Accelerating movement across the intentional arc: developing the strategic sensographer

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Abstract

This chapter explores the potential to develop pedagogical approaches to management and leadership education which equip the students to become 'strategic sensographers', embodied and multi-sensory practitioners with awareness and mastery of their own interpretative and creative responses. We analyse a case study of an interdisciplinary Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership since 2010, and especially the outcomes of an arts-based module which has been delivered since 2012. In this module, the students collaborate to create and perform a short play and develop and display an individual artefact to convey aspects of their experience on the programme. The final assessed element is a progressive, reflective journal. We conclude from this study that, rather than simply relying on reproducing or applying established management tools, such learning experiences accelerate and enrich the pedagogical experience and learning outcomes of the students by equipping them as 'strategic sensographers', embodied and multi-sensory practitioners.

Keywords: management education, Leadership education, Creativity and arts-based management pedagogy, Embodied and deep learning in management education

Introduction

This chapter explores the potential to develop pedagogical approaches to management and leadership education which allow the students to develop their awareness and mastery of their own interpretative and creative responses. Rather than simply relying on reproducing formulae, they can find imaginative approaches that are appropriate for them as strategists, and/or most appropriate to the environment under consideration. Through arts-based experiences, we argue, they can be equipped as 'strategic sensographers', embodied and multi-sensory practitioners.

Our definition of sensuous is characterised by a pseudo-formula, namely 5S+3D (5 senses plus 3 dimensions), which we contrast with the 2S+2D world which dominates the modern office and even university. We take strategists to include both senior executives themselves and those who explicitly support them in the strategy process, whether in a line or staff role. Our model of the intuitive qualities required for strategists has in part been derived from the recruitment criteria of leading organisations, as well as from analyses of the qualities needed to support creativity and innovation (Claxton, 1997; Lucas, Claxton and Spencer, 2012).

Our examination of the routes through which strategists are currently educated has concluded, with Mintzberg (2005) and others, that their education has been biased in favour of rational-logical thinking. It is in part the tension and interplay between the rational and the intuitive that contributes to sensography, a term that has in part spun off from 'stratography' (Cummings and Angwin, 2011).

Consistent with the focus of this paper, the three authors have sought to draw upon our distinct disciplinary expertise in reaching and presenting our conclusions. Mary Ann Kernan, after a History degree, gained a postgraduate qualification in research methods related to educational research. She is an Associate Professor in English, and researches publishing history (eg Kernan, 2016a) and arts-based pedagogy for professional education (eg Kernan, 2016b). Clive Holtham is a Professor of Information Management whose first profession was as an accountant. His research focuses on innovative, IT-enabled and interdisciplinary pedagogy in the VUCA age, and the critical evaluation of analytical, process-driven management education (eg Holtham and Dove, 2018; Holtham and Jones, 2018). After a first degree in Psychology and Philosophy, Sara Jones gained a PhD in Computer Science, and researches applied creativity and design, with recent projects focussing on the

relationship between creativity and the design of interactive systems (eg Makri et al, 2019), enhancing organisational leadership in the creative industries (eg Mitchell et al, 2019) and using arts-based methods in creative entrepreneurship training to develop enterprise skills for the creative economy.

Scope and methodology

In this chapter we present a multi-methods case study drawn from educational practice, focussing on the personal journeys of individual strategists. Our focus is on pedagogical design that integrates practices from artistic practices, and which enriches the repertoire of learning methods for the strategic sensographer.

In the final section we draw on evidence of success or otherwise in the aim of developing strategic sensographers. The evidence is culled from students' outputs in an interdisciplinary Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership (MICL), including performances and artefacts, and interviews.

Overall, we have been concerned with developing innovative management education to develop strategic sensographers for and through change, drawing heavily on tools and processes which facilitate embodiment (Claxton, 2015). Our approaches are far from unique. Nonetheless, we conclude that the case study illustrates successful evolution of 5S+3D approaches to strategic sensography.

Theoretical references

In terms of areas of study, firstly we are concerned with innovative management education. Our focus is the nature of expertise and the intentional arc as defined by Merleau-Ponty (1962, p.136), which is 'supposed to embody the interconnection of skilful action and perception' (Dreyfus, 1996).

Secondly, and informed also by the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Dreyfus (1996), we have a specific interest in the role of embodiment in educational processes, defined both in terms of the role of artefacts in strategising, and in the physical role of embodiment. An important framing derives from Schiuma's (2011) study, which explains how art-based methods are deployed in a business context.

We have also traced the historical roots of such approaches, including the scale model cities for military strategy commissioned by the Marquis de Louvois as war minister of France in 1686 (Fayard, 2012; Google Cultural Institute, 2013). Another

milestone was the contribution of Brech in 18th-century Sweden through his Theatrum Oeconomico-Mechanicum, and his use of models and samples of industrial objects (Liedman and Persson, 1992). Recent years have seen a wide variety of contemporary examples of such 'embodied metaphors' (Heracleous and Jacobs, 2011, p.121).

We also apply here techniques developed through projects which have deployed transitional objects (Winnicott, 1987) as an explicit part of research and consultancy processes related to business strategy. Figure 1 shows a selection of six such artefacts, displayed in a recent workshop for Chief Information Officers.

Figure 1 *Six transitional objects relating to business strategy*

It is interesting that in Lampel's (2001) study of artefacts in innovation processes, he explicitly touches on the need in certain types of innovation to divert attention away from imperfect and incomplete products, to create an emotional quality to the product presentations, as exemplified by the management examples of Whitney, Edison and Jobs. Artefacts such as these embody metaphors which create aesthetic distance and allow participants to deal with sensitive issues related to their organisational contexts (Heracleous and Jacobs, 2011; see also McGilchrist, 2010 for a thorough review of the function of metaphor in creative thinking).

Thirdly our definition of embodiment in learning extends to concepts of personhood which recognise the function of the human body and feeling in personal experience, learning and change – embodiment in a felt, physical sense, as defined also by Merleau-Ponty (1962). In this we have also been influenced by Heron's hierarchies of

personhood, for example his Up-hierarchy of Basic Active Emotions (1992, p.122). Heron describes each element in the up-hierarchy in these terms:

> **Delight**: The foundational level of Heron's model:
> 'Appreciation is a delight that springs from the love of aesthetic form; interest a delight that springs from the love of knowledge; zest a delight that springs from the love of action.' (Heron, 1992, p. 123)
> **Appreciation:** Encompasses our spiritual and our artistic capacities:
> '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.' (Heron, 1992, pp. 122–3)
> **Interest:** 'When the need to understand is realized, we experience interest, extending into curiosity and fascination, the passion for truth, excitement in intellectual discovery, pleasure in the clear communication of ideas.' (Heron, 1992, p. 123)
> **Zest:** Encompasses 'the emotions involved in the fulfilment of free choice and effective action', which he identifies as including 'relish, gusto, exhilaration, achievement and work satisfaction' (Heron, 1992, p. 123).

The concept of aesthetic distancing

This paper also draws upon the interpretation of intuition, for which the concept of aesthetic distancing is a useful analytical tool. The word 'aesthetics' is derived from the Greek aisthētikos, from aisthēta 'perceptible things' and aisthesthai 'perceive'. Aesthetics are concerned with knowledge that is created from our sensory experiences (Taylor and Hansen, 2005). The concept of aesthetic distance has its roots in philosophy of Brechtian epic theatre (Brecht, 1964), Boalian theatre (1995) and Dewey's identification of art as experience: '... the actual work of art is what the product does with and in experience' (1958, p.2).

Aesthetic experience is based on the perspective that experience is perception, and this resonates with Taylor and Hansen's (2005) idea that aesthetic experience and sensual perception goes beyond rational and analytic apprehension. In this paper aesthetics are linked to sensuous thinking, to the different ways in which we create knowledge, including through our senses and experiences.

The MICL case: Embodiment in executive masters creativity education

In this section we review a pedagogical approach to developing the strategic sensographer, focussing on an interdisciplinary Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership (MICL), launched in 2010 with its first set of graduates in 2013. This degree programme set out to take an unconventional approach to the education of strategists. We particularly review components of the programme which most strongly explore embodiment, and relate the findings of the case to the theoretical models outlined above.

This section outlines the educational aims, process, assessment and outcomes of two aspects of a Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership (MICL) programme which are relevant to the concept of sensuous sensography as outlined in this paper.

The programme is an interdisciplinary offering originally designed as eight 15-credit modules plus a 60-credit dissertation, with modules were drawn from a business school (two), a school of interactive design (two), a school of arts (two), a law school (one) and a school of social sciences (one). The marketing, pricing and recruitment requirements of the programme defined it as a programme for post-experience professionals who wished to enhance their personal and professional practices and skills related to innovation, creativity and leadership rather than gain purely functional skills. This is in contrast, for example, to an MSc in Interactive Design, an MSc in International Business or a professional development masters related to a specific professional practice or discipline. Only a minority of the students join the programme with previous performance or artistic experience, though some have worked in design roles or in functional roles such as marketing within a creative industry context.

The teaching has been informed by the disciplines and teaching styles that prevail in each of the module leaders' disciplines, supported by active collaboration across the delivery team, with consistent delivery structures and assessment criteria.

This case study focuses on these two aspects of the programme which involve the explicit deployment of embodiment in the development of strategic sensographers: first, dérive activities based on the work of Debord (1958) which form part of the programme's induction, and which are revisited in one of its final modules entitled Creativity and the Creative Industries; and secondly, arts-based activities and

facilitation which inform the students' two assignments in the Creativity and the Creative Industries module.

Induction: The dérive

This activity is based on the work of Guy Debord, a Situationist and activist whose thinking contributed to the protest events in Paris in 1968. He developed the dérive as a practice to fully experience human contexts, especially urban settings. The MICL's introduction to the activity that forms part of the programme's induction includes this definition of the dérive:

> *'The dérive: learning by walking about in a group, observing, noticing and conversing' (Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership, 2012)*

The briefing also includes this quotation from Debord's work:

> *'One of the basic situationist practices is the dérive [literally: "drifting"], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. Dérives involve playful–constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.' (Debord, 1958)*

Armed with historical maps of London which assign an area of the city to each group, the students are invited to spend up to two hours in a specific small zone of inner London, and to identify and report back on examples of innovation, creativity and leadership in practice. They are briefed to feed back their findings orally or by using a visualiser to show images or objects (which can include telephones or cameras and any captured images), with no use of presentational software such as Powerpoint. A reflective group report is also submitted in writing at a later date.

The briefing for the activity (which is not assessed) seeks to position the dérive within current research in creative and 'slow' thinking, introducing the practices of noticing and building awareness. The sources cited include Neugarten (2003, 2006), Baumard (1994) and Stilgoe (1998). The context section of the induction activity briefing draws these general conclusions about the purpose of this kind of learning:

- *'There is an urgent need in the professions to promote curiosity and more reflective approaches.*
- *Technology has not provided more time to create and critically reflect.*

- *Walking enables students (and faculty) to make time and space for visually-oriented reflection.*
- *The dérive is one way to model creativity and critical reflection through a form of learner centred, informal, critical learning.' (Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership, 2012)*

The briefing for the activity itself, which includes a variety of advice relating to team working, the importance of slowness in observation, and the need to document observations and reflections systematically, concludes:

> *'Don't get arrested*
> *Do plan, converse, argue, record*
> *Depth much more important than breadth…*
> *Generate insights for the other groups*
> *Take risks in presentation.' (Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership, 2012)*

The groups' presentations based on this dérive activity since 2010 have taken a variety of forms. Different small groups of three or four students have developed and performed mini-plays, presented imaginative or analytical narratives around a series of photographs or drawings, and identified both context-specific and interpersonal insights which surprised them.

In one case a group discovered an abandoned child's 'Creativity Desk' which they appropriated and brought back as the centrepiece of their presentation. This is perhaps an extreme example of the physical embodiment of the abstract concept of creativity. Other findings highlighted in the groups' presentations include: noticing design features in pavements and on buildings; seeing working spaces from unexpected angles, and questioning their effects on the workers; becoming aware of the design aspects of housing developments within the city, and issues of community; seeing the multiplicity of messages in traffic signs and public transport initiatives, and questioning the inherent design processes as well as broader social, environmental and governmental implications; and questioning the historical and current function of a structure within a cemetery.

Almost all of the groups reported initial uncertainties or tensions with one another or with the brief, followed by a 'letting go' process beyond that resistance. They also

commonly reported becoming increasingly aware of the processes within the group, eg of how they agreed working definitions of the concepts of innovation, creativity and leadership; of the stages of exploration and refinement they experienced in formulating their conclusions – which, they reported, often came together during social, relaxed time when the group 'took a break' from the task itself; and of how the different group members contributed to developing the presentations within a short period of time.

This activity has an obvious induction function in terms of the allowing the students to become more familiar with one another and with the faculty. Beyond this, their feedback confirms its contribution to the establishment of a culture of open, participative, explorative learning for the programme as a whole by encouraging engagement with learning activities which might initially appear unpromising, uncomfortable or even potentially risky.

The Creativity and the Creative Industries module

This module, one of two in the programme informed by arts practices, forms one of the final modules of the MICL. Drawn from expertise in the School of Arts and Social Sciences and involving specialist arts practitioners in its delivery, the design of the module drew upon the structure and assessment of successful experiential modules offered at Bachelors and Masters level within the Cass Business School. Like one of the first modules of the programme, Creative Writing, the assessments explore the students' own creative processes within given creative frameworks. In this module, the frameworks are performance (a group assignment) and the development and display of a creative artefact with a supporting reflective portfolio (an individual assignment).

The module specification includes this statement of aims:

> *'This module will provide an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills gained in the other modules in a series of experiential workshops, to develop performance-based assessment, and to explore the ways in which innovation, creativity and leadership apply to a number of creative industries.' (Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership, 2012)*

The delivery of the module since 2012 has included visits to creative institutions including major museums and performance spaces with presentations and

discussions with associated professionals; and music, comedy, acting, dance and art workshops with expert practitioners. For example, classes have been convened at a London museum, and revisited the dérive activity by inviting the students to spend an hour in silence, on their own, exploring the museum and starting their personal portfolios with sketches or notes, or by taking photographs. In the comedy and acting workshops, the students have been introduced to a series of improvisation and performance practices. Another visitor-led session (Complete Coherence, 2019; Watkins, 2013) has invited the students to explore biofeedback techniques that are applied in leadership development and executive coaching to encourage awareness and management of internal states and their impact on health, creativity and innovation, both individually and communally.

This module has been led to date by a faculty member whose own previous research has explored the Heron model of personhood introduced above (Heron, 1992, p. 122), and who became a higher education teacher after executive-level experience in a creative industry. Her teaching is informed by a commitment to active, reflective and transferable learning related to individual students' personal experience and goals. As module leader, she has contextualised the workshop experiences by providing theoretical insights relating to learning theory, reflective practices and the interdisciplinary literature related to the creative industries; and facilitated groups and individuals in the development of their arts-based and reflective assessments.

The assessed coursework elements in this module are:

> *'Group: a creative live performance of 5–10 minutes (40% of the module credit), timed after the completion of roughly two-thirds of the module.*
>
> *Individual: an assignment with three elements (60% in total of the module credit), as the final teaching event of the module and, for most students, of the programme:*
>
> - *An arts-based artefact, presented in a final show*
> - *A personal, reflective portfolio which evidences progression in understanding and skill through the module, with reference to theory.' (Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership, 2012)*

The notified marking criteria for all of the assessment elements have cited Besemer's (1998) 'Creative Product Analysis Matrix', with its distinction between 'Novelty', 'Resolution' and 'Elaboration and synthesis'. The marking scheme has allowed credit

for evidence of active exploration of the chosen media, for the effectiveness and originality of the presentation format, and for ‘Refinement and persuasiveness of progressive personal reflection which integrates perspectives from theory’ (Masters in Innovation, Creativity and Leadership, 2012).

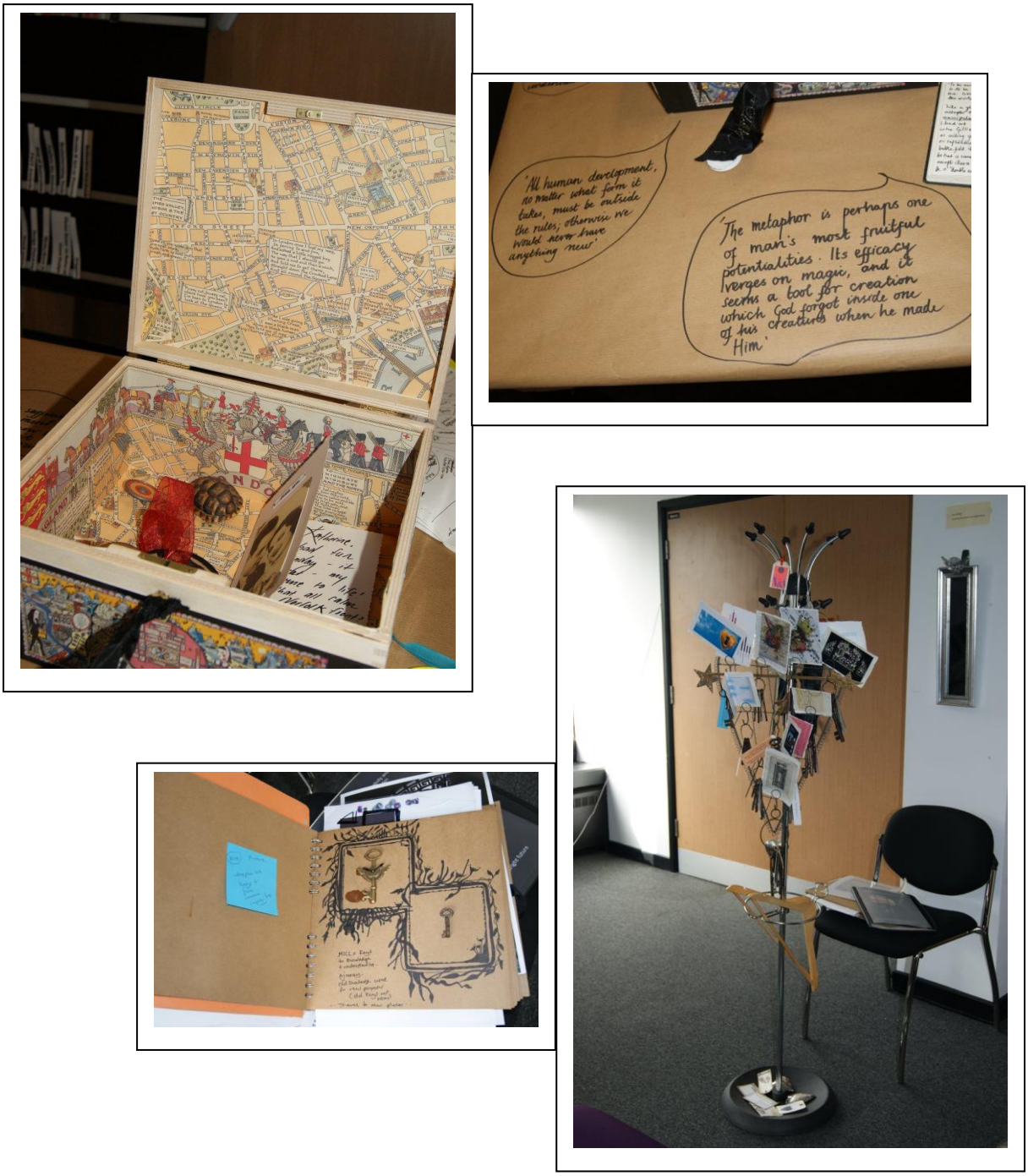

Figure 2 *Examples of MICL Artefacts and Portfolios (2012)*
Note: Reproduced with permission, all rights reserved

The students’ responses to these assignments have been of a high calibre, as confirmed in the moderation process and the External Examiners’ reviews. The

group performances have responded to the brief in a variety of formats including drama, improvisation, comedy, mixed media, and crafted scripts which in some cases integrated music and dance. The integration of MICL themes has been frequently been conveyed in comic and playful ways, and have demonstrated a strong sense of mastery and application of the students' learning. Consistent with the themes of this paper, in every performance to date the students have participated equally in the performances as well as the planning stages, in many cases operating well beyond their personal expectations and professed comfort zones, as confirmed by the honest and evidenced reflective content of their individual portfolios.

The artefact shows have similarly produced work of a high calibre, in most cases beyond the general standards of Masters students within the Business School completing artistic assignments of similar intent, as confirmed by the co-marker. Many demanded the acquisition of new skills in the use of materials and electronics, and almost all moved beyond technology into an artistic framework, defined as a representational, integrative piece. 'Considered', 'deeply felt' and 'rich' were adjectives we have frequently applied to the marking of the artefacts, which have applied a range of media including paint, metal and wooden sculptures, plaster of Paris, paper, and electronic submissions. Among the many examples of sensory explorations, increasing numbers of the students' artefacts have incorporated music and sound, most have invited exploration of taste, touch or making, and some have incorporated a range of smells

The personal portfolios have also in many cases represented deep intrapersonal reflection which demonstrated considerable learning gains through the module and the programme as a whole, as well as evidencing the students' artistic explorations as specified in the assignment briefings.

The students' overall feedback on the module has also been strongly positive, citing concerns related only to the scale and nature of the effort involved in the coursework, especially to refine and plan the form and execution of their artefacts. After the first year, the delivery was therefore adjusted to be delivered over 10 weeks rather than in an intensive five-day workshop format.

Analysis

This case suggests that the outcomes of the MICL's dérive activities invite further research into the design of HE teaching to promote embodied learning combined

with reflection (Bolton, 2010). The levels of active participation and achievement within the MICL group performances also suggest that these activities deliver outcomes in terms of risk taking, collaboration and deep-level processing of themes and core content which support the 5S+3D learning outcomes required to develop a strategic sensographer.

The MICL's arts-based assessments throw light on the other face of embodiment in learning design by requiring the students to develop, perform, make and present their achievements, and then to reflect on the process and on their learning gains. The students' feedback suggests that this aspect of the module delivers the most challenging assignment and the deepest learning in the programme as a whole. The most profound of the artefacts and reflective portfolios were deeply felt and personal as well as representational.

Both the performance and the artefact assessments can be related to Merleau-Ponty's (1962) theory of the establishment of the intentional arc, as outlined by Dreyfus (1996). In both cases, the learning challenges called upon the students to engage as 'Stage 1: Novice' in both a motor skill and a series of intellectual skills. Most moved successfully through the stages of 'Stage 2: Advanced beginner', 'Stage 3: Competence', and 'Stage 4: Proficient', though there was no expectation on them of expert performance as performers or artists at the highest defined level of embodiment, 'Stage 5: Expertise'.

Our analysis of data related to the development of the students' artefacts also confirmed the explanatory potential of Heron's model of personhood (e.g. 1994, p.123): though these were often not fully crafted pieces of work, the artefacts which most impressed as art conveyed deeply felt engagement with the theme (accessing Heron's 'Affective mode') which was both visualised (his 'Imaginal' mode) and convincingly situated within a given setting (his 'Conceptual' mode) – and many of the students' journeys to achieve their artefacts (the 'Active' mode) were evidenced in convincing detail in their associated reflective portfolios.

Beyond the initial framing of this study since 2012, we also acknowledge its alignment with recent debates calling for 'Leading beautifully' and inspiring leaders through art (Adler, 2011; 2015). The concept of slowness (Kahneman, 2011) was also not an explicit initial aim of the programme, but when we reviewed the striking differences between the outputs of the students and, for example, equivalent MBA

students, it struck us that the slowness, the cumulative considering of different disciplinary perspectives on the programme themes, was a fundamental factor in promoting the programme's learning outcomes.

Our learning through this project continues to inform our research and practice. This chapter draws on a relatively small-scale qualitative analysis of the data related to the first MICL cohort, and outlines our initial theorising of the pedagogical impact of this interdisciplinary programme. We have continued to analyse the broader data set related to students' learning experiences and outcomes since 2010, for example in the dérive and the students' assessed creative performances (Holtham and Dove, 2019; Kernan, 2016b); to contribute to critical debates about management and leadership education in an age of paradox and uncertainty, drawing on theories of the evolution of the university, pedagogy and embodiment (Kernan, 2016b, 2017; Rich et al, 2017; Holtham et al, 2019); and to triangulate our findings and conclusions through other forms of data, including a self-efficacy study with the MICL students since 2012 (Kernan, 2019).

This project also highlighted the need to involve our MICL graduates in the analysis of data related to their experience; to foreground cases where students did not engage with the MICL teaching, especially the arts-based elements; and to question the power issues (James and Brookfield, 2014) implicit in teaching and assessment modes which call for embodied performance, exploration of the arts and self-reflection (Holtham and Dove, 2018). We hope also to extend our research insights by comparing evidence for the MICL students' learning experiences and outcomes with those on other interdisciplinary management programmes which do and do not incorporate arts-based and embodied learning.

The authors have applied the insights presented here in projects with creative practitioners across and beyond the UK. Jones and Holtham led City's contribution to the 2017-19 Boosting Resilience project (Holtham and Jones, 2018; Mitchell et al, 2019), which applied arts-based experiences, developed and honed in the MICL delivery, to an Arts Council England project with senior leaders from 27 arts and cultural organisations from across the UK. More recently, Jones also applied these methods in two British Council-funded projects to deliver creative entrepreneurship training aimed at developing enterprise skills for the creative economy in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan (in 2018) and to train creative entrepreneurs in Cuba (in 2019).

Conclusions

We conclude that strategic sensographers need to be developed though methods which are themselves predominantly sensuous, and which, in contrast to the MBA-dominated approach to the education of strategists as a ‘fast’ approach, promote ‘slow’ approaches (Claxton, 1997; Kahnemann, 2011). In our experience, the traditional business school is so strongly dominated by rational interests and disciplines that it may become increasingly necessary and indeed highly desirable for strategic sensography to involve authentic collaboration across apparently unrelated parts of the university.

From the cases outlined above, we conclude that such collaborations can evolve a specialised route to management education rather than by waiting for rationally based programmes such as the MBA to change by themselves. Strategic sensography is so different from rational strategising that it involves disruption for the individuals most directly involved – including teachers as well as learners, though the initial focus of the research presented here is primarily on pedagogical design and the student experience. This disruption can be a powerful catalyst for learning, but calls for processes which promote slow and deep learning rather than fast and shallow learning (Claxton, 1997; 2015; McGilchrist, 2010). To achieve this, we also advocate the integration of reflective practices (Bolton, 2010; Vince, 2002.) to support such slow approaches to learning, as an essential tool in the promote the development of lasting intrapersonal insights.

Pässilä et al (2012) raise the legitimate question of whether pedagogical approaches, such as those adopted in the MICL, can be used as an inquiry method for organisational actors who have no interest in looking behind the rational mask (Lester and Piore, 2004). Undoubtedly there are organisational actors who are more keen on traditional learning programmes than art-based and sensographic initiatives. Approaches in this paper promote the proposition that the participants have the power to change existing practices in their organisations – not only to suggest ideas. If the organisational actors – managers or employees – lack that power, the art-based approach will be ‘tamed’, and merely maintain situations rather than providing transformative steps to change.

In order to enable human potential – which we see as an essential element of embodiment – there is a need to bridge rational and intuitive thinking (Dreyfus,

1996). Both dimensions are needed in order to be able to allow a novel, emerging knowing.

We conclude that these examples offer potentially fruitful pedagogical approaches which allow the students to develop their awareness and their mastery of their own interpretative and creative responses. Rather than simply relying on reproducing formulae, they can find imaginative approaches that are appropriate for them as strategists, and/or most appropriate to the environment under consideration. The embodied experiences also build both their awareness and their confidence in improvisation, including the introduction of an approach unexpectedly in 'mid flight'.

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