Engaging Minds immediately excited me. I wanted to contact all my colleagues and shout, “This is what we should be using in our teacher education programs!” This book is not the typical text that is often written for prospective teachers. Instead of a linear, mechanistic, objective worldview that has informed Euro/American education in the past, the authors use as the basis for their work a holistic, ecological perspective of teaching and learning, which they call ecological postmodernism. This worldview has also been called enactivism or complexity science by researchers working in other disciplines and is a relatively new area of inquiry that is gaining interest in many natural and social sciences. This view acknowledges the “complex ways that personal and collective identity are entangled in historical, cultural, biological, and more-than-human worlds” (p. 178) and “that learning is coming to be understood as a participation in the world, a co-evolution of knower and known that transforms both” (p. 65). The authors show how knowing resides not in the mind, but in the whole body, and how “all learning becomes part of a complex ecological dance” (p. 197). Not only do the authors describe this complexity in a way that is interesting and understandable, they provide fascinating examples such as learning to ski to illustrate a theory. They also give an overview of other historical and recent worldviews and theoretical influences that have contributed to Western histories and sensibilities. In the “Reading Possibilities” section they list resources written by some advocates of the various schools of thought. This is an excellent starting point for those who want read further in any of these fields.

As much as I love this book, I find its structure can be both frustrating and delightful. The Table of Contents with the unusual, but thought-provoking headings poses somewhat of a challenge when looking for topics. The index is very useful though. I am intrigued, however, with the authors’ use of double-meaning, verb/noun phrases such as “labeling problems”, “connecting thoughts”, “reading bodies” or “engaging minds” in the headings, sub-headings and title to give us a sense of the multiple meanings and ambiguities of language. That our perceptions are based
on language that is fluid, contextual and evolving, is a theme that is woven throughout the book. I also appreciated that the authors’ use of language is accessible to most prospective teachers.

The format can also be a bit frustrating for those of us who like to read a book from cover to cover. I am so easily sidetracked by the many interesting bits. (Did you know a glass of water might increase intelligence?) On the other hand, I am delighted that I can open it anywhere and immediately be drawn into the text. The authors deliberately use a number of strategies such as insert boxes and side notes to prevent a linear reading and to emphasize that thinking is not linear.

What I liked best, however, is that this book has no prescriptions. As most experienced teachers know, “how to” directions for teaching rarely work. Rather, the examples the authors provide, help us to imagine how we might address various issues within our own contexts. Difficult topics including assessment and evaluation, classroom management, diversity, gender and spirituality – issues that can perplex even the most experienced teachers – are addressed sensitively through an interweaving of current educational thought and stories. Instead of telling us how to accommodate difference in the regular classroom, the authors show through narratives how we might structure tasks that learners can adapt to their own talents and interests. Folding paper to understand fractions is just one example of such a task. Instead of telling us how to sensitively handle issues of diversity as in the case of children who have parents of the same gender or other family structures, they relate how one student teacher came to terms with this issue. They show how multiple lenses can be used to interpret experiences, as in using photographs to imagine the lives of the subjects in them or creating stories around other people’s shoes. Stories such as these interrupt our taken-for-granted assumptions and provide other ways of seeing. The paradigm shift represented in this book has possibilities for transforming how we make sense of our world. I believe this is necessary if we are to live in harmony with it and with each other.

This book is transforming the way I think. I bought the book.
Prepared for a long journey home on a flight from Toronto, I pulled out my paper and pen, in anticipation of skimming through the pages of this book, jotting down helpful hints, and ideas to use with my children. I started to write, and write and write. Within the first half an hour I realized that this was no way to interact with this book.

Offering a wealth of ideas, this book weaves together theories and practices on learning, pedagogy, education and parenting, rejecting the notion that theory and practice can be separated. It is not a ‘how to’ book offering step-by-step formulas for checklist teaching. Rich in images, symbols and metaphors this text is more of a resource than a book to be read cover to cover. This is one of its many attractions. It is a book to be carried with you, to rest on your desk, or to sit on your bedside table. Open it at any page and you can dive straight in.

Organized into five chapters, each chapter is divided into three sections. ‘Working Ideas’ are supported by “Telling Experiences’ followed by “Interpreting Events’ where you will find specific suggestions for teaching. These suggestions can be used by both teacher and parent, in or out of the classroom.

The act of teaching is an awakening of our children and ourselves to the wonders of the world. What happens when we:

- Create stories using other people’s shoes as a prompt and discover the connection between creating human identities and storying?
- Explore ‘wild mind’ writing exercises, using a piece of hair, a box of buttons, or a scent in the autumn air as a prompt?
- Pretend to be an android programmer imputing the information that is required for the android to perform what we do in a day, and we discover the multiple layers of knowledge, many of which remain unrecognized?
In a continuous conversation the text provides space for opening up dialogue and opening our awareness of the complex webs of knowledge that are embedded deeply in our history of human understanding.

Initially, I had a moment of being overwhelmed by the wealth of information available to me as a reader. Where to begin? I found myself jumping from one place to another in an attempt to ‘get it all’. I then started to focus on the narratives, which drew me into the world of story and I started to see connecting patterns between the narrative forms and the more standard academic prose. Engaged in its web of thought-provoking information, I connected to the words as a mother, a student and teacher, focusing on how I can remain present to uncovering, rediscovering and understanding the layers of meanings in the world through story, writing and conversation.

I bought the book!
Before you continue, I bought the book but, why should you?

The challenge is to find a way to describe a book unlike any I have read before. *Engaging Minds* is motivational, inspirational and educational. Relevant. *Accessible!* I see my children, both at school and at home, in a new light. As I read, I am astonished at how much I don’t know about learning and the processes involved. The book contains vast amounts of information regarding perception, cognition, ability, identity and language acquisition: it’s akin to discovering elusive puzzle pieces fifteen years after you started the picture. Eureka!

No matter where the book falls open, something new is revealed. To convince you, I’ll randomly select pages using lottery numbers from my most recent fortune cookie - 6, 11, 17, 26, 27 and 47. Here goes:

**6 - Fig. 1.3** - Human Consciousness: our sense organs can register in the range of 11 million bits of information each second....the evidence suggests that humans are powerfully attuned to and affected by events and circumstances that may never come to conscious. As teachers, we need to question how children best learn concepts, in isolation or as part of a bigger picture. Something else to contemplate is your classroom. What does it look like? What does it sound like? Why does that matter?

**11 - Fig. 1.5** - The [virtually infinite] Capacities of Human Sense Organs: It is important for teachers to realize that consciousness is limited, but to consider the conditions that contribute to what gets noticed. How is a trickle of perceptions selected out of a torrent of sensorial possibilities? It is naive to assume that we really know or completely control what kids are truly getting out of our lessons. Therefore, how do I structure my approach to best meet the varied needs of so many children?

**17 - Fig. 1.9** - What is the meaning of the symbol / ? “T”, “L”, “I”, “/” or any number of other things. The meaning is not in the symbol, but in the complex webs of association that the symbol triggers when it is deployed in a particular context. Language and symbols never have just one meaning therefore when we hear or see these icons, a flood of potential connections fill our minds. I think this might mean that the more associations we have, the more creative we
can be. I think it also means that maybe we shouldn’t be so quick to judge students’ answers right or wrong based on what we think we asked.

26 - Knowing Looks - Teaching seems to be less about helping students ‘know’ what they don’t know and more about helping them ‘notice’ what they haven’t noticed. There is then, no singular ‘correct’ way of seeing the world. As a teacher, this dramatically changes my perception of my role. Albert Einstein said, “Learning is experience. Everything else is just information.” How should we guide?

27 - Seeing Pictures - An anecdote in teaching: “What do you see?” in the dots scattered randomly on the page? The beginning activity is an exciting series of lessons on visual perception.

47 - The realization that humans are storying creatures is an important one for teachers...the deliberate use of narrative structures - that is, telling and composing stories to incorporate new information into established understandings - is an important tool...regardless of subject area. Most of our memory is stored in story. How can I use this information to positively impact my students’ futures? Coincidentally, the flip side of that fortune predicts my review: You will bring joy to many people!

You will en’joy’ this book. It has revolutionized the way I think about thinking, yet, I feel my words inadequately reflect its essence. Maybe that’s what the authors intended: to create something that was potentially powerful, original and virtually indescribable - just like the precious lives of Everychild. Maybe in labouring to confine the book to a single page review, I recognize a comparative incongruity in what we attempt every day, to pigeon-hole and neatly categorize our multifaceted, amazing children. Thus, each fascinating page is analogous to the possibilities within Everychild - a mind with all sensors on alert, all neurons snapping, every cell significant, individualized in their function but each a contributing part of the whole. Lives unfolding. Humans becoming. Each a rare and unique edition.

Why do I care if you read this book? You might be one of my children’s teachers.

Reference