



Notes on the Heart: Affective Issues in the Writing Classroom

Susan McLeod

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It has long been recognized that affect (that is, the noncognitive aspect of mental activity) plays a large role in writing and in learning to write. According to Susan H. McLeod, however, the model that has been most used for empirical research on the writing process is based on cognitive psychology and does not take into account affective phenomena. Nor does the social constructionist view of the writing process acknowledge the affective realm except in a very general way. To understand the complete picture, McLeod insists, we need to explore how cognitive, affective, and social elements interact as people write.

In this book, McLeod follows a group of students through a semester of writing assignments, tracking the students' progress and examining the affective elements relevant to their writing. To facilitate future discussion of these phenomena, McLeod also provides suggested definitions for terms in the affective domain.

In a very real sense, this book is the result of a collaboration of three Susans: Susan McLeod, who researched and wrote the book; Sue Hallett, an instructor in Washington State University's composition program whose classes McLeod observed and who helped provide much of the data; and Susan Parker, a graduate student who observed Hallett's class and who ran a tutorial connected to that class. To provide a narrative structure, McLeod and her two collaborators have constructed a simulated semester, conflating the year and a half of the study into one semester and creating a class that is a composite drawn from seven classrooms over three semesters.

Although philosophers have had much to say about the affective domain, *Notes on the Heart* is based for the most part on research from the social sciences. Discussions of pedagogy, while meant to have practical value, are suggestive rather than prescriptive. The goal is to help teachers see their practice in new way.

Teachers will be particularly interested in McLeod's discussion of teacher affect/effect. This section examines both the issue of the "Pygmalion effect" (students becoming better because the teacher believes they are) and perhaps the more common opposite, the "golem effect" (students becoming less capable because their teachers view them that way).

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