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Developing personal creativity through lifewide education

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Abstract

As Ruth Richards (2007) points out in the introduction to her book on 'Everyday Creativity', our personal creativity is an integral part of who we are, how we live our lives and how we create meaning and purpose in our lives. To deny its existence is to deny our very being yet this what higher education often seems to do. In his theory of creativity Rogers (1961:350-351) describes the everyday process of creativity as 'the emergence in action of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life on the

other.' He places the locus of this action in 'man's tendency to actualise himself, to become his potentialities'. If we agree with Rogers then a concern for students' creative development is fundamentally connected to the moral purpose of a higher education - to enable students to realise more of their potential, to actualise themselves to become their potentialities.

Personal creativity in the context of a higher education may be considered using the 'Four-c model' of creativity proposed by Kaufman and Beghetto (2009). They refer to '*Big-C*' creativity that brings about significant change in a domain; '*Pro-c*' creativity associated with the creative acts of expert professionals at work; '*small-c*' creativity - the everyday creative acts of individuals and '*mini-c*' the novel and personally meaningful interpretation of experiences, actions and events that leads to personal transformation. Both mini-c and small-c forms of creativity are relevant to higher education learning and curriculum designs and teaching and learning strategies could usefully encourage and facilitate these. One might speculate that participation in these forms of creativity are a pre-requisite for Pro-c and Big-C creativity in later life as well as for personal fulfilment throughout life.

Personal creativity manifests itself in the way we deal with or create situations: how we think about, evaluate, generate ideas, decide how and when to act, how we actually act and how we adjust our actions as we see their effects, and finally how we reflect on and learn from the experience. Creativity is embedded in the thinking, capabilities and actions that enable us to invent, improvise and adapt in the situations we find ourselves. It is also within the fundamental generative process of learning that results from dealing with situations.

Greene's (2004) detailed research-based account of the capabilities of high-performing people who are effective in their field provides a comprehensive, explicit and inspiring vision for human development. Several of these general capabilities make explicit reference to the creative acts of turning ideas into impacts, protecting novelty, bringing about change and inventing new common sense.

Such a comprehensive view of capability needs to be supported by a comprehensive view of learning. Beard and Jackson (2011) present a useful framework to help us understand and appreciate how our whole being is involved in learning. In this representation of learning there are three components to a learner's world – his inner world, his outer world and the sensory interface between these worlds. Learning is represented in six dimensions: *sensing, belonging, doing, feeling, thinking* and *being/becoming*. A creative act may (is likely to) involve all of these dimensions and adopting such a comprehensive model of learning can help learners and teachers recognise this.

Seeing learning and personal creativity in the ways outlined above, has important implications for education that purports to help and enable students to realise more of their potential - to actualise themselves, to become their potentialities (Rogers 1961). It means that we have to be open to the potential for learning and development through a lifewide concept of education (Jackson 2008, 2010, 2011).

Lifewideness is a simple idea. It recognises that most people, no matter what their age or circumstances, simultaneously inhabit a number of different spaces - like work or education,

running a home, being a member of a family, being involved in a club or society, travelling and taking holidays and looking after their own wellbeing mentally, physically and spiritually. We live out our lives in these different spaces and we have the freedom to choose which spaces we want to occupy and how we want to occupy them. In these spaces we make decisions about what to be involved in, we meet and interact with different people, have different sorts of relationships, adopt different roles and identities, experience different sorts of feelings, and think, behave and communicate in different ways. In these different spaces we encounter different sorts of challenges and problems, seize, create or miss opportunities, and aspire to live and achieve our ambitions. It is in these spaces that we create the meaning that is our lives (Jackson 2011).

The significance of a lifewide concept of education for personal creativity is that it enables students to feel that even if they believe that there is little opportunity for them to be creative in their course (as many do), they can still gain recognition for the creativity that they are expressing in other aspects of their lives. It also encourages students to be more aware of their creativity and how it emerges in different ways in different parts of their life.

The presentation will consider the nature of personal creativity and the sort of higher education curriculum that would nurture and value students' creative development. An example of a partnership framework for supporting lifewide education developed at the University of Surrey will be described, together with examples of students' personal creativity revealed through their involvement in the scheme.

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