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CREATIVITY FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: PURPOSE, PROCESS, PRODUCT

An extended editorial

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*"…riches that the fairies have given to mortals turn to paper
as soon as they are measured or counted"* (Hyde, 2012:153)

This editorial sets out, broad brush in hand, to paint a view ofthe landscape that we, staff and students in higher education along with our creative practices, inhabit. It is a landscape that we sketch only in outline but the lines turn out to be rich in metaphor.

Creativity is widely recognised as a catalyst for innovation and adaptation, and so it carries value in an increasingly unpredictable and rapidly changing world. Kleiman (2008), however, argues that "it may evade the sort of definition, categorisation and compartmentalisation required to integrate it fully into thecurriculum frameworks and assessment regimes that are currently in place in higher education" (p.209), whileBarnett (2012; see also Barnett& Coat, 2005) questions whether the current emphasis on skills and outcomes is developing the full potential of students to engage with a complex and ever-changing world. Meanwhile, we are said to be in the midst of a 'creative turn' in higher education (Harris, 2014) as we see the value of creative and agile graduatesacknowledged across institutions, disciplines and courses - althoughrelatively little attention is paidto thestudent engagement initiatives that can help realise this value, or to how staff might be supported in the process.Whilst different disciplines and contexts may conceptualise and value creativityin different ways, the need to stimulate and nurturecreative engagement withlearning is common to all. This requires a pedagogic stance that is facilitative, enabling, proactive and responsive, open to possibilities and experimentation, collaborative and relational, and values processand, or even as,outcome. Currently, thiscan feel like swimming against the tide.

University systems present a paradox. They aim, and indeed claim, to prepare graduates for uncertain futures in an increasingly disordered, messy and complex world – yet they pursue   transparency and clarity throughlayers ofstructures - module descriptors, learning outcomes, assessment criteria - that constrain and routinise how we work and learn. This createspedagogic spacesthat arestriated in nature; contained and compartmentalised - like cities - in which progress is linear

and between predetermined fixed points offering a sense of certainty and stability, in contrast with theopen, unstructured and wild and messy nature of smooth space – like the desert, ocean and steppe - where movement is nomadic,exploratory and uncertain (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988 cited in Savin-Baden, 2008).The meta-structure of a VLE is, for Bayne (2004:312), "… a space of pure striation", offering "…a city on the steppe, a 'safe' space of enclosure or containment". However,where the city walls obscure, thestructurescan come to definethe learning space - and the wild beyond, where creative potential lies, goes unseen. The metaphor extends to Cowden and Singh's (2013) view that learners, in moving along predetermined linear paths, are learning by 'satnav', "…providing an easy formula for teaching and learning which closes down the possibility of creative curriculum design, structures and spaces" (p.52) and creating a "new poverty of student life" (p.43). Instriated spaces, creative opportunities, if they exist at all, are squeezed into the cracksbetween fixed points so that engagement is limited to 'weak' creative acts as learners try to solve problems presented to them(Freeman, 2006).The inhabitants see no need to venture outside the safety of the city into the "unregulated unknown" (Bayne, 2004: 312) – and so remain unaware of the possibilities for 'strong' creative acts associated with thefurther problematisingthat opens up multiple possibilities for thinking and action (Freeman, 2006). It is the wild that reveals the affective, dispositional and relational in creative engagement.

Solomonides, Reid and Petocz (2012) highlight a student's developing 'sense of being' as a cornerstone of creativity as it mediates the ways in which students engage with various aspects of their learning, from the practical, to the development of their emerging personal and professional identities. Striated spaces are, however, pernicious in the ways in which they position identities and undermine creativity through structures that predetermine how teaching and learning 'should' beso thata tutor's purpose is reduced to managing knowledge, translating, interpreting and making it safe for student consumption - and learners are positioned as subordinate and conformingas they subsume disciplinary practices rather than challenge them (Savin-Baden, 2008). As Cowden and Singh, 2013) note: "the academichas morphed from an explorer in [their] own right to an embodied Sat-Nav system"(p.56)and "students arebeing taught how to operate… a 'Sat-Nav' system rather than how to discover the terrain for themselves" (p.49). It is in the smooth spaces, as spaces of becoming and potential transformation, where learners learn how to navigate their own route, discover the terrain for themselves – and, in the process, forge their own identity.

Professional education conducts regular risky forays outside the walls of the city when the uncertainty of real world contexts comes into contact with the routinised patterns of signature pedagogies, and where we find rich learning situations that are "…routine, yet never the same…habitual, but pervaded by uncertainty" (Shulman, 2005:20). The 'signature' represents those complex aspects of working in a discipline that have been routinised i.e. delegated to the sat-nav. For the educator, the challenge lies in knowing what needs to be made transparent and clear in order to transition students from the safety of the concrete- and what needs to be left to the

imagination in order that they can engage creatively with the ambiguous and contingent in a way that makes them feel safe or enabled.

An uncertain, messy and chaotic world needs curricula that reflect its qualities. Savin-Baden (2008) and Orr and Shreeve (2018) call for troublesome, 'sticky' curriculaand pedagogies of uncertainty and ambiguity that open up the space between the known and the unknown. For the educator the challenge liesin designing learning opportunities that can catalyse a sense of disjunction or 'stuckness'.The discomfort arising from disjunction is key to what happens next. Does the learner look to the 'satnav' to get them from A to B within the city walls – and, as a result, achieve 'weak' creative acts at best? Or do they switch off the satnav and wander nomadically on a creative voyage of adventure and discovery? Where discomfort is combined with a perception of no supportive mechanisms or an absence of trust, however, then an experience of alienation may follow. In these circumstances the sense of uncertainty can become emotionally overwhelming and the learner likely to turn to the sat-nav and retreat to the safety of the city. Aconsideration of the affective domain in creative engagement should include not only the environment in which learning occurs, but also the modelling of a tolerance for uncertainty where the educator can develop the student's capacity for working productively with uncertain conditions (Solomonides, Reid & Petocz, 2012).For Orr and Shreeve (2018), a pedagogy of ambiguity is about recognising the discomfort that can arise in the face of uncertainty and supporting students to develop the disposition, the ability, and the strategies to deal with the unknown, the uncertain, the ambiguous – and in doing so, learn how to navigate their way into and through it – and maybe even, as a result cometo embrace and delight in it.

The relational brings an important dimension to the processes of creative engagement in learning. For Shulman (2005),it is the visibility and vulnerability that comes from working 'shoulder to shoulder'as part of a professional learning communitythat helps students feel deeply engagedwith uncertaintyin practice situations. In this case the tutor's role is to help the student make the cognitive, social and cultural connections that will develop their autonomy and ability to actively engage with communities of practice (Palmer, 2007). For Burbules (1997) and Savin-Baden(2008) the relational is about managing the space between learner and teacher as an encounter that may be contradictory or disjunctive– a potentially shared state of being lost in a labyrinth- induced by sufficiently puzzling, confusing, open-ended and interesting problems. In exploring together, "[t]he roles of learner and teacher blur…" (Burbules, 1997:41) so that the relationship isone of 'being-with' and 'learning-with',where the teacher helps the student to 'stay with' the state of unknowing until they work out for themselves how to move in and through it. As Burbules (1997) notes,this is not aboutgiving learners maps, but helping them to learn how to create maps, to discover the terrain for themselves and,so, become "a path-maker on their own"(p.41). This shares characteristicswith the view of studio teaching as "not 'trying to get the students to go there' but helping them realise when they are 'there'" (Shreeve et al 2010:131, cited in Orr & Shreeve, 2018:143).Studio teaching in art manages the 'performative paradox' of "teaching but not seen to be

teaching" (Buckley & Conomos, 2009:17 cited in Orr &Shreeve, 2018:142,144) as a 'kind of exchange' (Shreeve et al., 2010) in which teaching becomes invisible and learning opportunities might arise unexpectedly as teachers respond to a student's work, their developing practice and its relationship to the field. It is clear that, at least in the context of creative engagement, the teacher-student relationship is neither neat nor simple.

Csiksentmihalyi (1997) makes the point that, whilstan individual's creative engagement is relational, it is situated as part of a broader system that includesa cultural dimension of rules and practices and a social dimension in which the creativity is subject to recognition by the relevant community of practice. Process-based definitions of creativity introduce a range of perspectives beyond the singular, creative individualso that a creative process is not the result of one person or even one group of people, but of intersecting and interacting relationships between them and others as part of a broader system of practice. Jackson (2016) develops this idea to reflect the complex interactions that comprise this system includingthe teaching that takes placeinthe particular social and cultural conditions of higher education. This presents a view of creativity as a complex, largely unpredictable and multi-dimensional process in which individual creativity will only thrive as part of a larger creative 'system', through which different ideas, attitudes and practices can collide in new and alternative ways. We agree with Belluigi's (2010) claim that there needs to be holistic articulation between the agentic, cultural and structural if the conditions for creativity are to be realised. Digital networked technologies extend the possibilities for learning with, and from, each other (Wenger, White & Smith, 2009) and open pedagogical approaches can magnify such opportunities (Resnick, 2017).Engineering the conditions that can enable suchpossibilities becomes the challengeand raises issues for a higher education in which student outcomes and graduate attributes continue to be understood and measured in predominantly individualised ways.

A view all too familiar in HE settings is the privileging of 'content' as the product of learning, rather than as situated in relation to purpose and process as one of a triad of equally-valued dimensions. The emphasis onlearning as'product'perpetuates a system of exchange and transmission – of instrumentalised pedagogy - which militates against experimentation, play and risk-taking which carry the potential for failure. Our structures find failure difficult to accommodate so that we find ourselves parcelling risk and the creative potential that comes with it – into 'safe spaces'as extra-curricular opportunities, or occasional learning activities where it can be keptat a safe distance from the 'main business' and, particularly, where it will not impact on assessment. In other words it is relegated to the margins as a sideshow rather than as a main attraction of the big tent.

Resisting the instrumentalising conditions currently at play in HE, according to Cowden and Singh (2013:53) "…begins within our own minds and those of our students; through a realization that teaching in Higher Education at its best is about being creative, taking risks, having passion…". We see the contributions to this special issue as such acts of resistance. Collectively, they bring the fine detail,

texture and colour to our landscape. They represent forays into the wild beyond the city walls where sticky, troublesome curricula and pedagogies that can support nomadic wandering – those characterised by indeterminacy, ambiguity, uncertainty - and even purposelessness (Dean, 1976 cited Hyers, 1991) - are needed. They bring our metaphors to life and make them concrete.

> *"…worthless goods… [turn] intogold when they are received as gifts."*
> (Hyde, 2012:153)

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