't think I'll actually go out there and make time for it".

4.3.7 Gabrielle.

Image 9: Gabrielle's collage



Gabrielle's collage of, "things that most matter to me," and items she has always wanted to try or learn evidences her enjoyment of her journey at university to become an ECE teacher. She has found that her programme has allowed her to practise what she's learned about children and theories of development, and she believes these experiences have made her a more confident teacher. While she had completed the Gateway ECE course before this programme, she believes her identity as a teacher changed and developed throughout her programme as well.

Gabrielle was an engaged reader who reported she had been reading more and more in her third year of study. She stated that she did not read her readings every week, or articles which were twenty or thirty pages long, but she did usually read a bit of each reading before tutorial "just to get a gist of what it's about". She reported that reading and having lectures were an effective way for her to learn, but also stated, "If you don't like reading, then it's really hard for you". Gabrielle believed the purpose of reading academic text was "to get other people's perspectives on the topic, from people who have done a lot of research and know what they're talking about". She also found that reading assigned text before lectures helped her prepare for both class and assignments, and she reported that she would definitely read an article if it related to an assignment. It seemed as though Gabrielle had in fact read before tutorial on at least two occasions as the researcher saw her point to highlighted text in her course reader during group discussions (although the researcher was unable to hear her at this point). Her reading skills were "just above average" and she believed that she read more than most of her peers as they were often surprised that she had read. Regarding the amount of reading she had done across her programme, she said she was, "not pleased in the first year, maybe the second year, I got a lot better then, but this year definitely, I've read a lot more". Her reading strategy was to "highlight things that I think are important, and then you can discuss them in your tutes. You get a lot more understanding when you discuss it in a big group, whereas I kind of don't understand it when I just read it by myself". Regarding her future plans with academic text, Gabrielle

stated that, as she has bought a number of the texts, she may as well use them in the centre next year, especially when writing learning stories.³

4.3.8 Hester.

Image 10: Hester's collage



Hester's collage is a visual representation of her ECE training. To form her collage, Hester explained, she decided to "fit with the New Zealand theme of weaving; so I have four different strands meaning different things, all kind of woven into one."⁴ Hester explained that her four strands were key ideas and important things to her that all came out when making the collage, and they represent: 1) studying and achievement, 2) a developmental structure of learning, 3) a cultural perspective, and 4) the local area where she grew up and where she lives now. She believes that during the programme "my knowing and my thinking and how I view things has changed a lot. Especially in

³ Learning stories are the form of assessment many ECE centres use in New Zealand.

⁴ New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, Te Whariki, is set up as eight stands representing a woven mat.

regard to children". She believes these changes have happened through her readings, her teaching practices first hand, and from other good teachers.

Hester was a seemingly committed reader who tried to read her assigned readings weekly and not just specifically for assignments. She commented, "I find that if I do the readings they'll help my assignment anyway so I might as well do it before I need to". She said she was a skim reader who wrote down notes to keep her focus, and that reading was an effective way for her to learn "if supplemented with lectures, where the lecturer explains things or goes over things". Sometimes she found she would read a reading twice, both before and after the lecture, as she believed that the assigned readings were "meant to supplement what the lecturer is saying". She explained the purpose of reading was to, "elaborate on those ideas (from lecture), it's to supplement them from different perspectives," but she also clarified that academic writing is often written from the perspective of people who are educated and respected, and can sometimes be detached from her practice. Across her programme of study, she has changed her reading practices, which she explained like this, "first year I didn't read enough which was a really bad idea, but I've learnt that it's the best. I need to do as many readings as possible even if they don't seem relevant at the time, they often are later". Hester found it helpful to discuss text with her peers, and she believed she may read a bit more than her peers, but she did not want to "be like 'I did the readings'" when she was in class. During observations, Hester was overheard contributing to her reading group's discussion on a number of occasions, and she contributed feedback to whole group discussions as well. Her goal for reading at the beginning of the semester was to, "try to read as many of them as I can, and think about them in depth as much as I can". At the end of the semester she said that she was happy with the reading she had done, but that, "most weeks as assignments have gotten a bit more frequent, it's become a bit more difficult, but I've been still trying quite hard". Hester plans to read academic text after graduation; she explained that, as a teacher, it is important to continue to learn, and that your ideas are supported by others whose views are respected.

4.3.9 Inel.

Image 11: Inel's collage



Inel reported that her journey as a university student has grown both her capacity as a teacher and a learner, and this is reflected in her collage. She explained the structure of her collage by stating, “This is all Wellington - this side here (pointing to left hand side of collage) - and it’s kinda like the gradual movement to the ‘now what’ and ‘graduation’ and looking into things deeper and searching for jobs and the union” (all on the right hand side of the collage). Inel has found that as a learner at the university she has not been gravely challenged. She stated, “I do find a lot of the work quite easy... not like easy, easy, but it just seems to come quite naturally, which is quite a lucky thing for me”.

While Inel liked reading, saw herself as a skilled reader, and thought it was an effective way for her to learn, she struggled to complete all the readings she would have liked during her programme. She explained how she felt about her reading practices:

I’m a bit embarrassed actually, that’s how badly I’ve done. I think that I actually do need to start reading them and not just use them for assignments... I’m really bad at time management. I just can’t find enough hours in the day which is quite embarrassing because we’re only at uni two days

a week... I found that when I read some of the readings for assignments I tell myself 'I'm definitely going to do more reading,' but I just never seem to get around to it. I feel pretty guilty about it, but have been passing everything so I don't think it has affected me too badly.

To Inel the purpose of reading academic text was, "to be able to understand, 'cause there's so many things in lectures". She stated, "If you make notes on it and actually do active reading, then I think it's probably the best way you can pick up on anything". While she did not often read entire articles, she did read for assignments, because, "it's kinda like you have to". She would also skim readings and have a conversation about them with the students around her before tutorial. During observations, Inel was observed sitting next to the same group of students and she was often seen pointing to the course reader and chatting to those around her. She explained, "Even if I don't read it I will print it off and have a flick through before I'm in class". She liked to talk about the articles in class, but noted, "If you have done the reading, you kinda don't really say it". She also commented, "I know that most of the girls that I hang out with don't read, or read about as much as I do, and that's not very much". Inel explained, "I find that when I do my readings I get quite confident...I almost talk too much when I have read, so it's probably a good thing that I don't read all the time". Inel's goal for reading in the course was to try to have a good reading of articles, possibly before assignments. At the end of the semester she said, "The closer we have got to the end of the course, the less readings I have done... I rarely did the weekly readings assigned for courses but would do a lot of readings in relation to assignments". Inel explained her plans for academic text after graduation: "I can definitely see the readings helping me in the future, I think it's really good that the uni lets us have access to the readings for the next three years or so after we finish. I'm probably going to need to use the readings more in my next few years of working than when I am studying".

4.3.10 Jessica.

Image 12: Jessica's collage



Jessica reported that her layered collage encapsulates many stories and experiences of her journey at university learning to become an ECE teacher. For example, she introduced her collage by first describing the bottom layer, a picture of the Rangi and Papa Maori creation story, which she sees as a nice way of viewing learning theory. She told a number of stories about her collage items and how they represent things she has learned during her programme, many of them through experiences in centres, or things she saw as important to teaching. Jessica believed that her time at university has changed her identity: "I've realized what defines life for me, what's important to me".

Jessica saw reading as an exciting and effective way to learn, but has struggled to read all of the assigned text she would have liked during her programme. While she expressed a sense of frustration with her reading practices - "I'd like to think I do the reading, but I don't" - she did identify herself as a bookworm with a high level of reading skill who read for pleasure. She represented this passion on her collage and said, "Reading has always been a huge part of my life. I love to read". She acknowledged that she had a hard time reading her assigned text because of how she viewed it as homework:

Inside of me it's like, 'but it's homework', but then I do appreciate having my readings because I know when I do actually sit down and start reading, my god, it's really good, like it's actually really interesting, it's just getting past the, I guess it's just instilled from school, it's homework.

Jessica also found it challenging to read because of time constraints in her life, but she sometime skim read her assigned readings, and also read them for assignments. During some weekly observations it seemed Jessica had at least skim read as she was heard contributing to class discussions, and on one occasion her comment referred to information within a specific assigned article. She stated that, "I find that I can skim read and pick things up reasonably well so I sometimes will do it in class". Jessica also said,

Often I find that I can pick what I don't get from it (the reading), or if I don't do the reading, I can pick it out from the lecture or from the tutorial as...whatever we're talking about in class, it's often a common sense thing.

She added, "If I feel I can get away with not having to read it, then I won't". For Jessica the purpose of reading academic text was "to broaden your own education," and she saw the value of her readings not just for teaching, but for parenting as well, as readings can "help people have more confidence in knowing what they can do (with children)". She wished she had read more across her programme, but stated, "This year I've found the expectations with readings has jumped, it is quite paramount to what it's been previous years and it's been difficult making that adjustment and attempting to time manage". Her goal in regards to the readings in the course was to "try and make a bit more of an effort," and at the end of the semester she stated, "I haven't learned as much as I could of from my own doing, just reading when I've had to read... I do value what I've learned". Jessica hopes that she will be able to read her assigned readings after completing the programme. She stated, "I've already thought about how once I finish uni I want to revisit all of my readings and find the ones that I think will be good to have easily on hand, with a base for starting my teaching career".

4.4 Key patterns in participants' beliefs with academic text

While individual participants' data presents much variance and insight into the beliefs and perspectives of these students, looking at the data across the participants allows for potentially helpful patterns to emerge. The next three sections will outline key themes that illustrate patterns which emerged from this study. As this study sought to examine the complexity of students' experiences with academic text, the researcher acknowledges that while these patterns may be meaningful to this group of students, it is a small cohort with a limited timeframe for the study. Further discussion and analysis of these themes will occur in Chapter Five of this report when the researcher seeks to holistically answer the research questions. All of the data presented below emerged from the qualitative coding process of the data analysis, and ideas are presented in this section if data collected from five or more of the ten students was consistent with the pattern. Because this study was primarily concerned with identifying themes and patterns, cases of outlying data or ideas which were not discussed by at least five students may be included in this report in the above individual students' data or discussed in Chapters Five or Six at the researcher's discretion.

While the data clearly show a relationship between participants' beliefs and experiences, the following sections distinguish beliefs (thoughts or ideas which students hold about academic text), and experiences (occurrences that have happened when engaging with academic text). First to be explored are the patterns in the research data which present four common beliefs held by the participants. These are that academic text: 1) is for assignments, 2) is a supplementary learning tool for information covered in lecture or tutorial, 3) is a tool for gaining professional knowledge/information, and 4) is a way to examine multiple viewpoints or back-up perspectives. See table 2 below for a brief overview of the key beliefs the participant's discussed about academic text.

Table 2: Key beliefs of participants about academic text

Academic text ...		Amanda	Brooke	Caitlin	Diane	Erin	Fiona	Gabrielle	Hester	Inel	Jessica	Totals
1. Is for assignments	Requirement or for quotes	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	8
	To make assignments easier	X	X		X	X		X	X			6
	For ideas/information					X						1
2. Is a supplementary learning tool		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	9
3. Provides professional knowledge/information			X		X	X		X	X	X	X	7
4. Presents multiple viewpoints or perspectives				X		X	X	X	X		X	6

4.4.1 Academic text is for assignments.

All ten students discussed the belief that the purpose of reading academic text is for assignments, and thus this is viewed as one of the key findings of this research. Because all of the participants discussed academic text in relation to assignments, the researcher attempted to unpack students' beliefs of why academic text was linked to assignments. Interestingly, eight of the ten students who discussed this link made specific reference to quotes which they must supply in their assignments or the requirement of academic text for assignments. Amanda commented, "Yeah, I do read, 'cause I need to, you know you need to pull out good quotes". Gabrielle stated, "You do have to read the readings for assignments". Six of the ten students also linked academic text to assignments as a general aid or as helping to make assignments easier. Brooke confirmed, "When it comes to doing assignments it's just easier if you've already read the material". Only one participant, Erin, discussed the link between academic text and assignments as a required aid to form ideas or information for her assignments, saying, "As the assignments intensified, and as you need to know more information in order to do the assignments, you read more because you need this". While participants were not specifically asked to explain their linking of academic text and assessment, the data from this study shows that the participants see academic text more as a required source of quotes or enabler to complete assignments, than as a provider of helpful information or ideas which shape their thoughts for such assessments.

4.4.2 Academic text is a supplementary learning tool.

Nine students viewed academic text as a way to either prepare for, or clarify, information presented to them in their lectures or tutorials, making this another key finding in the study. Gabrielle said,

If you've read them before, you can definitely see where the lecturer has got their notes from. It makes me understand the lecture a bit more. It makes me focus because sometimes when I'm watching a lecturer I don't really know a bit about it, I don't know what's actually happening in the lectures,

but reading them before time you can kind of pick up on things and you can kind of relate back to that article.

Participants discussed how reading text can enable them to participate in tutorial conversations or allow them to find answers to their own questions without having to ask a lecturer. While nine students addressed how text can help them understand lectures and tutorials, there is still a tension about the overlap of this material: Jessica stated, “Often I find that I can pick what I don’t get from it [text], or if I don’t do the reading, I can pick it out from the lecture or from the tutorial, it will get explained again”. Brooke stated this tension in a slightly different way: “If I think I’m going to struggle, or if I’ve been at the tute and didn’t understand, then I’d read it, but I don’t just read them”. Such data indicates that while the participants see academic text as a supplementary tool to their learning, it is not always their first option for learning course material, and therefore text is not always actively engaged.

4.4.3 Academic text provides knowledge or understanding of course content/information.

The majority of these students (seven) discussed how reading academic text increases their knowledge or understanding of course content/information. Gabrielle explained, “If we didn’t have all of them [assigned readings] I guess we wouldn’t have the content knowledge that we need for the course”. Students in this study held the view that their readings contained information which they needed to know. Erin stated,

I feel a bit smarter, not that smarter is based on anything, but I feel a bit cleverer and a bit more on tune if I’ve had readings and I’ve got text, ‘cause I feel like I can answer questions a bit more at the finger tips, and I can say this and quote this.

Jessica stated her view of the way readings are a source of information slightly differently, saying, “Reading might help you have better understanding of what’s happening [to children]”. While these quotes do not explain how each participant thinks reading increases understanding, some students appeared to hold a passive

view of learning through academic text, a view that may evidence a surface approach to learning where students see themselves as empty vessels which need filled up with information. This idea will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

4.4.4 Academic text is a way to examine multiple viewpoints or back-up perspectives.

Another key belief about academic text identified by this study, expressed in different ways by six students, is that academic text is a way to examine multiple viewpoints of the same subject or to back-up perspectives. As such, Caitlin stated that the purpose of reading academic text is “to gain the knowledge of other people’s views and ideas”. Participants explained that multiple perspectives helped them to feel confident in their knowledge, or at times helped them to reflect on new ways of thinking. Both Gabrielle and Hester commented on the importance of these views coming from other educated people who are highly respected or possibly have conducted research. Hester stated, “It’s [academic text] to supplement them [lecturers] from different perspectives. And they’re all usually peer reviewed or educated people who have written them so they’re obviously academic people whose views are respected”. At times this belief meant that participants could be sure that the lecturer was not the only person who held a particular view; for example, Gabrielle explained, “Instead of just hearing the lecturers saying this is what happens, you know a lot of other people have thought this as well”. Evidence from this study shows that students who see academic text as a tool for exploring multiple viewpoints may understand the importance of reflecting upon such reading in order to better understand content; this will be discussed further in Chapter Five (section 5.1.2).

4.5 Key patterns in participants’ experiences with academic text

Five common student experiences of engaging with academic text were identified in this study: 1) choosing what to read based on written assessments, 2) preference for three main reading strategies (skim reading, talking about text with knowledgeable others, and highlighting while writing notes), 3) difficulties with some academic text (mainly text on a computer screen, text with jargon, and text

that is impersonal or unpractical), 4) changes in reading practices across the three years of the programme, and 5) experiencing frustration with the amount of time dedicated to reading during the programme. Table 3 displays the key findings, all of which are discussed and supported below.

		Amanda	Brooke	Caitlin	Diane	Erin	Fiona	Gabrielle	Hester	Inel	Jessica	Totals
1. Choose what to read based on assessments		X	X	X			X			X	X	6
2. Reading strategies used	Skim reading	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	9
	Discussing with knowledgeable others	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	9
	Highlighting while writing notes	X			X	X		X	X		X	6
3. Difficulties with academic text	Reading on a computer screen	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	8
	Text with jargon	X		X	X		X	X				5
	Impersonal or unpractical	X		X			X		X		X	5
4. Changes across programme	Read more and more every year	X				X		X	X			4
	Read less and less every year		X				X					2
	Changed how she read				X							1
5. Experienced frustration with amount of time dedicated to reading	Feeling she “should” or “could” be reading more		X	X	X		X			X	X	6
	Lack of time (or time and stress management skills) for academic text		X		X	X	X			X	X	6

4.5.1 Choosing what to read based on written assessments.

Six of the ten students commented that rather than reading assigned weekly texts, their main way of identifying which text to read was closely related to their written assignments. Two other participants, Diane and Gabrielle, while reporting that they tried to read weekly assigned articles; they would at times focus on text needed for assessments as well. In Chapter Five, the reading practices of Diane, Erin, Gabrielle, and Hester, will be examined closer as they were the only four readers in this study who reported *some* success with reading on a more regular weekly basis during this course. However, the experience of identifying text to read based on assessment is closely linked with the belief (discussed in 4.4.1) which all participants held that academic text is for assignments. This connection will be explored in Chapter Five. Some of the evidence that participants chose text based on assignment requirements is contained in students' comments such as, "I rarely did the weekly readings assigned for courses but would do a lot of readings in relation to assignments and could relate these back to lectures and tutorials when needed" (Inel); "I wouldn't say that looks interesting and read it, I'll only read it if it relates to what I'm discussing in my assignment" (Brooke); and "I use the readings when I really need to for assignments, so I prep myself with readings for an assignment rather than the lecture" (Fiona).

While there was also evidence from observations that these students did read (at least on a surface level) and highlight their weekly assigned articles, these six students expressed that written assignments heavily determined which articles they read and which ones they did not. While some participants discussed how they would not read text if it did not relate to their assignments, others talked about how they would read articles in more depth if it was connected to an assignment: "I sort of skim read through them, I guess for assignments I'll read them more in depth" (Jessica). Assignments were, therefore, a strong indicator to these students of which text to read, when to read them and how to read them. The effects of assessment on reading practices will be explored in Chapter Five.

4.5.2 Preference for three reading strategies when reading academic text.

While type and use of reading strategies varied, all ten participants discussed using at least one or more of the following reading strategies with academic text: skim reading, talking about text with knowledgeable others, and highlighting while writing notes. While the researcher did not observe students' personal study / reading time and was therefore unable to observe skim reading, there was evidence during tutorial times of highlighting, note taking, and students talking about text with knowledgeable others. Each of the three reading strategies is discussed below.

"Skim reading" is an obvious pattern in these students' reading strategies as nine of the ten students mentioned that when they read academic text, they often skim read. While skim reading is different for each reader, below are three examples of how these participants explain their use of skim reading.

I kinda just search for things in relation to what I'm looking for in the assignments. I'll go through a page if I'm just looking at it for an assignment reason and I'll just search through it and find words and quotes that may relate, then I'll read that section to see if it fits, I usually just go all over and sort of get a fair idea of what they're talking about and then I just skim over it just to try find the areas that I want to be talking about in my assignment (Caitlin).

Hester explained her use of skim reading as:

...kind of just picking out key words, and not actually reading a lot of the content, like if I see something that obviously seems important I'll go back over it and read it, but I find myself kind of thinking about other things while I'm meant to be reading.

And lastly Jessica reported:

Often I'll read the introduction 'cause I always find that it always says exactly what the rest of the article is going to say, so I can sort of figure out from that if I'll want to go further, but I'll just skim read and look for bits

that often jump out, something that seems relevant, or a word from the lecture. Or often if they've broken down into headings, it's just about picking out the best few parts, like I know often the first sentence of a paragraph will tell you everything that's going to be in that paragraph so I'll read the first few bits and if there's going to be relevance I'll keep reading, if not I'll move on.

As these statements show, skim reading seems to be a way for the participants to identify information that they find relevant (possibly for assignments) and to quickly move past other text. Three students specifically discussed using skim reading with text they "have" to read. Diane said, "If I just want to read it because I need to read it, I'll just skim it". Quotes such as this indicate that students may be more inclined to skim read when they are not intrinsically motivated to read. The motivation for and effectiveness of this strategy, will be explored further in Chapter Five.

Nine students mentioned that at times they enjoy discussing academic text with knowledgeable others. Participants largely reported that this strategy helped them to gain understanding or "make sense" of the content of text. In relation to one article which she had discussed with her peers, Amanda explained,

We're doing a reading at the moment and when I read it, it went straight over my head, but when we went into the tutorial and we talked about it with groups of students, I talked with 3 or 4 other people and I understood it more from doing it that way than just reading a reading.

Amanda went on to comment, "You get more out of it, and you can understand it from their perspective a lot more". Observed tutorials sessions included time for students to break into groups of their choosing to discuss readings and assigned tasks. During these observations it was noted that the participants were talking and pointing to text for most of the time allocated for this type of activity. However, one student, Fiona, acknowledged that while she enjoys discussing ideas with others, at times finds this type of activity a waste of time because her peers do not seem to have read or understood enough of the articles.

Highlighting and writing notes were identified by six of the ten participants as important strategies when reading academic text. These common reading strategies were seen to help students focus and to identify relevant components of text for tutorial discussions or assignments. As such, Diane commented, “I just highlight the stuff that I understand or think is relevant, it’s just anything that I think is relevant and the message that they’re trying to get across”. Because these students prefer to highlight and/or write notes, a number of them discussed how having a paper copy of the readings helps them to do this. Jessica stated, “I just skim read, or take notes, or I’ll often, if I’ve got a copy, I’ll highlight or make a wee note in the side of it, just to sum up a point so I can look through it later for an assignment”. Highlighting and taking notes are thus popular and engaging reading strategies for these students.

4.5.3 Difficulties with some academic text.

Surprisingly the majority of participants in this study did not complain about having too many assigned texts to read during their programme as they reported that having plenty of text options is helpful for assignments. While participants discussed their appreciation for text options, all ten students commented on some frustrations they have with academic text; mainly text they must read on a computer screen (eight students), text with jargon (five students), and text that is impersonal or unpractical (five students). The following paragraphs provide key quotes to demonstrate these findings.

While many universities are digitalizing their library resources, these students found reading text on a computer screen challenging. Eight students in this study in fact discussed their preference for reading text on paper rather than a computer screen. A number of participants found it helpful that the particular class in which this study took place supplied an optional reader (printed on paper and ring-bound), which contained most of the assigned readings, and which students could purchase. If students choose to not buy the reader, all readings were supplied online where students could choose to either print them off, or read on the screen. Erin explained her experience with the course reader like this, “We got printed out

a book and I bought the book to keep up, 'cause I thought I'm not printing out all of these and I can't read on the screen all the time". Some participants seem encouraged to read because they had the paper book option. Inel stated, "You can buy the book, which makes it a lot easier than having to get them off course reserve, so I might actually have a crack at it this time". Therefore, while some students are beginning to transition to read online, the majority of participants in this study still preferred to have the option to buy a paper version of assigned text.

As previously mentioned, five students discussed experiencing difficulties with the language of academic text. Fiona encapsulated her frustration by stating, "I hate reading academic text that has all this jargon and you're like 'well that was useless'". Diane commented, "Sometimes it's hard to understand if they're using jargon, like some of the words that they use, like big huge words that I have no idea what they're talking about. I could read a whole sentence and just think 'what was that'". During one of the observations of tutorial, Diane turned to the researcher while pointing to a word in one of the readings and asked "what does 'tripartite' mean?" When the researcher replied with a shoulder shrug and a smile, Diane commented "see, jargon," and lightly slammed her fist to the table. Participants reported that negative experiences with the language of academic text frustrated them, making it difficult for them to read the articles, rather than encouraging them to investigate the new terminology.

The final frustration with academic text which this report will discuss is the impersonal or unpractical nature (or in other words, highly theoretical components) of some academic text which participants found challenging. Five students in this study commented that they prefer text that contains personal or practical experiences or examples of working with children. Caitlin stated, "When it's a text that's obviously something you could use while working, I find that really helpful". Hester also explained why she found a particular text enjoyable, saying, "It used a lot of really relevant examples that were obviously really important for the author, like it was quite personal". While each of these five students worded their frustration differently, each of them was able to think of some academic text that did not fit this description.

4.5.4 Changes in reading practices across the three years of the programme.

Another common experience with academic text which participants identified was a change in their reading practices across the programme. Overall, seven students discussed the changes they made over the years; four students think they read more and more every year of their programme, two students reported reading less and less each year, and one student said that “how” she reads has changed. Diane explained “how” her reading practices changed; “At the start of first year I read it word for word and I would get really tired really quickly because I wasn’t used to reading so much, um second and third year I kind of skim”. Brooke explained her decline in reading this way;

In the first couple of years I always did my work, it’s this year that I’ve kind of, I don’t know, I guess it’s just third year, and you just want to finish. I’ve slacked off a bit. In first year I did every reading, second year I did most, and this year I probably do less than half.

Amanda explained her increased reading by stating,

I’m more inclined to read them now. In year one you just kind of read the reading for the sake of having to read it for the tutorial, whereas now I think I find, if I do sit down to read a reading, I’m highlighting and I’m writing questions.

While the changes in reading practices that participants experienced obviously differed, it is still worth noting that students’ reading practices are not stagnant as they are responding to the changing demands of their programme and lifestyles.

4.5.5 Experienced frustration with the amount of time dedicated to reading during the programme.

The final experience of engaging with academic text which seven of the ten students in this study discussed was frustration with the amount of time which they dedicated to reading. Two different types of comments were identified within this finding: firstly participants who discussed feelings of how they “should” or “could”

be reading more than they were, and secondly, participants who talked about having a lack of time or stress management skills in order to handle the reading they were given.

When asked how they felt about the reading they had done during the programme, six students explained their sentiment of frustration about the amount of time they have spent reading. These students used the phrases “could be reading more” or “should be reading more,” and the word “guilt” when explaining how they felt. Inel stated,

I found that when I read some of the readings for assignments I would tell myself ‘I’m definitely going to do more reading’ but I just never seemed to get around to it. I feel pretty guilty about it, but have been passing everything so I don’t think it has affected me too badly.

Most of these students did not mention such feelings only once in their interviews, but repeatedly discussed this experience: Inel, for example, discussed her feelings of guilt three separate times across her two interviews. Other participants said they could read more, but did not seem to feel a sense of guilt. Caitlin commented, “I guess I could say I’m not really that happy. I feel that I should be reading them more”. The potential effects of such feelings about academic text will be discussed further in Chapter Five of this report.

Participants’ frustration with reading time was also expressed by explaining their lack of time or stress management skills for engaging with academic text. Six students reported a lack of time or stress management skills which detrimentally affected the time they spent reading academic text. Inel said, “I’m really bad at time management. I just can’t find enough hours in the day which is quite embarrassing because we’re only at uni two days a week”. Jessica explained,

Managing stress is something I’m learning, too... I look back and I’m like it would have been good to do more of my readings or it would have been good to do them, but I’m not going to because I don’t want myself to.

While participants described their growing ability to manage their time and stress, it was still equating to an overall frustration for them when they looked back at what they had read. Such a frustration with time and stress management skills may offer valuable insight into explaining these students' engagement with academic text.

4.6 Key patterns in participants' identities

This section presents three common themes which participants held about their reader identity. While some participants held only one or two of the following beliefs, this study found that six of the ten students held all three of the following beliefs: 1) I like to read for pleasure (outside of university), 2) reading is an effective way for me to learn (if supplemented with lectures and tutorials), and 3) my reading skills are average or above average. Table 4 shows an overview of participants' identities as readers. These themes are discussed below.

<i>Table 4: Key findings about participants' identities as readers</i>											
	Amanda	Brooke	Caitlin	Diane	Erin	Fiona	Gabrielle	Hester	Inel	Jessica	Totals
1.Likes to read for pleasure (outside of university)	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	9
2. Believes reading is an effective way for her to learn (if supplemented with lectures and tutorials)				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
3. Believes her reading skills are average or above average				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7

4.6.1 Reading for pleasure.

Enjoyment of reading outside of university is something nine students in this study reported. While they did not express reading academic text outside of university, it is significant that almost all of these students do enjoy reading, especially fiction novels. Fiona, who said she does not have time for academic reading, said she loves reading for pleasure; “If I get into a book, I get into it, so I’ll finish it in two days, but yeah if I’m not interested, I’m not interested”. Participants also explained that they read fiction differently than they read academic text. When asked about this, Brooke said, “Well it’s different, it’s a story, it’s not just information”. Such statements seem to verify that students do not have one simple identity as a “reader” or “not a reader”, but their identity as a reader is complex and multi-faceted, determined by what they are reading, when and how.

4.6.2 Reading to learn.

A majority of students (seven) in this study explained that they see reading as an effective way to learn; however a number of these students commented that it still needs to be supplemented with lectures and tutorials. Hester commented, “If supplemented with lectures where the lecturer explains things or goes over things, I think that’s effective”. Some participants found reading effective because you can visually see the words; for example, Diane said reading is effective because, “the text is there to refer to”. Jessica also commented on this aspect of text, saying, “It’s just being able to make the visual context with what you’re reading. It’s just nice being able to see it and then being able to process it”. While participants found reading to an effective way to learn, they did not think that reading was the only way to learn as they also commented on their teaching practicum experiences, tutorials, and lectures.

4.6.3 Reading skills.

When asked about their reading skill, seven students expressed that they see themselves as average or above average readers. Again, this reading identity factor is complex, as indicated for example by Inel who stated, “I think my skill is pretty good, but I just don’t think my participation is very good”. Each participant

also defined for herself what “good reading skill” meant in these interviews as one can see by Jessica’s quote: “I think I’ve got quite a high reading level. I just have a good understanding, I’m able to make sense of, I find that I’ve got a good vocabulary, so I would understand at the end”. Such comments help evidence the fact that the way students see themselves as readers is a personal and iterative process, thus this study cannot claim to have fully explored these students’ identities as readers. Therefore, while meaningful, these data may only touch upon the surface of their identities.

4.7 Conclusion

While the findings of this research will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, key patterns have been identified in this chapter. Some of the key findings which will lead the discussion in the next chapter include how the participants’ beliefs and experiences of academic text are arguably closely linked with their written assignments as well as their understanding of the learning process. Findings presented above show that students in this study do utilise and appreciate important reading strategies (skim reading, highlighting, discussing text, and writing notes), thus an examination of their use of these strategies will provide more insight into their experiences. Lastly, this chapter has outlined a key finding of how a number of these students hold a positive individual reader identity. The next chapter explores and discusses more fully how a number of these readers still do not actively engage with assigned text.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study's key findings provide interesting data for understanding these ten ECE students' experiences of and beliefs about academic text. A closer examination of how assessment, reading strategies and reader identities affect their reading practices will be made in this chapter. A more complete outline of the data which supports these insights is provided in Chapter Four. Here, the researcher will turn her attention to making connections between other research and the findings of this study. This chapter focuses attention upon key findings which provide the most insight into understanding this group of students' engagement with academic text.

5.1. Beliefs and experiences of engaging with academic text

This study's key findings include three main experiences with and beliefs about academic text which have a large effect on students' engagement with reading. This section will examine how assessment, students' understanding of the learning process, and students' use of skim reading had the largest impact on the participants' reading engagement. A number of the other key findings identified in Chapter Four will also be discussed in relation to the above three experiences and beliefs.

5.1.1 Effect of assessment on reading practices.

The participants' engagement with academic text was clearly influenced by assessment. While assignments provided motivation for participants to read, they also encouraged students to be selective in what texts they would focus their time upon, and when during the semester to read. Although the data do not identify students' levels of success in their study, previous research has shown that reading for assessment purposes or with a performance orientation may adversely affect learning outcomes and successful use of reading strategies (Wolters et al., 1996).

Reading for assessment purposes changes how students read. While students in this study had differing reading abilities and they utilized different

reading strategies, Prosser and Trigwell (1999) found that, “the motivation or intention students have when undertaking subjects is as fundamentally important as, or more important than, the particular skills they have” (p.27). Lehman and Schraw (2002) report that when students read they change how they process text according to the relevance of text. Research has shown that students determine text relevance by their reading goals which are the product of both “personal and given intentions” (McCrudden, 2011, p.3). Students in previous research have reported focusing longer on text which is more relevant, resulting in a deeper processing of that text (Lehman & Schraw, 2002). Both the current study and McCrudden’s (2011) quantitative research with undergraduate students at the same university found that students most frequently reported reading for assessment purposes; thus determining text relevance based on assessments and skim reading other text. Phillips and Phillips’ (2007) study also found accounting students read differently, using a “skimming study mode” and were less likely to use elaboration strategies when reading for exams (p.34). Given the results of the current study that participants engaged with academic text mainly when assignments were due, and they focused on finding quotes when reading, students evidenced a tendency to avoid continuous and deep level learning through most assigned text.

There is evidence from this study that some participants did not find it necessary to deeply engage with academic text even when completing their assignments. Take for instance, Inel who stated,

I found that when I read some of the readings for assignments I tell myself ‘I’m definitely going to do more reading,’ but I just never seem to get around to it. I feel pretty guilty about it, but have been passing everything so I don’t think it has affected me too badly.

Inel’s belief that she could pass assessments without reading more meant that at times using a surface level approach for reading was sufficient. Hazel et al. (2002) found that students who perceive their environment to support surface level strategies are more likely to adopt surface level strategies. However, Hazel et al.

(2002) also found that students perceive learning environments differently, and their study also found evidence that some students did not perceive they could use a surface approach to learning.

Research shows the importance of students' reading goals upon their learning outcomes as well. While more current research has tried to understand how extrinsic, performance-orientated goals affect students' learning, the work of Harackiewicz et al. (1998) who conducted their study with university students is most relevant to this study. Harackiewicz et al. (1998) reported that performance goals were able to enhance intrinsic motivation and improve grades if students were assigned performance goals (or in other words if students' intrinsic goals matched the assigned, extrinsic goals), and if students felt they were successful in the task. As outlined in section 2.2.3, students who hold mastery learning goals seek content understanding or learning of the material, while students with performance goals seek to demonstrate their performance in relation to others. While learning outcomes in EPSY 315 focused on student understanding, students reading with performance goals would not match the assigned goals of the course. Participants motivated to read mainly with external, performance goals may therefore have experienced decreased learning outcomes (such as decreased intrinsic motivation or lower grades). As this study did not measure participants' performance, it is not possible to assert this claim entirely. However, other key findings (see 5.1.3) did provide evidence that reading mainly for assessments did decrease students' intrinsic motivation for reading and learning satisfaction.

Although assignments were seen as an important reason for reading academic text, they were not the only reason participants supplied for engaging with text in this study. Other studies have found that students who read for assessment are able to have multiple reading goals at the same time (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Harackiewicz et al., 1998). In fact, Harackiewicz et al. (1998) found that in the competitive university climate, students were well suited to hold both performance goals as well as mastery goals. This finding is supported by evidence from this study of a connection between students' reading goals and their beliefs about the purpose of reading academic text. Findings from this study (from weekly

readers) indicate that a multi-faceted understanding of the purpose of reading may link with students' engagement with text. This study's four identified weekly readers, Diane, Erin, Gabrielle, and Hester, who all reported wanting to read weekly and experienced *some* success throughout the semester in their attempt to read on a weekly basis, also reported holding numerous reasons for reading academic text (including assessment purposes). Therefore, helping students to actively acknowledge multiple reasons for reading may promote engagement with reading. Furthermore, this provides evidence that performance goals for reading are not necessarily detrimental for reading engagement.

Besides reading for assessment, nine students in this study also discussed how they believe text is a supplementary learning tool along with lecture and tutorial. Even so, the results showed an inadequate connection between this belief and participants' practice of reading mainly for assignments. The final issue therefore this study has raised relating to assessment and reading is the question as to whether information from academic text which is not covered in assessments will be adequately addressed by students. While over assessing students can cause many new problems and still not address students' lack of internal motivation for reading, educators should be aware of the potential for important course information that is not covered in assessment to be missed by students.

5.1.2 Students' understanding of the learning process and its effect on text engagement.

Findings from this study indicate that the participants believe academic text is important for increasing professional knowledge or understanding of course content/ information. Seven students reported valuing academic text for its ability to contribute "content" knowledge to their courses. While content knowledge is important to university courses, the way students envisage that this knowledge is transferred through reading may provide a key insight into understanding their reading practices.

This study found that students who saw academic text as information which could be understood simply by reading the text were more likely to read for

assignments only. Contrasting results include students who believed that they must think about or reflect upon the text in order to make the information useful to them and who were more likely to read weekly. This study showed clear differences between students' patterns of reading (e.g. Gabrielle a weekly reader, and Fiona an assignment reader). Their reading patterns were evident in relation to how the reader identified with the function of reading in the learning process. Three of the four weekly readers in this study held the belief that academic text is a way to examine multiple viewpoints of the same subject or to back-up perspectives. These readers discussed the importance of reflecting on reading, while assignment readers were more likely to comment on the importance of simply reading the material.

Phillips and Phillips (2007) reported a similar finding from their study with 172 undergraduate accounting students. They stated, "Some students acted as if learning would miraculously occur just because their eyes had scanned all the assigned lines of the textbook" (p.30). These students reported surface level reading strategies such as skim reading to get through the reading, yet they justified their skim reading by stating that they would revisit the text at a later time, yet were often unsuccessful in doing so. In the current study, participants who viewed reading as a passive transfer of information did not report intent to revisit information during the course, but rather planned to use text simply to complete the assessments. Ramsden (2003) explains that students who use surface approaches often see learning "as a process of increasing knowledge or memorisation" (p.55). Therefore, promoting students' understanding of deep learning approaches which view learning "as understanding reality and abstracting meaning" may increase their engagement with reading (Ramsden, 2003, p.55).

5.1.3 Use of skim reading.

This research found that participants utilized a range of reading strategies such as skim reading, highlighting, discussing text, and writing notes. Participants were aware of the helpfulness of reading strategies, yet their prevalent use of skim reading indicates a lack of ability or desire to use these reading strategies as

effectively as possible. Other research such as Reynolds' (1992) study found that successful readers were aware of multiple strategies, and knew when and how to use the strategies appropriately. For example, Reynolds (1992) found that readers who successfully comprehended text not only focused more attention on salient text, they focused their attention by using an appropriate type of attention or rather, conceptual attention (focusing on the meaning of the words) as opposed to perceptual attention (focusing on the on shape and length of words). While skim reading may work in some settings for some students, successful text processing requires readers to be selective when using this strategy.

These students' use of skim reading has potential to be linked to two other significant findings from this study; participants' feelings of frustration or guilt about not reading assigned text and participants' lack of time and stress management skills when reading. This study found that six of the ten participants expressed that they think they "should" or "could" be reading more. However five of these six same students expressed that they felt that they lacked the stress or time management skills needed to complete the readings. While students may identify the importance of academic text and therefore think they should read it, at the same time they felt that they did not have enough time to read, thus skim reading may have been identified as a helpful reading strategy to alleviate this problem. However, the surface learning which skim reading promotes left these students dissatisfied with their learning. Ramsden (2003) confirms that deep approaches to learning are often more enjoyable for students while surface approaches are dissatisfying.

Participants' feelings of guilt and frustration with reading academic text may also be in agreement with Geisler's (1994) work which explains how students often leave university not trusting their professional knowledge. This is not disconnected to the debates about professionalization of ECE teachers in New Zealand outlined in section 1.2, or the socio-cultural view of literacy examined in section 2.2.2 of this thesis. Geisler (1994) states, "The cultural movement of professionalization has used the technology of literacy to bifurcate expertise into two distinct components—domain content and rhetorical process – creating, in effect a Great

Divide between expert and layperson” (p.36). The students in this study reported experiencing this divide between their instinctual knowledge of working with children, and the “professional” information they obtain through academic text at the university. They also discussed the tension they experience between ECE centres where they report encountering very little discussion and use of academic text, and the university which requires them to use it. These students thus report being caught in the middle of a cultural movement of professionalization. Fiona’s statement below typifies this experience, she said,

Centre and university is such a different world, here you talk beautifully about how teaching is; then you go to the centre and it’s so different. Yes you can apply some of the theories and everything, but you’re not going to sit there and be like ‘okay what theory am I going to use here’, you just do it. You just go with your natural instinct. Some of the stuff is a bit useless, but you know, you gotta do it, so you gotta do it.

While Fiona is not saying that academic text is irrelevant for her practice, here she explains how her experience with the content of the text, and more specifically theory, has been difficult for her to enact in her practice. Fiona’s experience, like a number of participants, was that academic text was not a major component within ECE centres, yet it was a requirement of her university degree (which was needed to achieve professional status and further pay). As seen in this study, students seeking to resolve this tension may turn to skim reading in order to achieve what they think they “should” do to become a professional, yet are still left feeling that they have not achieved what they set out to do and leave university frustrated with their learning.

5.2 The relationship between students’ identities and their engagement with academic text

Changes in student identity throughout the programme help explain students’ changing reading practices. Understanding student identity has proven to be a challenging and complex process, and it is the changing nature of how participants saw and understood themselves that contributed to this complexity.

Seven of the ten students in this study discussed significant changes in their reading practices across their three year programme. This finding could be tied to the fact that nine of the ten participants reported that their identities as learners and teachers have also changed across the programme. This study has sought to understand the different identities they held of themselves as students, professional teachers, and readers, and how these affected text engagement.

The participants in this study reported holding positive beliefs and professional identities as ECE teachers. While not all participants believed they were ready to call themselves a teacher, participants showed passion and excitement for their budding careers as ECE teachers. Inel included a quote on her collage which she said explains how she feels: "I feel so good working in a career that has purpose and meaning. And I think that it pretty much sums it all up". Diane stated, "I've always had a really passionate interest of children anyway, and I think having children of my own just sort of put it in store more that that's what I wanted to do. I've always wanted to do it". Such statements indicate that these students' positive identities of ECE professionals could provide intrinsic motivation for engaging with, and interest in text about children and teaching within ECE centres. Flowerday et al.'s (2004) research on student interest in reading engagement found that while such topical interest did improve students' attitudes towards reading; it did not promote a significant increase in student engagement with text. This could help explain why participants, although reporting that the assigned text in the specific course was especially interesting to them, did not necessarily engage with it.

One aim of the research was that by understanding students' identities as readers, insight into students' reading practices would be gained. In this study nine students liked to read for pleasure outside of university, seven saw reading as an effective way for them to learn, and seven reported that they believe their reading skills are average or above average. This indicates that the majority of these participants do hold a positive reader identity. These results are consistent with Jolliffe and Harl's (2008) research which found university students to be capable

and interested in reading. However, while participants held a positive reader identity, not all engaged with reading academic text.

When examining these results in conjunction with individuals' reading practices, these findings indicate that students who engage with weekly reading assignments are more likely to hold all three of these positive reader identity traits. Three of the four participants (Erin, Gabrielle, and Hester) who reported that they had been somewhat successful in reading weekly assigned texts during the semester, also reported all three of these positive reader identity traits. Three other students who reported all three of these identity traits, yet did not read on a weekly basis, reported that they were frustrated with their reading practices. Having a positive reader identity therefore, does not account for all participants' reading practices, but it may promote student engagement with reading.

Besides individual identity affecting students' reading practices, results showed that individuals in this study also arguably shaped their identity as a reader by the way they understood the group's text engagement practices. All ten participants discussed at least once with the researcher how their reading practices were similar to the groups, or the groups' practices were the same as theirs. While the researcher aimed to ask all participants about how they understood their peer's reading practices in relation to their own, it should be noted many of the participants compared their peers' reading habits to their own when unprovoked by the researcher. This indicates that rather than individual identity shaping students' text engagement practices; students' reading practices were possibly more affected by the way they interpreted the group's reading practices. Not only did participants report that their reading practices were similar to the group's reading practices, but also, participants admitted that they were hesitant to confront the group when they felt their reading practices were different from the assumed group practice of not reading weekly for tutorial. One student reported that it was appropriate in a tutorial session to give the impression of not having read the required reading, even if she had. As Inel stated, "If you have done the reading, you just don't really say it. If you have, you wait until you get into the tute and then kinda bring up a few things".

Wenger's (2009) work on social learning theory may help explore such practices as he explains learning as a "fundamentally social phenomenon" (p.210). He therefore sees the focus of learning as participation and belonging in social communities. Wenger (2000) explains how social communities define competence or what it means to know. He states, "Learning is an interplay between social competence and personal experience" (p.227). So while students' personal experiences do shape their identities and reading practices, one cannot ignore the communities' influence on their practices. Therefore students participating and belonging to a community which does not see reading academic text as a prerequisite for knowing may make sense of and adjust their reading practices in reference to their community. Fiona is an example as she reported that she read only for assignments, even though she reported all three positive reader identity traits. When asked about her peers' engagement with text she commented, "I think we're all at the same level". Fiona's belief that her reading practices were similar to most students in her class may have heavily influenced why she did not engage further with academic text. Further evidence of this thinking includes Gabrielle who said that while she only read for assignments in first year, "that's all any of us ever did," and Inel who reported "I know that most of the girls that I hang out with read about as much as I do. And that's not very much". While these students had been in the same tutorial group for three years, it is quite possible that they became quite acquainted with group norms of reading and therefore did not find it necessary to read more than others around them. Therefore, this study found evidence that participants' identities as a group member within an established culture affected their engagement with academic text.

Another way in which student identity offered insight into participants' engagement with academic text, mainly uncovered through the student identity portfolio collages, was the way in which participants viewed their university experiences as changing their identity. Participants reported valuing their university experiences not simply because of how they were developed academically or professionally, but for the way their university experiences developed them as a person. Many participants in this study discussed how their identity was changed throughout university through their experiences of social life, paid employment,

moving to a new city, and learning financial management. It was particularly interesting that no participants discussed academic text as a major part of their university experience when discussing their collages, although two students did discuss their love of reading. As evidenced in other research, and by these students' discussions with their collages of what university has meant to them, it is possible that students who leave university in the twenty first century are less concerned with professional knowledge, and more interested in personal development and gaining a qualification (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Boughey, 2008). Arum and Roksa's (2011) examination of learning at tertiary institutions in developed countries found a significant drop in learning outcomes for students in the twenty first century, and Ramsden (2003) reported the amount of surface level learning approaches being used at universities to be a "disturbing phenomenon" (p.59). Arum and Roksa (2011) stated, "a market-based logic of education encourages students to focus on its instrumental value- that is, as a credential- and to ignore its academic meaning" (p.16). While the experiences that were meaningful to participants in this study may not provide the same knowledge one learns from academic text, this study found that these students' identities were shaped by their experiences. This finding may be connected to these students' practices of not engaging deeply with academic text on a regular basis.

5.3 Influences on students' decisions to engage with academic text

In order to further understand students' engagement with academic text, this study also asked; what encourages or discourages these students to engage with academic text? While there were numerous factors affecting their engagement, this section will look at some of the key findings of this study in order to answer this question.

The type of text students are asked to examine may be important for student engagement with text. As outlined in Chapter Four of this report, students expressed frustration with text on a computer screen, text that was impersonal or unpractical, and text with jargon. Students' desire to engage with text which they can easily link to their practice as an ECE teacher may help address issues raised in

section 5.1.1 of how to align students' personal reading goals with assigned or external goals. Caitlin is one example of a student who reported having poor reading comprehension skills and not reading outside of assignments very often, however she reported finding herself engaged with text which she could clearly link to her practice. For Gee (2001), how we teach language and through language (both written and verbal) needs to be directly connected to social activity. He states that reading "must be rooted in the connections of texts to engagement in and simulations of actions, activities, and interactions- to real and imagined material and social worlds" (p.716). The importance of helping students to link academic text to their practice also supports van Wijk's (2006) work which found that practising ECE teachers prefer academic text which includes examples and practical ideas of how to solve problems in their centres. Thus it is not surprising that students would find value in text that helps them interact with children, and their lecturers may therefore need to help students make these links more easily.

Text which contained jargon that was not adequately explained to students also seemed to put students off engaging with text. This aligns with Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) who reported that students who are reading for extrinsic reasons (assessment), will "terminate or minimize the cognitive activity of reading that material" (p.408). Thus challenging words do not appeal to students who are not reading with a mastery approach. While it is seemingly impossible to avoid all jargon in academic text, discovering ways to help students overcome the barriers of jargon, possibly through terminology lists, may further promote student engagement in text.

Another type of text which discouraged student engagement in reading was not having paper versions of the articles which students could write upon. For these students it seemed even more meaningful when these articles were collated into one place rather than having multiple individual articles. While many universities are turning away from the practice of providing paper versions of text because of sustainability, cost and time issues, it is clear from this study that students have not yet gained the desire or skills for using electronic text in the same way they know how to engage with paper versions of text (ie. electronic highlighting and note taking). These data suggest that it may be helpful to students while they learn to

use electronic text, that they are given the option of buying a course reader as well as having access to electronic text.

This study found evidence that one way to promote student engagement with academic text is by helping students to verbally discuss it. Eight of the participants discussed the helpfulness of this strategy, and Guthrie (2004) reports that “engaged reading is often socially interactive” (p.4). As a number of students mentioned enjoying this strategy for the way it allowed them to see multiple viewpoints of the same information, this strategy may help students understand a new function of academic text. As discussed in section 5.1.2, students who saw text as having multiple purposes and as a way to *think about* information, rather than as a passive transfer of information, seemed to engage with text on a more regular basis than students who did not. The course in the current study was set up to have “reading groups” in tutorial sessions, although students expressed that this was not adequately carried through the entire semester (due to a number of time limitations and course considerations). Previous research on facilitating successful reading groups will be discussed in the final chapter of this report.

5.4 Value students place on academic text

The final research question addressed by this study examined the value students place on academic text in relation to their current course and their plans for the future. As eight of the ten students stated that they hope to use academic text in the future, there is evidence that they value academic text. This is a positive result when considering Guthrie and Wigfield’s (2000) explanation that “extrinsic motivation can produce self-terminating behaviour” (p.407). As such, students who read mainly for assessment goals are prone to stop the practice when it is no longer required of them. However, the ways in which participants plan to use academic text in the future suggest that they still value academic text for utilitarian purposes, rather than as a tool for learning. This finding is closely linked to the way these participants valued text in relation to their current course.

Participants placed a high value on using academic text for assessment purposes in the current course, which may or may not link to their learning goals.

While students in this study had multiple reasons for engaging with academic text, their main focus remained on using text for assessment purposes. Caitlin's quote below indicates that at times, reading for assessment purposes counteracts students' learning goals. Caitlin reported, "When I'm actually teaching in a centre I'll probably refer back to them and do a bit more ... so I can put it into practice, but at the moment it's solely like I'm just trying to pass". Caitlin indicated that to her, passing her assignment did not mean she had learned how to put this information into practice which is what she would seemingly like to do. Fiona, one of the participants who reported not planning to use academic text after graduation said, "when I think of readings, all I think of is just for assignments". Fiona does not seem to place value on the learning from text or assessment either, and therefore while she sees academic text as important (as previously stated in her interviews), her decision to not use text in the future is understandable. Other students did clearly value their learning from academic text during the semester even if it was limited to assessments. Jessica stated, "I haven't learned as much as I could of from my own doing I think, just reading when I've had to read ... I do value what I've learned". Thus while reading for assessments may translate to valuable learning for some students, it is not a guarantee for all students.

The value these participants hold for academic text in the future is also convoluted. As previously mentioned, eight of the ten participants reported that they plan to use academic text in the future. There were three main ways they mentioned that they plan to use academic text in the future; to help with the teacher registration process, when working on learning stories in centres, and to understand specific teaching philosophies at a centre. The teacher registration process requires beginning teachers to write documents about topics such as their philosophy and learning and teaching goals. Learning stories are used in ECE to provide written feedback to parents of how their children are learning. Both of these responsibilities have similarities to the assessment tasks students use academic text for at the university and are therefore understandably linked to their current use of academic text. Students' intended uses for academic text in the

future make even more sense when comparing their intended future uses, to the ways they have seen teachers in centres engage with academic text.

When students were asked if they saw teachers within ECE centres engaging with academic text, five students reported “never” or “only once”. Five students mentioned that they saw teachers using Te Whariki the national curriculum, which is arguably not academic text rather a government document. Four students said teachers use academic text in centres to unpack teaching philosophies, and two students said it was used for learning stories. This finding indicates that students’ intentions to use text in the future, mainly for utilitarian purposes rather than learning goals, are aligned with how they see text currently being used by ECE teachers. This finding also indicates that while ECE students are required to engage with academic text at the university, their plans for future uses of text are more driven by the cultures established within ECE centres. As also evidenced by social learning theorists such as Wenger (2009), Lave (2009) and Rogoff (2006), this study thus found that students’ beliefs and learning practices are best understood by examining the cultural practices and circumstances of communities surrounding these learners. This means that an attempt to professionalize the ECE sector through trained professionals who engage with academic text will be unsuccessful without further engagement of academic text within ECE centres as well. van Wijk’s (2006) report about engaging practising ECE professionals with learning through academic text thus provides insightful information about improving such learning.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed a number of key findings from this study including the large impact which assessment, participants’ understanding of the learning process, skim reading and group culture have upon students’ text engagement practices. Participants’ motivation to read for assessments and how this changed their reading practices is arguably the most important finding from this research. This study and previous research shows that performance goals, such as finding quotes for an assignment, can at times negatively affect learning outcomes by reducing intrinsic motivation to read in the future and student satisfaction with learning. Participants’ use of surface learning approaches, such as skim reading, and

some students' passive understanding of how reading functions in the learning process also link to these students' practice of reading mainly for assessments. This study also found through exploring students' identities, that the surrounding culture's expectations, as well as individual reader identities provide helpful insight into understanding student engagement with academic text. In the final chapter of this report, suggestions of how to implement these findings, as well as suggestions for further research to effectively build upon these findings will be explored.

Chapter 6

Recommendations and Conclusion

The findings from this study showed that reading is a social experience embedded in a socio-cultural framework within a tertiary education environment, affected largely by contextual factors, such as assessment. For the students in this study, reading was more than simply an individual activity or individual identity issue. This study shows that although the majority of participating students value reading and see themselves as capable readers, they did not necessarily engage with academic text in great depth, to ultimately achieve a deep level of satisfaction from their learning. Instead they mainly skim read for assessment purposes, and to identify surface features of the reading. Students who passed university courses without engaging in sustained, ongoing, and intense reading of the academic text were reinforced by the notion that they could “get by” with minimal time invested into this aspect of academic work. Further, when students did not believe that their peers were reading, they were not encouraged to make reading a priority. As participants did not see practising ECE teachers deeply engaging with academic text either, they were not encouraged to value academic text beyond its utilitarian function for professional tasks in the future. While this group’s culture played a large part in these students’ reading experiences, this study showed students both actively constructing their culture, as well being affected by the system-wide culture around them. Students and educators can therefore play an important role in creating and improving their tertiary learning culture.

The first section of this chapter will outline the implications of this research on student engagement with academic text at the tertiary level. These suggestions are intended to help students and educators consider the findings from this research in order to improve student learning outcomes. As the current research was a small, qualitative study, all suggested implications are limited, and thus further research is required and will be discussed in section 6.2. These implications and research recommendations are assuming that academic text will remain as a central learning tool which students are asked to engage within university settings and ECE programmes.

6.1 Recommendations based on findings

In order to promote further student engagement with reading, the findings from this study show that a culture within the student cohort (in the case of this study, specifically the culture within a tutorial group) which encourages, enables, and expects students to read deeply needs to be intentionally established from the outset of a programme or course. Such a culture has potential to increase the students' intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for reading, which can result in better learning outcomes and satisfaction for these students. As students in this study reported some frustration with their reading habits, improving their satisfaction with such learning tasks is imperative. Creating a "reading" culture from the beginning of a programme may help ECE students find value in academic text even when faced with different expectations for academic text within ECE centres. As there are a number of advantages of learning through academic text, including increasing students' knowledge in the area, and helping students experience their learning at a deeper level, it is important for tertiary educators and students to find ways to establish cultures which encourage students to deeply engage with academic text.

This study's findings suggest a number of ways that students and educators can help create a culture which encourages, enables, and expects students to engage in more meaningful ways with academic text (these will be examined below). Results indicate that both educators and students play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining learning culture. These suggestions therefore attempt to avoid placing responsibility on one party or the other, but rather they seek to acknowledge the importance of helping students and educators to support one another in improving the reading culture within tertiary settings. As such, this section will outline a number of ways which students and educators can work together to promote engagement with academic text.

6.1.1 Re-examine assessment practices.

The large impact which assessment had on participating students' reading practices suggests that a close examination of assessment practices may help

promote students' further deep engagement with text in order to improve student learning outcomes. In order to promote deep learning through assessments students can encourage one another to start earlier in the semester on their assessments tasks and to engage sooner in the reading of text. By openly discussing with one another in and outside of class time what they are learning through reading and by questioning difficult texts, students can play an important role in creating a culture where it is acceptable and necessary to read. In order to implement such discussions, students must be willing to speak-up and establish cultural norms for reading which may mean challenging their peers' expectations. This provides the students with an important leadership role in their own learning. For example, students may find the use of online blogs and emails to help promote such discussion in a non-threatening way (although further research on this is needed as this was not explored in the current study). Creating open dialogue between students about challenging and positive experiences with academic text may help their peers to establish higher expectations of those around them, which as evidenced in this study, may also help them to hold higher expectations for their own learning. Consistent with Wenger's (2009) social learning theory and Hazel et al.'s (2002) work, such a recommendation promotes students to an important role in defining competence and acceptable behaviour within their learning community.

Previous research shows that assessment can increase students' extrinsic motivation for learning, which is not necessarily detrimental to student learning outcomes (Harackiewicz et al., 1998). Harackiewicz et al. (1998) found that if external learning goals align with students' personal, intrinsic learning goals motivation can increase through assessment. The current study found the majority of these ECE students were at least somewhat intrinsically motivated to engage with and interact with children (see section 5.2). Thus assessment goals which students are able to easily link with improving this engagement, or their practice, may motivate students to engage more deeply with academic text and the ideas within such text. In this way, educators can work with students to increase extrinsic and intrinsic motivation for learning through text and assessment. Arguably, many educators are already aware of this suggestion, yet find it challenging to help

students make links between important theoretical information and their practice. Further, students are often faced with heavy course loads and multiple assessments due at one time which limits their perceived ability to read their academic text in more depth. These factors indicate that finding ways for students to work on larger assessment tasks throughout the semester, which may potentially help students revisit information which they find valuable to their practice in more depth, could encourage deeper engagement with reading. Such assessment tasks potentially differ from having students submit multiple smaller assessments on topics determined by lecturers which potentially promote only performance goals.

A key strategy for tertiary educators then, may be to require students to submit multiple drafts of the same essay as this may encourage these students to revisit text in deeper and more meaningful ways, however further research is needed in this area. In this way, students can be encouraged to understand the nuances of text often not grasped when skim reading. This suggestion requires both educators and students to work together to promote deeper learning through reading as this type of assessment task would require students to actively engage with reading throughout the semester. Such assessment practices may not lead to deep engagement with text, however if educators are unable to scaffold students' learning by giving valuable feedback, or if students are unwilling to accept and incorporate such feedback. Changing assessment practices without implementing any of the following suggestions may also prove unhelpful for students' learning.

6.1.2 Use of pre-reading instructions.

Research examining the use of pre-reading instructions and their potential to help readers set appropriate reading goals provides another potential way forward for promoting student engagement in reading at the tertiary level. The current study showed that motivation for students to read, during their academic study, derives mainly from the need to prepare and complete written assignments. This demonstrates that there is an ongoing need at tertiary level to support students to identify goals and strategies which promote reading for their learning, rather than simply assessment purposes. McCrudden's (2011) research on pre-reading

instructions found that students provided with weekly reading instructions were engaged with reading throughout the semester. Although the students in McCrudden's (2011) study still identified that they were mainly reading for assessment purposes, the regularity of their reading may have increased the learning from such reading and may have helped them identify important text even if not used in a high-stakes assignment. Such a practice requires educators to set-up and distribute pre-reading instructions, while it also requires students to utilize reading instructions and complete all reading assignments. Further research is needed in this area, but the potential for pre-reading instructions to help students read more effectively and regularly is worth examining (especially for first year students who may need the most help in establishing reading goals).

6.1.3 Reading groups.

In her 2006 article "Troubling Teaching," Dr. Alison Stephenson reports on an initiative she trialed in an ECE course at Victoria University to promote student ownership in the classroom. Her initiative includes one avenue for encouraging and expecting student engagement with academic text on a weekly basis. Stephenson's approach was one similar to the reading group times set-up in the current study's tutorial sessions (see section 4.5.2), but Stephenson's structural features of the reading groups and intentionality throughout the entire semester seemingly helped promote student engagement with reading. Notably students in the current study reported that their reading groups were discontinued later in the semester and were not made a priority. Stephenson (2006) quotes one of her students as saying that this was the "First time in the whole course I have read all the articles provided" (p.4). For her project, Stephenson (2006) outlines how she set up reading groups in which individual students were responsible for reading and explaining articles to a small group of students on a regular basis as well as journaling about the readings on a weekly basis. Reading groups were meant to discuss the articles together and journals were read by at least one other reader. The current study's findings encourage discussion of academic text as students found this to be a helpful way to learn from academic text (see sections 4.5.2, and 5.3).

Utilizing a reading group set-up encourages educators to re-examine their role in the learning process and to examine how they can facilitate class time so that students take ownership of their learning. However, this type of activity requires deep student engagement and will likely not be successful if students are unwilling to accept their role as competent learners and teachers. The reading group approach is suggested here because of its potential for educators and students to collaborate in creating a culture of readers who take ownership of their own learning and reading. It is also a way to tie reading to assessment (the reading journals), yet still promoting student engagement throughout the semester rather than reading for one-off high-stakes assignments. Notably, if educators choose to not use this set-up during their class time, students could organize such reading groups outside of class time. Further examination of how to set up a culture of readers during first year courses is still needed if the above approach proves too demanding on existing knowledge of students at the beginning of a programme.

6.1.4 Promote understanding of the learning process.

Helping students to understand the psychological and cognitive processes of how reading and learning occur may help encourage students to take a deeper approach to their learning. Students in the current study showed evidence of seeing reading as a passive transfer of information that happens by simply reading the words, and therefore tended to simply skim read across the text. Discussing topics in first year education courses such as; differences between surface approaches and deep approaches to learning and how repetition of material affects brain development may help students to understand that simply reading text does not increase one's knowledge. By avoiding "brain dump" images where teachers or text place knowledge in empty vessels, students may be able to quickly reject notions of being able to learn information without repeated and involved processing. Although many secondary school students are presented with study strategies, the current research provides evidence that tertiary students may still benefit from further insight into the learning process and how it can shape their study strategies. Such discussion may help students become consciously aware of images and ideas of learning which they hold, even if they do not recognize that they identify with

such views. These types of discussions require students to honestly and effectively evaluate views they hold, and calls for educators to clearly articulate new ways of viewing the learning process in a non-judgemental manner.

6.1.5 Promote collaboration on reading list.

The current study found that students prefer text which is printed off for them, includes minimal jargon, and includes personal and practical examples which they can easily link to their practice as an ECE teacher. van Wijk's (2006) work also found that practising ECE teachers prefer similar types of text. These findings suggest that educators can take steps towards improving their reading lists to promote student engagement in reading. Yet the findings also indicate that students and educators may need to work together to re-examine student expectations for reading academic text. While suggestions will be made below for how educators can consult learners when making a course reading list, students must also be willing to engage with text which is outside of their preferred and comfortable limits in order to maximise their learning. To do so, students may require structured support to immerse themselves in reading material they would not normally choose. Educators and students may find that by creating open and honest dialogue about how best to approach readings identified by students as "difficult", students will be able to better understand the educator's rationale for choosing text which is challenging and possibly highly theoretical as opposed to practical. As indicated in Ako Aotearoa's (2011) report, students may also need to establish new expectations for how much time their studies will take and be willing to spend more than sixteen to twenty hours per week on a full course load.

While it may not be possible for all text in a course to meet every student's preferences, this research shows that there may be identifiable trends that if adhered to will potentially encourage student learning. Some lecturers may feel that changing text selection to suit student opinion is not a viable option as they find some text seminal to develop professional knowledge. However, helping to prevent students from forming opinions of academic text as inaccessible and unhelpful can encourage future learning through text.

Lecturers who are willing to examine and possibly improve their reading list to make it more student-friendly could conduct a survey at the end of the semester asking students to rank assigned articles on a number of qualities; mainly their usefulness and general comprehension. Taking the time to make printed copies of the text available to students can go a long way in promoting student engagement with text. The current study also suggests that students can play an active role in negotiating difficult text. For example, students can become actively involved in the process for comprehending new terms or jargon through conversation or by supplying terminology lists from such text. These simple but effective strategies can help in promoting student engagement (see section 5.3).

Where lecturers believe a reading is critical for student learning, but dense in theory, they could supply a “user-friendly” overview of the reading to highlight key ideas and their links to practice, with the intent to provide cues for students when reading the article. In order to still promote student engagement with reading when given such an overview, lecturers may ask students to submit a reflection of how the text affects them and their practice. While such suggestions require plenty of work and willingness on behalf of educators, students would still need to engage with assigned text to give honest and helpful feedback, as well as be willing to work with educators to improve future course decisions.

6.1.6 Actively seek exploration of text within ECE centres.

A further suggestion for students to improve their reading and learning culture is situated outside of the university context. As this study reported, students noticed a discrepancy and different expectations for engaging with academic text between the practice within the university and the ECE centres they visited. In such cases, students who find academic text valuable may find it helpful to talk about the value of reading text with associate teachers and others when on placements. By openly discussing what reading means to them, and how academic text improves their practice, students may help practising ECE teachers to also value text further. It is possible that because students in this study did not actively seek out opportunities to explore text with practising ECE teachers they simply missed

seeing the importance of academic text in their work. Therefore by actively engaging in dialogue with teachers about academic text, students have a chance to influence the culture of ECE and to gain further insights from practicing teachers on such text. Such conversations require students to be willing to seek conversations about academic text which may mean actively going against cultural norms in some ECE centres. As such, students may face resistance and should be aware that changing a professional culture may take time and insight as to how best to approach such discussions.

The above recommendations align with the current study's findings and seek to help educators and students to promote student engagement with academic text. While this is not an exhaustive list of ways to implement the research findings, it is meant as a starting point for improving the conditions for reading in order to enhance student learning experiences. While these recommendations are based on a small scale study, educators and students might find these useful ideas as a starting point to examine the culture of reading within their own individual contexts.

6.2 Recommendations for further research

The following section includes suggestions for ways this research could be improved and build on the current project. While some limitations of the data collection methods were previously discussed in section 3.5 of this report, this section will discuss ways to further improve the overall project.

In order to understand students' experiences in more depth and in order to avoid retrospective reporting, the researcher could have looked to collaborate with students on a more regular basis to examine their reading experiences. This could have included daily or weekly, verbal or written diaries about their beliefs and experiences with assigned text. However, the researcher would need to consider how to minimise interfering with students' learning in order to conduct this research, as well as be aware that students may still need time and space to reflect on their experiences. It would also be useful to longitudinally track students' experiences and beliefs rather than simply across one semester, as further

understanding of changes in students' reading practices and beliefs could be examined.

The current study explored with the participating students how they *intended* to use text in the future in their work as an ECE teacher. Further research examining how they *do* use text once working as an ECE teacher in an ECE setting would be useful. In this way, the changes in their beliefs and experiences could provide some insight into what impacts on either students' or teachers' beliefs about academic text and the link to their practice. While professional cultures are constantly changing, examining the practices of such graduates could help inform teacher educators of how best to prepare students for their professional careers. van Wijk's (2006) work examining teachers' views of educational research and written reports provides evidence that views similar to the students in the current research are held by professionals in the ECE field as well, thus it is even more important to help improve students' beliefs about academic text before they leave the university setting.

As technology may change how academic text is used in tertiary environments, further research is needed in this area. Understanding current initiatives with video and audio presentation of information may provide further insight into student learning. While this type of information delivery will not necessarily replace written material entirely, individuals' preference for audio books delivered through popular media demonstrates a need for research to understand how this change in delivery may change students' experiences. Giving students options for engaging with text across a range of mediums may also increase student engagement with course content and reduce the barriers some learners may associate with written text.

6.3 Conclusion

This study examined ECE students' beliefs and experiences of engaging with academic text in order to promote further understanding of the differences and cultures among specific groups of learners, and to contribute to a wider discussion of students' experiences at university. By examining this specific group of students,

the study has shown how both culture and individual identity affect ECE students' experiences with academic text. While previous research influenced the decision for this study to explore student engagement with text by examining students' *individual* identities as well as their socio-cultural experiences of learning, this study also found that *group* culture and contextual factors play a large role in participants' text engagement practices. The ethnographic approach (including visual participatory methods) taken within this research enabled a closer exploration of ECE students' perspectives of engaging with academic text.

While results from this research found that participants' text engagement practices were largely affected by (1) written assessment tasks and (2) a general preference of these students to skim read material, it also highlights how students and educators can collaborate in creating a culture which encourages deep engagement and learning with academic text. By examining student identity, this study found that participants' reader identities did not help explain their reading practices as much as participants' understanding of the groups' reading culture. Furthermore, these students reported seeing minimal evidence of academic text read by teachers within ECE centres. This suggests therefore, that part of the solution is about *creating a culture* which enables deep text engagement. Such a solution requires both students and educators to actively construct a culture of reading and engagement with text from the outset of tertiary programmes or courses.

Ongoing research about ECE students' text engagement practices is pivotal given that tertiary students rely on academic text to supplement their studies, inform and challenge their thinking, and to reach a deeper understanding of the course content. The answer, in part, lies in finding ways to support students individually and collectively, to develop "reading" identities for them to gain greater satisfaction from their learning. This process of identity formation and improving learning begins by gaining understanding of one another's perspective. Thus this study's aim to explore students' perspectives by foregrounding their voice and gathering data through student identity portfolio collages allowed this research to uncover ways in which these students make sense of their university experiences

and their identities. By working alongside these students to gather in-depth qualitative data about their experiences, this study identified the importance of actively including student voice to understand how their learning experiences through text may be enhanced. Perhaps also, it points to the possibility for researchers, students and educators to continue to explore innovative ways to collaborate for enhanced and deeper learning experiences for these students.

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Appendix A: Student participants' information sheet

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui



Early childhood education students' experiences of engaging with academic text Student participant information sheet

Researcher: Lacey Blass: School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Victoria University of Wellington.

This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

My name is Lacey Blass. I am a Master of Education student at Victoria University of Wellington and as part of this degree I am undertaking a research project leading to a thesis. The project I am undertaking is examining students' perspective of what it means for early childhood education students to engage with academic text. The University requires that ethics approval be obtained for research involving human participants.

I am inviting students in EPSY 315: Learning Together: Young children and adolescents in early years settings, tutorial group EC3 Tahī to participate in this study. I have selected this course as it is one of the last of your undergraduate study, and thus you will be able to reflect on both your undergraduate career, and your future teaching career. A premise of this research is to understand a community of learners and the social and cultural effects on their learning.

Participants will be asked to: 1) make and explain an identity collage, 2) take part in a number of interviews and 3) take part in a number of observations of tutorial sessions. (see more details below).

- 1) **Student identity portfolios (collages)** are pictorial descriptions which ask you to utilize a technique of art that requires pasting numerous materials (newspapers, magazines, photographs, etc) on a surface (cardstock). I intend to book one of the rooms on Victoria University's campus to host a collage making session, where I will provide resources for each willing participant in the selected tutorial group to make a collage. Each student can then use this collage as a visual aid to tell stories of how he/she understands his/her identity as a learner and educator. You will also be given the chance to work on your collage at home if you choose to do so.

It is envisaged that the identity collage will take about one to two hours to complete and (as discussed above) may be completed in your own time or during a pre-arranged time at the university (this time will be announced at the beginning of your course). Each participating student will then need to explain his/ her collage to me in a formal interview and this may take up to one additional hour. All students will get to keep their collage as a thank-you for taking part in this research, but I would like to take photographs of these collages so I have the option of including

them in my research report. If you would not like to make an identity collage, but would like still like to participate in the research, please indicate this to me in an email and we can arrange this.

Note: Student collages will be chosen to be included and discussed in my final report based upon those which most reflect themes and patterns which are identified during the research project. Collages may be discussed in the final Master's thesis based on the following criteria: identifiable beliefs and experiences of academic text, indications of students' perceptions of professional identity, and reference to future aspirations as a teacher or learner. If your collage is chosen to be included in the final report, I will request to collaborate with you on how to protect your confidentiality (by blurring photos or selecting segments of your collage), while still conveying your ideas included in the collage.

- 2) **Interviews:** Participating students will also be asked to take part in a number of interviews.
 - Some interviews will be set-up via email ahead of time and will take no more than one hour. There will be between one to five of these interviews per student depending on the topics and questions discovered during the research.
 - Other interviews will be informal questions before or after tutorial times and these interviews should take no more than ten minutes.

Students can always choose not to participate in interviews, or to arrange them for a more suitable time. All interviews will be tape recorded for accuracy. Please note that an honest reflection of your experiences during these interviews has potential to create understanding and insight for the future of the teacher education programme, and at no point will you be penalized for your views and/ or practices regarding academic text engagement. I will also email initial data analysis to all participants for their feedback regarding this information.

- 3) **Observations** (narrative recordings) will take place during tutorial times, at which point I will be taking notes about what is occurring during these sessions. Narrative recordings are an observation technique where the observer attempts to record as much information regarding the context and participants as possible. (Examples of information to be recorded include: how the room is set up, who is speaking, types of activities in which students are asked to engage.) Note: I am also hoping to attend a number of lectures for this course, however this is simply for contextual understanding of the course, and I will not be recording conversations or observations during this time.

Should any participants feel the need to withdraw from the project, they may do so without question at any time before the data is analysed. Just let me know (via email or in person) if this occurs.

Responses collected will form the basis of my research project and will be put into a written report on a confidential basis. It will not be possible for you to be identified personally as the report will use pseudonyms for all participants. . If you chose to participate, you will be given the option to have an opportunity to check the initial data analysis before publication. All material collected will be kept confidential. No other person

besides me and my supervisors, Dr Roseanna Bourke and Dr. Amanda Gilbert, will see the complete data collection.

The thesis will be submitted for marking to the School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy and deposited in the University Library. An initial analysis will also be presented at Victoria University's annual postgraduate conference. It is also intended that one or more articles will be submitted for publication in scholarly journals.

All data will be securely stored and all recorded interviews and sessions will be destroyed within five years after the end of the project.

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the project, please contact me (contact details below) or my supervisor, Dr Roseanna Bourke, at the School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy at Victoria University (contact details below).

Please also understand that if you choose not to participate in this study you will **not** be disadvantaged in any way. The course coordinator and tutor will not know who is participating and who is not.

If you agree to participate in this research project, please review, fill in, and return the consent form.

Thank you for considering this request.

Lacey Blass

Please keep this letter for your records.

Any questions please contact:

Researcher

Lacey Blass

School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy

at Victoria University

PO Box 600; Wellington

Phone: 04 463 5233 x9401

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Supervisor

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Appendix B: Student participants' written consent form

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui



Early childhood education students' experiences of engaging with academic text Student participant consent form

This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

Please read the following, tick each box if you agree and then sign if you consent to participating in this research.

- I confirm that I am an undergraduate student enrolled in EPSY 315: Learning Together: Young children and adolescents in early years settings; and I am in tutorial group EC3 Tahi.
- I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that I have been asked to make an identity collage, and I understand that a student identity collage is a pictorial description which asks me to utilize a technique of art that requires pasting numerous materials (newspapers, magazines, photographs, etc) on a surface (cardstock). This may take me approximately two hours to complete, and I understand that the researcher will provide resources for me to make a collage. I can then use this collage as a visual aid to tell stories to the researcher of how I understand my identity as a learner and educator.
- I understand that if I decide to make my identity collage during the prearranged time at the university, the session will be audio recorded and then electronically wiped within five years of the end of the project. I will also be given the chance to work on my collage at home if I choose to do so.
- I understand that I can retain the collage I develop (if I choose to develop a collage).
- I understand that a photograph will be taken of my collage which may or may not be included in the final research report. Collages may be discussed in the final Master's thesis based on the following criteria: identifiable beliefs and experiences of academic text, indications of students' perceptions of professional identity, and reference to future aspirations as a teacher or learner. If my collage is included, the researcher will seek to keep my identity confidential by working with me to remove identifying factors.
- I understand that the researcher will be taking narrative recordings of a minimum of five tutorial sessions of EPSY 315. I understand that narrative recordings are an observation technique where the observer attempts to record as much information regarding the context and participants as possible. (Examples of information to be recorded include: how the room is set up, who is speaking, types of activities in which students are asked to engage.)

- I understand that I may withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from this project (before data collection and analysis is complete) without having to give reasons or without penalty of any sort.
- I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher, the supervisor and the person who transcribes the tape recordings of our interviews.
- I understand that the published results will not use my name, and that no opinions will be attributed to me in any way that will identify me.
- I understand that all data will be securely stored, and the interviews will be tape recorded and then electronically wiped within five years of the end of the project **unless** I indicate that I would like them returned to me by writing my postal address on this line:

- I understand that I will be given the option to have an opportunity to check the initial data analysis before publication.
- I understand that the data I provide will not be used for any other purpose or released to others without my written consent.
- I understand that I will receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed, which will be sent to me at the email address provided at the bottom of this form.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I agree to be contacted at the below email address in order to set up interviews.

Signed:

Name of participant:

(Please print clearly)

Date:

Email address:

**Please return signed forms to Julie Libby in the EPSY administration office by
Friday 22 July, 2011 at 1pm**

Researcher

Lacey Blass

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Pedagogy

at Victoria University

PO Box 600; Wellington

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Appendix C: Lecturer information sheet

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui



Early childhood education students' experiences of engaging with academic text Lecturer/ course coordinator/ tutor information sheet

Researcher: Lacey Blass: School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, Victoria University of Wellington.

This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

My name is Lacey Blass. I am a Master of Education student at Victoria University of Wellington and as part of this degree I am undertaking a research project leading to a thesis. The project I am undertaking is examining students' perspective of what it means for early childhood education students to engage with academic text. The University requires that ethics approval be obtained for research involving human participants.

As I am seeking to examine students' perspectives, I would like to invite students in EPSY 315: Learning Together: Young children and adolescents in early years settings, tutorial group EC3 Tahi to participate in this study. I have selected this course as it is one of the last of their undergraduate study, and thus they will be able to reflect on both their undergraduate career, and their future teaching career. As I am seeking to understand students' perspectives, I am asking you as the course coordinator, lecturer, or tutor for this group of students for permission to do my research in the course in which you are a part; however you will not be one of the primary participants of this research project in that no data will be collected around your teaching practice.

As the course coordinator, lecturer, or tutor for this group of students, I am asking for your permission to 1) observe five to ten tutorial sessions while taking narrative recordings, 2) attend three to ten lectures to gather contextual information in which to form questions to ask students, and 3) have access to all course documents so that I can ask students questions about their perspective of such documents.

Participants will be asked to: 1) make and explain an identity collage, 2) take part in a number of interviews and 3) take part in a number of observations of tutorial sessions. (see more details below). A premise of this research is to understand a community of learners and the social and cultural effects on their learning.

So that you have an understanding of what I would like to ask from the students, I have outlined below the explanation I would like to give to the potential participants about their possible contributions:

- 1) Student identity portfolios (collages) are pictorial descriptions which ask you to utilize a technique of art that requires pasting numerous materials (newspapers, magazines, photographs, etc) on a surface (cardstock). I intend to book one of the

rooms on Victoria University's campus to host a collage making session, where I will provide resources for each willing participant in the selected tutorial group to make a collage. Each student can then use this collage as a visual aid to tell stories of how he/she understands his/her identity as a learner and educator. You will also be given the chance to work on your collage at home if you choose to do so.

It is envisaged that the identity collage will take about an hour to two hours to complete and may be completed in your own time or during a pre-arranged time at the university (this time will be announced at the beginning of your course). Each participating student will then need to explain his/ her collage to me in a formal interview and this may take up to one additional hour. All students will get to keep their collage as a thank-you for taking part in this research, but I would like to take photographs of these collages so I have the option of including them in my research report. If you would not like to make an identity collage, but would like still like to participate in the research, please indicate this to me in an email and we can arrange this.

Note: Student collages will be chosen to be included and discussed in my final report based upon those which most reflect themes and patterns which are identified during the research project. Collages may be discussed in the final Master's thesis based on the following criteria: identifiable beliefs and experiences of academic text, indications of students' perceptions of professional identity, and reference to future aspirations as a teacher or learner. If your collage is chosen to be included in the final report, I will request to collaborate with you on how to protect your confidentiality (by blurring photos or selecting segments of your collage), while still conveying your ideas included in the collage.

- 2) Participating students will also be asked to take part in a number of interviews.
 - Some interviews will be set-up via email ahead of time and will take no more than one hour. There will be between one to five of these interviews per student depending on the topics and questions discovered during the research.
 - Other interviews will be informal questions before or after tutorial times and these interviews should take no more than ten minutes.

Students can always choose to not participate in interviews, or to arrange them for a more suitable time. All interviews will be tape recorded for accuracy. Please note that an honest reflection of your experiences during these interviews has potential to create understanding and insight for the future of the teacher education programme, and at no point will you be penalized for your views and/ or practices regarding academic text engagement. I will also email initial data analysis to all participants for their feedback regarding this information.

- 3) Observations (narrative recordings) will take place during tutorial times, at which point I will be taking notes about what is occurring during these sessions. Narrative recordings are an observation technique where the observer attempts to record as much information regarding the context and participants as possible. (Examples of information to be recorded include: how the room is set up, who is speaking, types of activities in which students are asked to engage.) Note: I am also hoping to attend a number of lectures for this course, however this is simply for contextual

understanding of the course, and I will not be recording conversations or observations during this time.

Should any participants feel the need to withdraw from the project, they may do so without question at any time before the data is analysed. I have informed them to simply let me know at the time.

Responses collected will form the basis of my research project and will be put into a written report on a confidential basis. It will not be possible for you to be identified personally as the report will use pseudonyms for all participants. All material collected will be kept confidential. No other person besides me and my supervisors, Dr Roseanna Bourke and Dr. Amanda Gilbert, will see the complete data collection.

The thesis will be submitted for marking to the School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy and deposited in the University Library. An initial analysis will also be presented at Victoria University's annual postgraduate conference. It is also intended that one or more articles will be submitted for publication in scholarly journals.

All recorded interviews and sessions will be destroyed within five years after the end of the project.

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the project, please contact myself (contact details below) or my supervisor, Dr Roseanna Bourke (contact details below).

If you agree to give permission for me to approach the research participants in EPSY 315, please review and fill in the consent form, and return to Julie Libby at the EPSY administration office.

Thank you for considering this request.

Lacey Blass

Researcher

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Appendix D: Lecturer written consent form

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui



Early childhood education students' experiences of engaging with academic text Lecturer/ course coordinator/ tutor consent form

This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

Please read the following, tick each box if you agree and then sign if you consent to giving permission for this research.

- I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.
- I give my permission for the researcher to:
- observe tutorial sessions (a minimum of 5).
 - attend lectures.
 - have access to all course documents (including the course syllabus and all assigned readings which I will supply in electronic form during the first two weeks of the semester).
- I understand that the researcher will be taking narrative recordings of a minimum of five tutorial sessions of EPSY 315. I understand that narrative recordings are an observation technique where the observer attempts to take note of as much information regarding the context and participants as possible. (Examples of information to be recorded include: how the room is set up, who is speaking, types of activities in which students are asked to engage.)
- I understand that once the students have given their permission, the researcher will work with them outside class time for the collage development.
- I understand that I may withdraw my permission (or any information I have provided) from this project (before data collection and analysis is complete) if extenuating circumstances arise.
- I understand that the published results will not use my name, and that no opinions will be attributed to me in any way that will identify me.
- I understand that I will receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed, which will be sent to me at the below email address:
-
- I give my permission for the researcher to approach students in the tutorial group EC3 Tahī, and enrolled in EPSY 315: Learning together: young children and adults in early years settings, to take part in this research.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Please return signed forms to Julie Libby in the EPSY administration office by Wednesday July 13, 2011.

Appendix E: Directions for student participants about identity collages

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui



Early childhood education students' experiences of engaging with academic text:

Directions to student participants about identity collages

Note: This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee.

Thank you for your willingness to take part in this research process! It is anticipated that this activity will be beneficial for both yourself and those who read about this research.

Please read the below information carefully:

It is envisaged that the identity collage will take about one to two hours to complete and may be completed in your own time or during a pre-arranged time in a university classroom (will add the time & location here when it has been announced at the beginning of the course). You are able to make this collage by yourself, or you may make it with a group of students. Each participating student will then need to explain his/ her collage to me in a formal interview and this may take up to one additional hour.

For research purposes, please remember that if you are choosing to make your identity collage during the prearranged time at the university, the collage making session is being **audio recorded** so that I can search for valuable data in the discussions happening during the process.

For this stage of the research project, please make a collage to **represent your experiences as a university student learning to become an early childhood teacher.**

Things you may want to include/ represent (either visually in your collage or audibly in your interview):

You do **not** have to include all of these- they are simply ideas:

- Thoughts, feelings, values of your experience at university and teacher practicums
- Particular experiences which were pivotal (positive or negative)

- References to specific people, objects, or resources which have impacted your experience
- Items which explain your identity as a learner or a teacher
- Your hopes and aspirations for the future and how these are tied or not tied to your university experience

In order to make your collage, please feel free to use any of the provided materials or anything you would like to provide yourself. You are welcome to work on this collage for as long as you'd like, and you are not required to work on it for any specific amount of time.

Student collages will be chosen to be included and discussed in my final report based upon those which most reflect themes and patterns which are identified during the research project. Collages may be discussed in the final Master's thesis based on the following criteria: identifiable beliefs and experiences of academic text, indications of students' perceptions of professional identity, and reference to future aspirations as a teacher or learner.

If you decide to include photos of yourself or anyone else, please note that if your collage is selected to be discussed in my final research report, I will need to collaborate with you to find ways to ensure the identity of all people is hidden (for example by blurring faces or selecting segments of your collage).

Please keep in mind that after you finish your collage, I would like to have an individual formal interview with you where I will ask you to explain your collage to me, so that I can understand what you have made. This formal interview will be set-up via email for a time that is convenient for both of us and will be audio recorded. This collage is yours to keep after you have explained it to me and I have photographed it.

Before this formal interview, it may be helpful for you to think about the most important aspects of your collage which you would like to explain to me. I may ask you further questions about your collage and your experiences at this time as well.

If you decide that you would not like to make an identity collage, but would like to set up an interview to discuss your experiences, please email me at the below email address to set this up.

You are welcome to contact me at blassel@myvuw.ac.nz with any questions.

Thanks again and happy collage-ing!

Appendix F: Frequently asked questions collage sheet

Collage F.A.Q's

This information is provided for those who would like a bit of direction with making their collage. You **do NOT have to follow these suggestions**; they are just to start you in a direction.

What is a collage?

A collage is a technique of art that requires pasting on a surface numerous materials not necessarily associated with each other. Traditional collage materials include scraps of paper, newspaper clippings, magazine clippings, photographs (or photocopies of photographs), objects such as string, beads, feathers, and fabric.

Collage may encompass images, text, solid colours, or a mixture of these. You may want a recognizable image or word, or simply a suggestion, feel, colour, or texture. Collage can be a blend of elements as well; you can paint, draw, stamp, or stencil in-between the elements you find, or cover over them. For this collage, you can use any provided materials, personal items or photographs.

Why make a collage?

- A collage is a unique way for you to reflect on your experiences and then tell meaningful stories.
- This specific art can easily account for the complexity of situations and allows for depth and insight into understanding one's experiences.
- It is a user friendly activity which does not require fine art skills.
- Using it for research allows you as the participant to direct our conversation with your voice so I can further understand you (rather than being directed by my questions entirely).

How can I make my collage?

These are just suggestions, which you may or may not find helpful:

1. Think about your base: The background does not have to be white or plain; the background could be a page from a magazine or book, a large photograph, or a page of text. Paint or draw on it, or cover over it with anything that glue will stick to.
2. You can choose to cut the base to the desired size and shape.
3. Use scissors to cut out pieces for your collage. Try cutting your scraps into unusual shapes, cutting out words or letters from a variety of sources to make phrases on your collage.
4. Cut out a whole picture, an identifiable part, or just enough to evoke texture, colour or feeling.

5. Cut different shapes for both words and images.
6. Try tearing materials too. The rough, random edges give parts of your collage a different character than cutouts.
7. Apply glue to each item.
8. You don't have to cover the whole surface if you don't want to, and not every piece has to be glued flat on the collage. You can fold or crumple pieces of paper, for example, to get interesting textures.

Tips for making a collage:

- You may find it helpful to get started by writing a list of them main themes/ ideas you'd like to represent.
- Take your time. Be patient and carefully choose and arrange your materials.
- If the materials on your collage do not stick perfectly after gluing, you can brush a diluted glue mixture (about 3 parts water to 1 part glue) over the whole collage once it is finished. You can also use this technique to seal the collage.
- Only use glues that are right for the materials you are pasting. Some glues simply won't hold certain materials, and some very strong glues may quickly damage your collage pieces. Rubber cement is great because it doesn't wrinkle paper and is very strong.
- If you want to plan out your collage, you can lay the pieces down on the surface without glue, rearranging them until you have it just right. Then take a picture of the collage so you will know how to assemble it.
- Make your collage however *you* want it, and don't be afraid to experiment with different techniques, images, etc.

Example collages:



Sources:

This written information has been adopted from: <http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Collage>.

* Collage 1 is from : <http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Collage>

** Collage 2 is from :

<http://nz.bing.com/images/search?q=how+to+create+a+collage&view=detail&id=4CE7AD02E06E2DC143078D1BF76CD956CB4336BF&first=0&FORM=IDFRIR> edi

*** Collage 3 is from :

<http://nz.bing.com/images/search?q=how+to+create+a+collage&view=detail&id=2CB6A28A2BC2A1554CEB2CB6A28A2BC2A1554CEB&first=0&FORM=IDFRIR>

Appendix G: Formal interview schedule #1

Early childhood education students' experiences of engaging with academic text

Schedule for formal (semi-structured) interview #1:

- *Note to researcher: Main objective for this interview is for student to lead and discuss his/ her identity portfolio collage.*
 - **Start with:**
 - 1) thank you
 - 2) role of researcher
 - 3) semi-structured interview with follow up questions
 - 4) writing things down for my sake
 - 5) will be audio recorded
 - 6) have you signed the consent form?
 - 7) Your opinions will in no way affect the outcome of your courses, and all answers will remain confidential
 - 8) Sake of tape- tell us what you're pointing to

Pseudonym of participant:

- a. Demographics/ General Questions:** (for other researchers to understand the type of people involved in this project)

1. Age range: 11-20; 21-30; 31-40; 41-50; 51-60; 61-70; 71-80
2. Reason for entering program:
3. Plans or goals upon exiting program:
4. Have you had any previous teaching experience:

- b.** Can you tell me about your collage?

Other questions to consider if not already discussed in their explanation of collage: (ask them to refer to collage... "Does anything here" or ask what does this mean?)

- c. Further questions about identity:**

1. Would you call yourself an educator?
2. What characteristics or values of an educator are most important to you? Or what do you want others to know about your style of teaching?

3. Do you think your identity has changed through your programme?
How did it change?

d. Questions about course readings:

1. Do you have **readings in this course**?
 - Can we explore your experience with assigned readings for your classes?
 - How do you know what to read and when?
2. Do you generally read your assigned readings? Why or why not?
3. Are you happy with the amount of readings you've done during your programme?
4. Can you think of a reading you like, what do you like about it?
5. What do you think is the purpose of reading academic text?
6. What are your plans and goals in regards to this course's assigned text?

e. Reading habits / strategies

7. What type of reader would you describe yourself as?
8. What reading habits or strategies do you use with academic text?
 - Maybe tell me about a time when you read the assigned reading for class? Did you learn something through this reading?
 - Do you read outside of University? Do you use the same strategies then?
 - Do you discuss academic text with anyone else?
9. How do you feel about your level of reading skill?
10. Do you think reading is an effective way to learn? Why or why not?
11. What is the most significant learning you've experienced so far through your entire programme?
 - How did you learn it?

f. Influences on your perspective of reading:

12. Have you seen or heard **teachers on your field assignments** engage with or discuss academic text?

13. Can you tell me about **your peers'** engagement with the assigned text in your previous classes? Do they read the assigned text? How do you know that?
14. How about your family- do you think your family values academic text?

Thank you!!!

Appendix H: Formal interview schedule #2

Early childhood education students' experiences of engaging with academic text

Schedule for formal (semi-structured) interview #2:

Start with:

- 1) thank you
- 2) follow-up interview, hoping to elaborate on data
- 3) Your opinions will in no way affect the outcome of your courses, and all answers will remain confidential
- 4) will be audio recorded

1. Now that the course is almost over, can you tell me a bit about your experiences and/ or beliefs about your assigned readings in this course?

- Did you achieve your goals in regards to the course readings?
 - Did you read them for the assignments? Week by week?
- Did you like the reading groups? Find them helpful?
- Can you tell me about any specific instances when you used or didn't use the text this semester?

2. Do you value any learning that happened through your course readings in this course? Do you value academic text as a way for future learning?

- Did you learn anything through the course readings this semester?
- Can you tell me about any of the readings in specific?
- Did the course readings help you with the class assessments?
- Will the course readings help you in the future?

3. We'll take a final look at your collage- is there anything on here that relates to your experience or beliefs about academic text now that the semester has ended?

Appendix I: Observation schedule or field notes

Early childhood education students' experiences of engaging with academic text

Narrative recording observation schedule

Tutorial Observation	
Date:	Time: # of observation:
Setting:	
Participants:	
Narrative Recordings:	Running Analysis:

Tutorial Observation Continued

Narrative Recordings:

Running Analysis:

Tutorial Observation Continued

Narrative Recordings:

Analysis:

Running