



A curriculum for Being: Creativity for a Complex World:

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Summary

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I. INTRODUCTION

Steve Jobs famously claimed that creativity is about making connections. And in a world that is more open, complex, dynamic and networked than ever before in human history (Dorst, 2018), we could say that understanding this connectivity should become the central enterprise of any educational institution attempting to find creative solutions for the challenges and opportunities we face today.

For example, you cannot study the health of our population without understanding the impact of our education system on our health, or our ecology, agriculture, medical sciences, marine biology, the media, and so on. Any change made in one of these layers or nodes of the system will impact on all others in ways that are impossible to predict. Nonetheless, today's university student will generally study only one of these disciplines, usually in isolation, and often with a neo-liberal agenda that prepares students for an unsustainable future or for jobs that will no longer exist. There is little or no creative thinking put into understanding creative, connected thinking in education.

Schools, too, silo our disciplines as if they have nothing in common. The liminal spaces 'betwixt and between' fields (Turner, 1967) are a no-man's land,

yet these liminal spaces are ripe for creativity and discovery, with predictions that they will be the fertile areas for future discovery (Johansson, 2014)

This study describes an award-winning attempt to combine 25 different undergraduate degrees with a single degree – the Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation at the University of Technology Sydney. This extremely popular transdisciplinary degree cannot attempt to teach deep knowledge to students in each of the 25 disciplines it combines. Rather, it privileges Being rather than Knowing – ontology not just epistemology (Barnett, 2012). The value of a Curriculum for Being is explored as a way to find unity in our diversity, making it a model for the new uni-versity where inner and outer knowledge must combine.

COMPLEXITY IN EDUCATION

Whilst we think of individual learning taking place within an educational system (which learns and evolves), the Academy sits within broader systems that are also learning and evolving, including our state, nation and world, which simultaneously interact with all other living systems that are learning and adapting to co-exist. Culturally, ecologically, conceptually, these sense-making systems are intertwined and respond to each other in a creative fashion, and as such require a creative response. To separate these distributed and diffuse systems into parts, according to some, is an act of violence. 'The opposite of complexity is not simplicity. It is reductionism.' (Bateson, 2019)

How then do we create an education system that isn't reductionist, but rather utterly expansive, where creativity plays a central role?



CREATIVITY IN EDUCATION

How do we avoid giving students a reductionist education in a singular discipline that clings to the safety of its historical, retrospective boundaries? The idea proposed here is that we look at creativity as a way to respond to complexity – looking at its capacity well beyond any single discipline – looking at creativity as a way to probe rather than predict. To engage rather than freeze. To play rather than work. To trust rather than fear. To connect rather than dissect.

The dissection of knowledge into a variety of disciplines is one of the reasons so many of our systems are stuck. Climate science, on its own, tends to be a process of ‘monitoring our extinction’ rather than improving our chances of survival – many more players in our system are needed if we are to address the problem in its fullest context. Indeed, disciplines, when separated into discrete domains, can rarely take action to tackle wicked problems. ‘Most actions, if they are eventually taken, tend to focus on back-end, shallow, reactive, short term, single-factor, heavy-handed, de-contextual initiatives.’ In response to this stuckness, one of the solutions proposed is ‘transformative education.’ (Hill, 2019)

I would suggest that there is no such thing as a transformative education without the inclusion of introspective as well as action-based creativity. Introspective, because it can help us understand our individual creative agency in a complex world – and action-based (often through collaboration) because we cannot remain paralysed in the face of complexity and the massive challenges we face.

Creativity is at the pulsing core of all our disciplines, all our discoveries – so it plays an important role in generating new knowledge and pushing out the boundaries of our fields. This diversity at the bleeding edges of discovery is essential, but so, too, is the core or source of creativity – the place from whence it radiates outwards. This creative source can exist in an institution (the unity in the uni-versity) and in a curriculum. (The Bachelor of Creative Intelligence and Innovation is a degree that sources a unified field of knowledge to share between all individual disciplines).

Significantly, however, it also exists in the individual. Hence a creative education should also focus on Being (ontology) not just Knowing (epistemology). There is a Vedic notion that there are many knowledges but only one knower. This site of knowledge is simultaneously located in the knower and the core of the university, as well as in the unifying principles of the curriculum. Realised on this level, it becomes a thing of ‘profound simplicity,’ rather than a reductionist simplicity that does a disservice to its object of study.

A CURRICULUM FOR BEING

This abstract alludes to the potential of a Curriculum for Being to deliver transformative education – and it has mostly stated the ‘why’ rather than the ‘how’ of such a curriculum. However, my talk (and the paper that will follow) articulates how this curriculum has evolved in the context of a world-first transdisciplinary degree.

Case studies of a full range of creative methods for delivering education will be explored – from thought experiments to straw man proposals to think tanks, complexity storytelling, data visualisation, dragon’s dens, methods sandpits, etc. Whilst touching on traditional research in creative educational delivery, such as Lombardi’s work on authentic Learning, Barrows’ work on Problem Based Learning (PBL) or Design Based Learning as practiced at Stanford’s D.School, this work addresses the notion of how the self is created by responding to the creativity of individuals, organisations and living systems as we all continue to learn in relatedness. Indeed, the theme of this talk is very much about relatedness and its integral role in the building of a Curriculum for Being. The research method for a Curriculum of Being is based on action research for transformative change (Ison, 2008), and allowing students to pursue what is most meaningful to them (Checkland, 2000).

I also invite collaborators to speculate and contribute to a vision of what a universal creative curriculum might look like if it were to exist in an interactive, networked, global context that defies any notion of a university as we have currently understood the term.



II. CONCLUSIONS

As early as 2010, IBM's global CEO survey surfaced concerns that the world was becoming too complex to negotiate – that tools were missing from the toolbox that had been trusted thus far. Creativity was seen as the single-most important management trait for our organisations to thrive. Understanding and teaching creativity, then, should become an integral part of every educational institution. This requires us to not only transform our educational institutions, but to offer within them a transformative curriculum. It also requires us to work together in imagining how such a curriculum could transcend disciplines, educational institutions and national borders.

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