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Citation: Kernan, M. A. (2015). Transforming identity through arts-informed, collaborative learning and reflection: case study of a Masters programme in innovation, creativity and leadership. In: Spender, J. C., Schiuma, G. and Albino, V. (Eds.), Culture, Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Connecting the knowledge dots. (pp. 2038-2047). Arts for Business Institute, University of Basilicata.. ISBN 9788896687079

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Transforming identity through arts-informed, collaborative learning and reflection: case study of a Masters programme in innovation, creativity and leadership

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**IFKAD 2015 – International Forum on Knowledge Asset Dynamics,
Bari, Italy, 10–12 June 2015**

Structured Abstract

This paper and the associate conference presentation review the initial findings of a PhD study in Professional Education, a mixed method, interdisciplinary project which aims to contribute to research on interdisciplinary pedagogy related to both teaching and enabling creativity. The research focuses on *Creativity and the Creative Industries*, the final module of City University London's Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership (MICL), an interdisciplinary Higher Education (HE) Masters designed for mature students with managerial experience. The module's teaching includes collaborative, experiential arts workshops (eg drama, classical music, improvisation and art) to support the students' group and individual artistic projects and final reflective journal and report. The paper outlines these theoretical propositions which inform the study's data analysis (Yin, 2008, p.18):

- 1) That the module's learning processes are artistic, unfamiliar, disruptive, embodied experiences
- 2) That the students create an applied understanding of their learning through reflection and personal narrative
- 3) That critical incidents in the students' personal narratives will be expressed through metaphors of personal and professional identity
- 4) That both narrative (eg James and Brookfield, 2014, p.106, citing Kübler-Ross's (1997) Change Curve) and personal change models (eg Heron, 1992, p. 122) will usefully inform the analysis.

The study's primary analytical methodologies include content analysis (eg Charmaz, 2006), narrative analysis (Gregerson, 2013), thematic analysis (Van Manen, 2014) and critical incident analysis (Shiu, 2014) (Argyris, 1982; Bolton, 2014; Dewey, 1933; Downey & Clandinin, 2010; Dreyfus, 1996; James & Brookfield, 2014; King & Kitchener, 1994; McEwen *et al.*, 2009; Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2002; Ricoeur, 2007; Schön, 1983, 1987). The research approach is consistent with work on threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2003), theory which links identity and narrative (eg Bruner, 2002; Boyd, 2009; Downey & Clandinin, 2010; Gottschall, 2012; Herman, 2013; McGilchrist, 2009) and arts-based and creativity research (eg Amabile, 1983; Bateson & Martin, 2015; Gregerson *et al.*, 2013; Shiu, 2014; Sayer, 2012).

The paper acknowledges the need for a reflexive approach, especially in HE and artistic contexts (eg Brookfield, 2010; Fleming, 2012; Foucault, 1980; Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1998, 2000), as well as the risks of drawing broader lessons from a case study (Cohen, 2010; Yin, 2013). Consistent with this Track's theme of 'rattling' HE and organisational development through the application of arts-based initiatives, I conclude by discussing whether shifts in the students' narratives through the MICAL programme and this might

can be related to their personal and professional identities; and the degree to which these might in turn promote sustained impacts on their inter- and intrapersonal competence and self-efficacy.

Background to the study

The PhD study introduced here is focused on City University London’s Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership (MICL). This was developed by City’s Centre for Creativity in Professional Practice and launched 2010, initially as a part-time Masters (with 12 completers in 2012). The MICL, an interdisciplinary programme developed through university-wide collaboration led by a central team, offers three potential final awards: MInnov, MSc and MA. Its stated aims include to ‘meet the needs of future creativity and innovation leaders’ (2010-12 Programme Handbook). The taught curriculum in 2014-15 was as below, representing 120 of the 180 credits, with a 60-credit final dissertation.

Term 1	Term 2
INM403 Technologies for Creativity and Innovation Module owner: Dr Sara Jones, School of Informatics	INM404 Leading Creative Design Module owner: Professor Neil Maiden, School of Informatics
INM406 Creative Writing Module owner: Phil O’Shea, School of Arts and Social Sciences	INM410 Creativity and the Creative Industries Module owner: Mary Ann Kernan, School of Arts and Social Sciences
INM408 Creative Problem Solving and Leadership Module owner: Professor Clive Holtham, Cass Business School	INM405 Delivering Innovation – Turning Ideas into Action Module owner: Professor Clive Holtham, Cass Business School
INM409 The Law, Creativity and Innovation Module owner: David Amos, The City Law	INM407 The Psychology of Creativity and Innovation Module owner: Dr Maire Kerrin, School of

School	Arts and Social Sciences
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These are definitions offered in the MICL modules for the core concepts of ‘Innovation’, ‘Creativity’ and ‘Leadership’:

Innovation:

- ‘Turning ideas into action’ (INM410)
- ‘Creativity is concerned with the new & completely original whereas innovation deals more with the application of novelty & is a social activity’ (INM407)

Leadership:

- ‘Leadership is continuous self development’ (INM408)
- Involves inclusiveness and creating ‘benign structures’ (INM408), and leading ‘creative design processes within established constraints’ (INM404)

Creativity:

- ‘the ability to produce work that is both novel (i.e. original, unexpected) and appropriate (i.e. useful, adaptive to task constraints)’ (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999) (INM404)
- ‘P’/psychologically creative (as opposed to ‘H’/human creativity, new to human kind) (Boden, 1990) (INM404)
- Also ‘S’-creativity: situated creativity – a specific task that is designed or created in a particular situation or domain (Suwa et al. 2000) (INM404)

The rationale for the study are rooted in the MICL’s distinctiveness in its pedagogical structure and transferable learning outcomes. My PhD’s aims are:

- to better understand interdisciplinary HE pedagogy related to the teaching of creativity
- to improve my own practice as a teacher and a programme designer
- to support the future development of the MICL programme
- to inform the design of future programmes through dissemination

To give an overview of the teaching content of the module which I lead, *Creativity and the Creative Industries*, this was our teaching schedule in 2014-15 for the ten three-hour teaching sessions:

1. Victoria & Albert Museum: initiating reflective notebooks
2. Module and Assignment Introductions, including Reflection; and Improvisation Workshop with Neil Mullarkey, [Improv Your Biz](#)
3. Theoretical review; and [Complete Coherence](#) Workshop with Alan Littlewood
4. Music Workshop, led by Susan Carpenter Jacobs (violinist and educational workshop leader, [Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment](#))
5. Acting Workshop with [Paul Chequer](#) (actor and visiting tutor, [Arts Educational](#))
6. Walking Stories, a choreographed group walk to a soundtrack, developed with Arts Council England funding by [Charlotte Spencer Projects](#), led and debriefed by Charlotte Spencer and David McCormick (in Regents Park)
7. Group Performances (Group Assessment)
8. Artefacts Workshop with [Angela Rogers](#) and individual tutorials
9. Artefact and final assignment review
10. Artefact Show (part of Individual Assessment)

For the 2012 cohort, the assignments for this module consisted of:

- A group performance, 5–10 minutes in length, developed and performed by the students (40% of the module credit)
- Two individual assignments, each with two elements:
 - o An artefact developed for a final Show, with supporting materials which demonstrate its proposed context and function (30% of the module credit)
 - o A reflective report developed with reference to a reflective journal related to the students' experience of the module and the programme (30% of the module credit).

Nature of the study

The research findings to be presented in the associated conference presentation are drawn from a mixed methods, participatory, pedagogical study, *Creativity and the Creative Industries* module of the MICL, focused on the first, 2012 delivery. This largely

qualitative study is designed to generate a rich case study (Cohen, 2010; Yin, 2013), drawing primarily on these data analysis processes: content analysis, critical incident analysis, thematic analysis and narrative analysis. As an interdisciplinary study of lived experience, it aims to reflect the ontological premises and epistemological disciplines of phenomenological research and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Van Manen, 1990 and 2014).

The presentation for IFKAD2015 reviews the findings of my analysis of these sources (consistent with City University London ethical approvals):

- The students' individual artefacts plus supporting materials
- The students' summative reflective reports and portfolios

The choice of a case study format for the presentation of my PhD was consistent with these definitions of the nature and requirements of case study research (from Yin, 2008):

‘1. A case study is an empirical inquiry that:

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.’ (Yin, 2008, p.18)

‘2. The case study inquiry

- Copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- Relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- Benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.’ (Yin, 2008, p.18)

From the initial literature research

Consistent with a grounded theory study (Charmaz, 2006), the initial literature search aimed to establish the scope of applicable research and theory in order to inform the analysis of the data. A more thorough exploration of literature will be the core of the study's construction of grounded theory. As with all interdisciplinary research, the challenge in the early stages was to define an appropriate focus and scope for the initial literature review.

In outline, the literature reviewed to define the study's analytical themes included:

- ***Creative experiential learning and assessment*** (Amabile, 1983; Bateson & Martin, 2015; Dewey, 1934; Fleming, 2012; Gauntlett, 2007; Gregerson *et al.*, 2013; Sawyer, 2012; Shiu, 2014; Schiuma, 2014; Snyder, 2013)
- ***Reflective processes in professional education*** (Argyris, 1982; Bolton, 2014; Dewey, 1933; Downey & Clandinin, 2010; James and Brookfield, 2014; Schön, 1993, 1987)
- ***Identity formation and narrative*** (Bruner, 2002; Boyd, 2009; Downey & Clandinin, 2010; Gauntlett, 2007; Gottschall, 2012; Herman, 2013; McGilchrist, 2009)
- ***Embodiment*** (Dreyfus, 1996; Lakoff, 2012; Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2002; McGilchrist, 2009; Van Manen, 2014; Varela *et al.*, 1991)
- ***Storytelling and the role of metaphor*** (Boyd, 2009; Bruner, 2002; Geary, 2011; Gottschall, 2012; Herman, 2013; Lakoff and Johnson, 2003)
- ***Learning, change, liminality, boundaries*** (Bourdieu, 1977; Dewey, 1910, 1938; Heron, 1992; Fiumara, 2013; Maslow, 1987; Meyer and Land, 2003; Winnicott, 1974)
- ***Interdisciplinarity in HE management education, and adult learning*** (DeZure, 2010; King & Kitchener, 1994; Laurillard, 2012; McEwen *et al.*, 2009; Mansilla, 2010)
- ***Reflexivity / power relations in higher education*** (Brookfield, 2010; Foucault, 1980; Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1998, 2000)

Theoretical propositions

Applying Yin's definitions of case study research, quoted above (Yin, 2008, p.18), from this initial literature search I identified these theoretical propositions to frame the data analysis:

- 1) That the module's learning processes were artistic, unfamiliar, disruptive, embodied experiences
- 2) That the students created an applied understanding of their learning through reflection and personal narrative
- 3) That critical incidents in the students' personal narratives would be expressed through metaphors of personal and professional identity

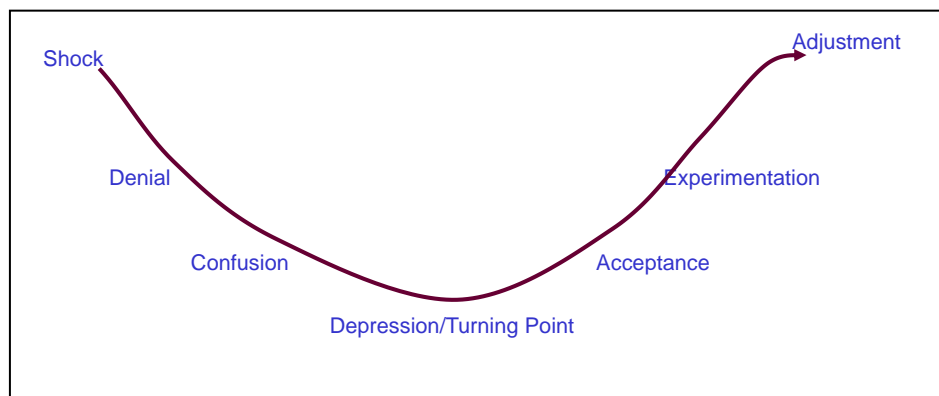
- 4) That both narrative (eg James and Brookfield, 2014, p.106, citing Kübler-Ross's (1997) Change Curve) and personal change models (eg Heron, 1992, p. 122) would usefully inform the analysis.

Analytical framing

While acknowledging that the meaning of a phenomenological experience is never fully reducible to a coding taxonomy (Van Manen, 2014, p. 319), the results presented in this presentation relate to key concepts drawn from the study's initial literature search. This section briefly outlines the key theoretical definitions that informed the data analysis.

The Change Curve

James and Brookfield (2014, p.6) described the benefits of using their Change Curve, derived from Kübler-Ross's (1997), as a model to support HE students' reflections about their learning experiences. As a development of their approach, the current study explored whether these stages are reflected in the students' reflective narratives and final, summative reports relating to their experiences.



Source: James and Brookfield (2014, p.106), citing Kübler-Ross's (1997) Change Curve

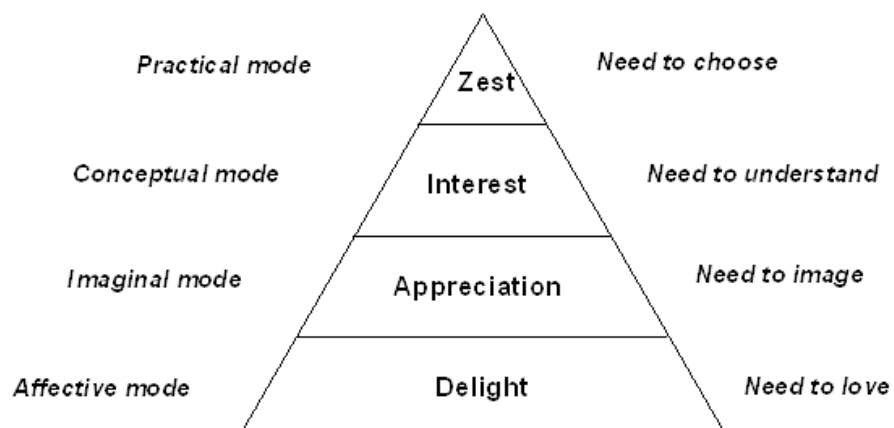
Heron's Up-hierarchy of Basic Active Emotions

The analysis also applied Heron's (1992) definition of the role of the 'imaginal' in learning and change. His 'up-hierarchy' model of personhood, including the one illustrated here for 'basic active emotions (see below; 1992, p.122), prioritised the foundational nature of our emotional and then our imaginal responses. He defined our imaginal capacity as a basic human need, both as experiencer and receiver: 'the need to

image and be image,... deeply stated... is the need to intuit the meaning of imagery and to be intuited as meaningful imagery' (1992, p.120). Our 'active' (in contrast to 'passive') mode requires 'appreciation':

'By "appreciation" I mean the emotions elicited by a consummation of the need to image, through the perception of nature and all forms of art, and through the creation of images. These are the aesthetic emotions called forth by the spatio-temporal properties of perceptual and other kinds of imagery: colour, line, proportion, balance, symmetry, asymmetry, measure, scale, depth, tone, rhythm, harmony, grace, strength, dynamic tensions and so on. The emotions of a fulfilled imaginal sensibility are of a range and subtlety that outstrip the power of language to symbolize them. Hence they are conveyed by the non-discursive symbolism of drawing, painting, sculpture, music and dance. One cannot give a verbal list of these emotions, but only show a portfolio of their aesthetic representations' (1992, pp. 122–3).

Heron's Up-hierarchy of Basic Active Emotions



Source: J. Heron (1992) *Feeling and Personhood: Psychology in another key*. London and Newbury Park, CA: Sage, p.122.

Critical incident analysis

The data analysis was also informed by this definition of 'critical incidents' in reflective accounts, as applied by Griffin (2003) in her research with the experience of trainee teachers:

‘a *description* of an incident that “amused or annoyed” (Tripp, 1993, p. 20), was “typical or atypical” (Tripp, 1993, p. 36), was an “aha or ouch” (Posner, 2000) or a “felt difficulty” (Dewey, in LaBoskey, 1993, p. 25.); and, the *meaning* of the incident written as a detailed reflection and analysis of the incident.’ (2003, p.210)

Overview of findings

The initial findings, which formed the focus of the associated conference presentation, broadly confirmed the focus on narrative, thematic and critical incident analysis, and identified key features of the students’ experiences of active, embodied experimentation and ‘sense making’. These initial results suggested that:

- The students’ artefacts functioned as transitional objects (Winnicott, 1974), providing embodied expressions of their MICL experience
- With individual variations, the module encouraged expressions of those experiences, especially in their artefacts and reflective notebooks, which were strongly metaphorical and artistic, and explored of a variety of art forms
- The ‘assessment’ regime impacted on the tone in which some of the written work was expressed, suggesting that the format constrained the depth of summative reflection in the final reports in comparison with the artefacts and reflective portfolios
- Establishment of a shared, trusting learning community was repeatedly confirmed as a key element of the experimentation and learning in the module.

Conclusion

This study acknowledges the need for a reflexive approach, especially in HE and artistic contexts (eg Brookfield, 2010; Fleming, 2012; Foucault, 1980; Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1998, 2000), as well as the risks of drawing broader lessons from a case study (Cohen, 2010; Yin, 2013). Consistent with this conference track’s theme of ‘rattling’ HE and organisational development through the application of arts-based initiatives, the associated presentation concludes by discussing whether shifts in the students’ narratives

through the MICL programme and this might can be related to their personal and professional identities; and the degree to which these might in turn promote sustained impacts on their inter- and intrapersonal competence and self-efficacy.

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