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Arts Education: Just like a Day at the Beach

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Arts education is qualitatively different to other ways of learning and teaching. It is about experience rather than outcomes, self-awareness in conjunction with 'other-awareness', intuition rather than logic, and collaboration rather than competition. Creativity is a way of thinking and being, of finding or establishing new relationships between ideas or things, or indeed of having brand new ideas (Runco, 2007), allowing some part of the self to emerge and wave at the world. In our schools, creativity is most often linked to the arts: the arts are perceived as an expression of creativity (Atherton, 2011). Gibson and Ewing (2011, p.1) argue that 'an Arts-led curriculum for children... is imperative if today's students are to develop a sense of their own identity within their social and cultural worlds together with the creative and flexible thinking skills needed for coping with living in the twenty-first century'. O'Toole and Becket (2010) state that arts-informed inquiry 'can provide a balance between rigour and creativity, imagery and accuracy, the individual and the collective' (p. 76). This paper explores the nexus between the arts and creativity in an attempt to better understand what we mean by 'creativity', and whether creativity can be 'taught'.

To begin, I invite you to imagine that you are at the beach. It is a lovely hot day. The surf is good and you are about to catch a wave. You can feel the undertow tug at you, pulling you out, as you wait for the wave into which you will throw yourself. You will body surf into the shore. The wave comes, just at breaking point, and you thrust your body before its swell. The water rushes over you – completely enveloping you, carrying you inside the wave. If you have caught it really well, your head will be just ahead of the wave, and if you dare, you can open your eyes and watch the foam of the wave splurge about you. And then, when you feel that you can hold your breath no longer, you are suddenly at the shore, sand along your chest, perhaps you graze your knees. You stand up, pushing the hair out of your eyes, rubbing the salt water from your nose, and look around.

And here's what you see:

Plenty of other people caught the same wave – little kids, fat people, teenagers, people just like you, people different from you. All came to shore on the same wave. And then you look a little harder, and you see the sentries lining the shore. Parents mostly, standing at the water line, watching their kids and others' kids, making sure no one's drowning. And you look closer and you see the beach dotted with sand castles, that the surf life-saver van is giving out free sunscreen, that people in the water and on the sand are jumping in and out and around each other, in a sort of dance. And you notice that people are at play.

Your adventure body surfing is a metaphor for arts education. It encapsulates the nature of creativity as an individual and collective, all-consuming pursuit (Craft, 2008). The waves don't care how many people they carry or who the people are or what they look like. Each person who catches a wave catches it on their own, but many people travel on one wave. Individually caught, but a shared experience, the thrill of the wave is not competitive but communal. Similarly, the sentries on the beach, just ordinary parents, don't care whose child they save. They watch primarily for their own, but if someone else's child is drowning they'll be in the water for them.

It seems to me that this is what arts education should be: a sort of spontaneously choreographed dance in which everyone participates, everyone watches out, and everyone, at their time, plays with abandon. Craft (2008) identifies the primary site for creativity as social engagement, requiring peer to peer equality. When you catch a wave, it is not a race or a competition you can win. Everyone reaches the shore at once, together, shaking off the water and looking about: how far did I come? Where am I now? Where are we? The metaphor can be explained further by Cremin, Burnard and Craft's study of creativity in early childhood (2006) which identifies risk taking, independent judgement, commitment, resilience, intrinsic motivation and curiosity as underpinning creative experiences in classrooms. Furthermore, in this study, 'the teachers prioritised learner agency, and provided multiple opportunities in which the children could initiate their own activities or make their own choices within a loosely framed activity' (p. 114). The day-at-the-beach metaphor captures this idea – that given time, space, opportunity and freedom to initiate action, everyone can catch a wave.

I begin with this metaphor because I believe that metaphors lie at the core of what we are doing when we act creatively. A metaphor is two things at once. It is a story of itself and of something else. It communicates with us as an image. It links the conscious (what it is) and the unconscious (what it tells us about). So doing, a metaphor is 'alive', it can change and develop, it can allude to further experiences, thoughts and images; it provides a key into shared and individual spaces. Metaphor indicates that discourse is flexible, it is simultaneously symbolic and forgetting in that it represents something, while asking one to forget how the 'real' something should be (Lacan, cited in Herbert, 2010; Runco, 2007). This element of simultaneously symbolising and forgetting is critical in creating in that 'it allows us to operate outside our immediate experiences' (Herbert, 2010, p. 96). O'Toole and Becket (2010) state that "'our ways of knowing" should be holistic' (p. 48). They observe that phenomenology, as a way of engaging with knowledge, employs metaphor to express the knowing 'that we know through our body' (p. 49).

When we engage students in arts education we invite them to work through their bodies in the space of metaphor. They are simultaneously that which is created and the creator. The dancer is the body and the movement; the actor is the character and the one acting the character; the musician is the sound, but also the fingers choosing the frets or keys. Boal calls this metaxis – the presence of two minds acting simultaneously in one; the presence of the character and the presence of the actor existing absolutely in the same body at the same time (Boal, 1995). Similarly, Anna-Karin Herbert links the creative impulse to the experience of the Other, claiming that learning about the Other is learning about ourselves, and that creativity lies within this nexus. Creativity requires both 'a knowing of' and 'a knowing how' – it is an all-embodying and all-embracing experience of being and becoming. The correlation between synaesthesia and creativity (Domino, 1989; Runco, 2007)

extends the metaphoric understanding further, into the senses themselves, as one sensory experience becomes the experience of another.

Brophy suggests in his book, *Patterns of Creativity* (2009), that creativity is an evolutionary outcome, and that it is linked to the unconscious, that part of our mind which is continually engaged, and which actually determines most of our decisions and actions, but to which we pay no attention. This idea of the unconscious is the wave that surrounds us and carries us to the beach. We are aware of the undertow, the salt, the sunshine and the sand, but when the wave breaks over us, when we throw ourselves into it, we are aware of nothing but the ways it surges forward with us inside. To experience the unconscious is to be in the space of creativity, a space where connections between the unconscious and the conscious are made, images are generated, and metaphors become the most effective ways to communicate the experience of being and doing. The unconscious requires us to be fully engaged in the moment, not thinking about it, but being within it.

Engaging with metaphor invites us to do two things which, in evolutionary terms, only humans can do. The first is to imagine – a task accepted so easily by us when we imagined surfing. In this case, the reader can feel the water on their skin and face, taste the salt, be carried in mind on the power of the wave. The second is to hold two or more ideas open or accessible in our minds at once. This is a uniquely primate ability and connecting two ideas, particularly two images with commonalities that are not explicit, is uniquely human (Walter, 2006). Both these intellectual actions, imagining and connecting, are identified as central to creativity and the arts (Heath, 2000), and are identified by Gibson and Ewing (2011, p.4) as ‘indicators of what it means to be human’.

One of Boals’ games invites us to consciously experience the unconscious (Boal, 2002). In this game, participants stand in a circle, facing outwards. Each adopts a physical position and a sound to accompany it. Participants then make dynamic their action and sound. Once this is established for each individual, participants turn in to the centre of the circle and continue with their sound and action but allow themselves to be changed by the sounds and actions of those around them. Gradually, and without conscious thought, the sound and action changes until it is uniform across the group – a new sound and action emerges which has been created within the body of the group through unplanned and unthought responses to one another. There is a certain danger in this game, as each individual participates, bringing something of themselves to the action, and yet, each individual also succumbs to the creative impulse of the whole. An expression of self becomes an expression of the collective as consciousness moves from self to other, instigating a moment of shared creativity.

The experiences we tap into with games like this take us to a place of intuition. Played fully, it is a genuinely collaborative experience – the outcome is entirely dependent on collaborative will and collaborative release. It encourages us to move into a space where we think through action rather than words, where we can experience the unconscious. When first played in a group, when the group is unfamiliar with the game, and perhaps with one another, we find our head full of words: ‘should I change now?’ ‘what’s she doing?’ ‘Is this okay?’ But when we play fully, if we are ‘playful’, and allow ourselves to rely on the unconscious to guide us, our heads are empty of words, though they might be filled with images or other sensations. These images and sensations, when we turn off the words, and release the whole body to an experience, are a place where creativity grows for the individual and for the collaborative community (Cropley, 1997; Gruber, 1989).

The problem of what creativity is (Ronco, 1997; Craft, 2006; Brophy, 2009), how one describes and explains it (Simonton, 1997; Gedo, 1997; Eysenck, 1997, Smith and Amner, 1997), and how one then teaches it (Cropley, 1997; Jackson and Shaw, 2006), is one I face every day as a teacher. Many studies of creativity take people identified as creative and extrapolate creative characteristics from a study of their lives and works (Simonton, 1997). Notably in these cases, creativity tends to be narrowly defined. Creativity is understood specifically as related to permanent product – art works, architecture, musical scores and so on. This way of defining creativity tends to be self-fulfilling: I call these people creative therefore their actions must be the product of creativity. However, creativity is often by nature ephemeral – a fleeting moment of insight applied to discussion, or performance, which lifts the moment to something wonderful and offers a door into new ways of thinking, understanding and interacting. However, it does not always result in a product (Runco, 2007). Such moments of creativity are shared but often not recorded. Csikszentmihalyi's notion of 'flow' recognises the often ephemeral nature of creativity by placing it 'in the moment', identifying 'flow' as complete absorption into an activity (Ted talk at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXleFJCqsPs>). Ultimately he is talking about a shift in the experience of being. Such experiences are difficult to apply language to (hence the value of metaphor), and hard to grasp – they must be experienced rather than analysed. 'Flow' is a fine example of the ability to know intuitively and the assertion of the richness of intuition in a learning environment. Identifying and understanding creativity in the moment of being lies at the core of developing innovative teachers.

Unfortunately, in our schools we focus student learning almost exclusively on the intellect, the thinking which is connected only to the conscious. Our school system is designed to rank and sort (Teese, 2000). Consequently, when students undertake the Arts at school they are doing so within a system that marginalises collaborative creative engagement, sometimes ephemeral and often difficult to assess (Cowan, 2006), and instead recognises and rewards competition. Even in the arts themselves we see competition as a key component: students 'audition' for roles in the school show; they are marked on a bell curve; and they judge themselves against their peers. The Victorian Certificate of Education is specifically competitive, ranking students against one another, and ranking the perceived difficulty of subjects against one another. Numerous explanations are provided for these competitive behaviours. Teachers will say that auditions replicate the 'real world' where actors compete for roles; school teachers will say that it is important for students to have an idea of where they 'fit' in the class; students will compare and contrast in order to judge their 'worth' (but not necessarily their learning) – and in seeking to make sure that grades are 'fair'. Everything must in some way be measured. There is no space in our school time for metaphor, and no time to wait for the perfect wave.

In contrast, I want preservice teachers graduating from my classes, to be responsive and reflexive, to bring creativity to their profession, and to be able to respond to, and support, creative thinking in their students. Various studies have explored what creative environments in schools look like and how teachers of creative pedagogies behave. Craft (2008) identifies a body of scholarship which asserts that 'the creative impulse is identical across domains' (p.242) and Cremin, Burnard and Craft (2006) observed common pedagogic themes across all settings, stating that 'standing back, profiling agency and creating time and space, nurtured the development of aspects of possibility thinking' (p.115) Pedagogical themes set the practice for creative environments, supported by student agency and motivation, and flexibility with time (Cremin, Burnard and Craft, 2006) When teachers encounter creativity in themselves, they begin to explore the nexus of creativity and artistry and

provide opportunities for their students to learn in the space of the unconscious (Cropley, 1997). In other words, they develop a sense of embodied learning – where the whole person is involved in the process of reflection, understanding and creation, rather than learning being a ‘head’ exercise, confined to tables, chairs and books. Creativity provides a new vocabulary, not always language-based, with which they can articulate and communicate their world. When teachers are able to engage their students with the unconscious and share this vocabulary of artistic engagement, they equip young people with alternative ways to explain, understand and inquire into their experiences of themselves, others and the world around them. In order to think and teach in this way, preservice teachers need to experience creative ways of doing, being and communicating. This is a radically different image of learning to that present in our current education system - we so rarely teach with head, heart, soul and body (Atkin, 2011). To think creatively is to allow intuition to shape our intellectual landscape. It is the refusal to cut through the mountain and the determination to work with the mountain (Smith and Amner, 1997). When we talk to students about creativity we tend to try to define, and to explain, but the only way to understand creativity is to experience it – it is an experiential state, not an analytical one. In his book, *Thumbs, Toes and Tears and other Traits that Make us Human*, Walter investigates those attributes that make us human and traces their evolution. In his discussion of brain development he examines learning and language, noting that the capacity to copy and then conceptualise (in other words, to learn, rather than mimic) preceded the development of language. To learn, invent and apply are early indicators of the evolutionary trail to being human. But this learning is bedded in the body. It takes place in the body and is experienced in the body before it can be enhanced by language. Our most primal way of learning as humans is embodied. What athletes and musicians have called muscle memory is learning that is not articulated or moderated through language, but experienced in the body. Embodied learning, based as it is in physicality and image, allows metaphoric thinking prior to language.

I want my students at VU to throw themselves into the waves. I want them to experience the sensation of diving into and being carried by a wave of creativity, of the abandonment of self and the abandonment to self. I want them to trust their environment, to find the freedom to be, and the boldness to experience. For me, the question is: how do I teach our teachers, along with their students, to throw themselves in the waves?

Each of the following examples focusses on doing, being or communicating creatively, and the expression of knowing that was experienced.

Doing:

Doing creatively involves analysis, problem-solving, synthesis and the development of multiple perspectives. In this example doing is explored through an experience of process drama.

Influenced by Dorothy Heathcote’s work, I recently used a form of process Drama with a group of 18 third year bachelor of education students. Each of these students is a drama or dance major. The purpose was to experience process drama for themselves, something none of them had ever done before. I wanted to contextualise creativity, and particularly Drama, in a place that did not involve written work, that was not ‘assessable’ and that demanded intuitive and instinctive responses. I wanted to make sure they knew how this felt.

I offered a number of articles from the newspaper to use as a starting point. We decided on an article about the exploding rabbit population in Melbourne (ref). We talked briefly about the sorts of people (and animals) that might be part of this story and I suggested a community meeting as a starting point. I took on the teacher-in -role stance, using a hat to distinguish when I was in role and when I was offering guidance, suggestions, or asking for a particular character to be heard or seen. The drama took up much of our three hour class and emerged from positions of involvement. Each student adopted a character, not a stance. We focussed our debrief, not on content, but on feelings.

All of the following emerged and were commented on during the debrief

- Insights into community structures and powers and the feelings they evoke
- Character and the influence of dominant individuals
- The ways in which less dominant people may manipulate circumstances and people in order to get what they want/believe is right
- Gender perspectives
- Rabbits as organised invaders (I had expected the rabbits to be soft fluffy victims as in *Watership Down*, but these rabbits were truly feral, very savvy and technologically switched on)
- Misunderstood relationships
- The intensity of the battle for survival and the way it influences behaviours
- Immigration and asylum
- Climate and food
- Adoption of multiple perspectives
- Ethics
- 'the human condition'
- Economics
- Priorities – who do we decide does the most damage, who do we hate most? Where do we invest our money and time? In this case it was a question of rabbits or rats.

Each of these is consistent with Cropley's cognitive aspects of creativity (Cropley, 1997, p.93).

Creative solutions to significant problems require more than statistical understanding and modelling. For example, we cannot solve the 'problem' of asylum seekers only by looking at human movement across the globe, sites of conflict and clusters of 'people smugglers'. We must begin to look at the humanity of the problem (Jay and Perkins, 1997), and how it 'feels' before we can begin to solve it. Understanding of multiple perspectives, coupled with intuition, gives agency, creates empowered individuals who understand their motivation, look for the motivation of others, and listen. This sounds like analytical problem-solving, but it is people responding with head, heart and body to move toward solutions. It is creative engagement.

Being:

This exercise in being creatively was aimed at developing students' self and other awareness. Through this exercise preservice teachers recognised the ways in which our experiences can liberate us, even from oppressive environments and oppressive ways of knowing the world.

The same class as in the previous example was introduced to Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, creating theatrical experiences from personal stories of oppression. Their instruction was to think intuitively rather than rationally, and see what happens. Their first questions, when they began to develop their stories into theatrical events were focussed on, and directed to, the story owner. In each case it was 'how did you feel when...?' Image-laden questions followed, such as; 'Was she a monster to you?' These preservice teachers were sorting, organising, planning and building knowledge but they used image for understanding. They entered the world of metaphor to express feelings and ideas for which they did not have words. In one case the story teller tried to explain the oppressor's actions, to contextualise them in a logical way, but others in the group asked: 'Did she seem bigger to you? Bigger than in real life? Did she grow bigger and bigger?' Their focus was on perceived relationship rather than on justification. It was on understanding the feeling rather than the context. In this dramatization, this oppressor did become bigger and bigger, taller, climbing on chairs and then tables, arms spread wide, but quieter and quieter as the oppression was internalised by the story teller, becoming a personalised dilemma. The scene froze with her literally being pulled in two directions. In another scene, from a different story teller, the oppressor began as physically big, and became louder and louder and louder until one's instinct in the drama, and as a watcher, was to cover one's ears, and duck down low.

Communicating:

This example of communicating creatively involved using the whole body in contradiction of the spoken word, to convey complex ideas without explicitly stating them or setting them up in opposition to one another.

This last example comes from a language-based class, rather than a Drama class. We were looking at the relevance of the 'classics' to teaching English – cultural capital, quality of language, thematic content and so forth. The question was: does this sort of study have relevance to students in the western suburbs of Melbourne, a low socio-economic area with high cultural diversity, high numbers of ESL speakers and high levels of violence and other crimes? I said to the students: 'I don't want you to tell me; I want you to show me.' I allowed them time to sit with the task before they began to talk or plan. Two students (one male, one female) answered by together presenting the sonnet: 'How do I love thee, Let me count the ways...' by Elizabeth Barratt Browning. It began beautifully and romantically and then the tone shifted. Their performative bodies told a different story to the words themselves, and the words and performance attributes became reflections, symbols of each other. The students needed to forget the language of love they were using in order to recreate a different language of relationships, using the same words. As we moved toward the central images of the poem, it became clear that what we were seeing was the manipulation of one member of the couple by the other, through violence. In fourteen lines they opened up questions of domestic violence, family politics, social interpretations and expectations of love, and the capacity of really fine literature to be understood and engaged with in a myriad ways. They answered the question about literary relevance by doing. They were simultaneously the poem and a representation of the poem, themselves and the other, working in a space where the unconscious and the conscious were linked through metaphor. In this case the poem itself became a metaphor for corrupted love and the words became symbols of the abuse of themselves. Although these students had not encountered Lacan, they provided a rich example of Lacan's symbolisation and forgetting in the construction of flexible

discourse through metaphor. In doing so, they acted creatively and intuitively in their personal response to domestic violence and in their professional response as future teachers of English.

In each of these cases the preservice teachers were connecting their unconscious worlds with their conscious landscapes. As actors, they were simultaneously the stories and the commentaries on the stories; as students they were simultaneously experiencing these feelings and observing the experience of these feelings. They instinctively used metaphor to traverse between the two, and they worked in that metaphoric space. The use of metaphor not only supported them in seeking the truth, but through it they also found ways to make further thinking possible (Brophy, 2009). Several studies have sought to distinguish creativity from the construction of meaning (Craft, 2008). In each of these cases we might ask whether these were creative experiences and expressions, or whether the students are simply using metaphor in order to analyse a world view and construct meaning from it. This question of exactly what determines creativity is again present. It is unclear what differences there are between making meaning and acting creatively – perhaps, in fact, there is no difference at all. Cochrane, Craft and Jeffery (2008) suggest we are so used to measuring meaning construction in terms of educational outcomes that we have determined a false dichotomy between creativity and meaning making in line with the competitive and measuring culture of school and education.

When body surfing, the primary experience is of the wave. Similarly, when we create, the primary experience is of the creation itself. There are spaces in the experience that cannot be captured in words. They can be alluded to through imagery. But essentially they must be felt. So what is the place of creativity in education? I suspect that we cannot teach people to be creative, but I also suspect that being creative is as natural as breathing. Our job as teachers, then, is to provide the space and time to connect to the unconscious. We can talk in metaphors, and we can recognise that not all thinking needs to be constrained by language. Saussure's idea that we cannot truly think something until we can articulate it in language (1959) seems to me the antipathy of creativity, and in direct contradiction with what we now know about the evolutionary development of abstract thinking and language (Walter). Moreover, as teachers we might often see ourselves in the role of standing sentry on the beach. We can focus our attention on those things necessary for creativity to take place and ensure that these are provided for. We can stand back and provide agency (Cremin, Burnard and Craft), open up opportunities for embodied learning (Csikszentmihalyi), for engagement of the head and heart (Atkin), for the use of the whole body, for the chance to throw oneself into the waves. It is the job of the sentry to ensure the safety of those in the waves. 'Safe' classroom environments underpin creative engagement (Gude, 2010) and are essential for learning (Victorian Institute of Teaching: standard 5; Principles of learning and Teaching:1). Collaborative learning, such as that which takes place in arts-based pedagogies, simultaneously supports and generates emotional and intellectual safety (Bryce, 2004). The role of sentry, therefore, is critical in ensuring that all students feel they can throw themselves into the waves, even if they are not skilful, in order to experience the rush of creativity.

Good teaching is an act of creative engagement. It takes us to a space where we must engage with thoughts and feelings rather than only with words. Often we ask school students: "what did you learn about at school today?" A better question might be: 'what did you learn?' or even, 'what did you do?' Or 'how were you at school today?' The difference between those questions is the difference between externalising (learning about) and internalising the learning (Atherton, 2011); it

is the difference between allowing the unconscious space to speak, and listening only to the conscious. It is the difference between *knowing of* and *knowing how*. Teachers who engage creatively in order to foster creativity in their students work 'on the edge' of social change by equipping students to critique their world and imagine something better and different. They allow space for metaxis to occur, where students can be simultaneously in the unconscious and in the conscious. Through exploring the arts in the tertiary classroom, and exposing preservice teachers to artistic ways of doing, being and communicating, I hope that they will become teachers who perceive themselves as creatively alive and who empower children to explore their own creative worlds. I hope they will leap into the waves and surf to shore, and I hope that, when their turn comes, they stand sentry with vigilance and care.

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