RAISING CREATIVITY BLOGS

A multimodal dissertation

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Abstract

The question of how we can encourage creative capacities in young people has never been more relevant than it is today (Pink, 2006; Robinson as cited in TEDtalksDirector, 2007; Eisner as cited in VanderbiltUniversity, 2009). While the world is rapidly evolving, education has the great challenge of adapting to keep up. Scholars say that to meet the needs of 21st century learners, pedagogy must focus on fostering creative skills to enable students to manage in a future we cannot yet envision (Robinson as cited in TEDtalksDirector, 2007). Further, research demonstrates that creativity thrives with autonomy, support, and without judgment (Amabile, 1996; Codack [Zak], 2010; Harrington, Block, & Block, 1987; Holt, 1989; Kohn, 1993). So how well are schools doing in this regard? How do alternative models of education nurture or neglect creativity, and how can this inform teaching practice all around? In other words, ultimately, how can we nurture creativity in education? This documentary explores these questions from a scholarly art-based perspective. Artist/researcher/teacher Rebecca Zak builds on her experience in the art studio, academia, and the art classroom to investigate the various philosophies and strategies that diverse educational models implement to illuminate the possibilities for educational and paradigmatic transformation.

The Raising Creativity documentary project consists of multiple parts across multiple platforms. There are five videos in the series that answer the why, who, how, what, and now what about creativity in education respectively (i.e., why is this topic important, who has spoken/written on this topic already, how will this issue be investigated this time, what was observed during the inquiry, and now what will this
mean going forward?). There is also a self-reflexive blog that addresses certain aspects of the topic in greater depth (located here, on this website) and in the context of Rebecca's lived experience to complement the video format. Together, all video and blog artifacts housed on this website function as a polyptych, wherein the pieces can stand alone individually yet are intended to work together and fulfill the dissertation requirements for Rebecca's doctorate degree in education in reimagined ways.
References


Adapting My Writing for Film

Since beginning my PhD program, I have learned and relearned how to write for various audiences and purposes. Although I would have said at the outset of the program that I was capable of writing academically, truthfully I became much more skilled at this craft as time went on. Since starting production on my video dissertation specifically, I have had to learn yet again how to write academically, but in a way that suits a viewership as opposed to a readership. This post will discuss these necessary adaptations.

Once my proposal was given the green light, I began my dissertation work by writing scripts for each video, keeping in mind and planning for ways in which other modes would assume some or all of the communicative duty. This is to say, I included notes alongside the text I wrote regarding what would be viewable on screen (e.g., text, visuals) that would either amplify what I would say (i.e., the scripted text) or simply say something on its own (i.e., without narrated assistance). Regardless of this, my writing—in terms of vocabulary, jargon, complexity, and depth—was unmistakably academic, which I did not realize posed a problem until the next step in my process (here I provide a link to the first version of my method script, complete with colour-coded notes as indicated above, to illustrate what I mean by "unmistakably academic"). I then filmed myself reading the script to form what I hoped would be a foundational track for me to work from (something around which I could piece the rest of the video together); however in playing it back, I realized it was really suitable only for readers and not for listeners/viewers. My writing made sense in the context of reading; I had written it to be read. I needed to edit it down for simplicity and conciseness in view of the other modes available with video, so that it could be easily digested. One example of something I
changed was the way I referenced the audience. Originally I consistently said "the viewer" to refer to the viewers; then I realized I was effectively speaking of them in third person while I was talking to them, and decided to say "you" instead (e.g., "I'm prompting the viewer to make up his or her own mind about what’s presented" vs. "I'm prompting YOU to make up YOUR own mind about what’s presented"). I think the latter term minimizes the distance between me on screen and the audience, which is positive. It took about four rounds of editing and test filming before I came up with a script I was satisfied with. Interestingly, test filming myself narrating the script was the most important part of the process, as it allowed me to accurately critique my work for the medium.

Once I was totally satisfied with my script, I plotted it out in chart form to show what would happen visually simultaneous to the audio (here is a link to this final working script). This style of chart is simply easier for me to follow during filming and editing. It also forces me to think through every scene in advance so I have a strong vision of what I'm working towards every step of the way. This part of the preproduction ensures that I don't waste time later on in the production process.

Incidentally, the process I've described here has been the case with every video I've produced thus far. My writing consistently starts off as overly academic, and I work through the steps to pare it down and adapt it for film as necessary.
Alternative Dissertation Formats

It’s 2013. Writing as we know it has changed, having evolved with technology (Dobson, 2005) yet the expectations for the dissertation have remained constant. Innovative writing formats can now offer scholarship new perspectives, new audiences, and new directions moving forward. Here I discuss how art-based researchers have approached the dissertation recently, with imagination and success. These examples offer a solid precedent to lean on and build on.

It has been acknowledged and theorized for some time now that literacy as a concept calls on more skills and competencies than simply reading and writing. There have been several fields that have emerged in response to a broadening of what literacy is. One field is New Literacy Studies which has anthropological roots arguing that literacy should be recognized as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1994; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984). New Literacy Studies scholars worked across international contexts to illustrate how literacy practices are informed by culture, by identity, by text genres, and by context. From New Literacy Studies came several fields that pushed the definitions of literacy such as multimodality. My thinking has been strongly influenced by multimodal thinkers like Gunther Kress (1997; 2010) who contend that literacy calls on a repertoire of modes that can be visual in one instance or oral in another instance or moving-image based and that literacy, ideally, needs to incorporate all modes (not just words) to teach what it means to communicate today. Alongside New Literacy Studies and multimodality, there is the work of the New London Group (1996) and the multiliteracies pedagogy (Cope & Kalantzis). Built on the notion of design and redesign, multiliteracies scholars ask researchers to premise their notions of literacy on design and
situate teaching and learning literacy on design and ways of critically framing students' tacit, naturalized understandings of design within classrooms. Clearly, my research adopts a multiliteracies framework - arguing that creativity calls on design and multimodality across contexts. Alongside multiliteracies, there is a larger field of digital literacy where scholars pursue different lines of research centrally concerning individuals' understandings and thinking through virtual worlds. Videogames, YouTube, Immersive words, digital literacy scholars focus on the kinds of skills and competences derived from technologies. Mining data from YouTube and the internet, as I am doing, makes direct links to digital literacies.

In a now well-known debate on whether the dissertation could be conceived of in a less objective format, namely a novel, Eisner (1996) argued that it could: “My conception of research is that the ultimate function of research is to enlarge human understanding.” (cited in Saks, p. 409). He goes on to say that, “The issue here has to do with the form in which one has learned to write, the virtues of that form for addressing the particular problem that one wants to address, and the kind of understanding that one wants to foster.” (cited in Saks, p. 407). Twenty years later however, the debate rages on, especially in view of the various technological platforms (e.g. Web 2.0) that have emerged since, which have shifted the nature of communication and publication. Needless to say, I am a strong proponent of creativity and of investigating and experimenting with innovative approaches to scholarship. Clark & Invanic (1997) argue that thesis writing must reflect the context in which the writing takes place, recognizing that it is shaped “not only by the local circumstances in which students are writing, but by the social, cultural and political climate within which the thesis is produced” (p. 11),
and yet Kamler & Thomson (2009) report more recently that “academic writing is [still] treated as a discrete set of technical skills that are effectively context free.” (p. 507). Like Eisner, Kilbourn (2006) agrees that ultimately “a doctoral dissertation must make a substantive contribution to scholarship. It must address a clear problem . . . [that] must not have been addressed before . . . It must make an argument and . . . the conclusions must be adequately supported. Finally, a doctoral dissertation should demonstrate the author’s sensitivity to the connection between method and meaning.” (p. 530) For many scholars, myself included, in order to establish this necessary connection between the method and the meaning and still execute all other prerequisites, an alternative format is required.

There are many examples of alternatively formatted theses and dissertations in existence already that can serve as precedent for my work. For example, Loi’s (2008) research is assembled within a suitcase. Filling it with various items, photos, and written pieces that are meant to be picked up and interacted with, this approach allows for individual navigation and personal meaning making of the juxtapositions between the suitcase contents. Loi (2008) asks, “why should I share my contribution to research by using an approach which is at odds with the nature of what I am discussing?” (p. 87). Initially Loi was permitted to pursue her suitcase presentation on the condition that the text still rendered 90,000 words, however it was ultimately decided that that “was an inappropriate requirement due to the demonstrated amount of work associated with [Loi’s] arts-informed inquiry” (Loi, 2008, 94).

In similar fashion, Wells’ (2008) work is informed by queer theory, and utilizes a photo narrative method of representing the queer environment. Like Loi’s work, the
nature of such a presentation offers multiple entry points for viewers to construct their own understanding by prompting reflection on how educational settings and other spaces are heteronormalized/homophobic. Cutcher (2008), another arts-based researcher, investigates life histories related to migration. Featuring her own family members, most of them elderly, she weaves together painted portraits, drawings, and text into what she calls an “illuminated manuscript.” This sort of presentation makes for a fragmented, nonlinear, yet still effective method of story-telling and meaning making. Likewise, McDermott (2008) pulls apart printed emails, newspaper headings, diary entries, and other tangible texts, and reassembles them in a collage to gain a new perspective and to discover new meaning. An essential element of her collage work is what is not included; McDermott intentionally leaves holes in the presentation of her work to emphasize the value the viewers’ interpretation brings to the process of meaning making. Roy (2008) reports on her frustration with having to fit her work within the confines of standard paper dimensions. After being encouraged by her supervisor to “stay true to [her]self and to the material” (p. 54) and reassured that she was “writing something important and [she could] take all the space [she needed],” Roy did just that, creating an 11 x 14 inch landscape page format for her work, which incorporated interview transcripts and analysis, photos and songs. As Loi (2010) puts it, “I previously tried to fit my work into given parameters – a bound paper report – and in doing so I castrated what I intended to say” (p. 86). Roy’s experience supports this notion; as she points out, a researcher’s choice of format is an indication of the values they hold. For myself, I have always valued thinking outside the box and doing what hasn’t been done, so it is appropriate that I will be producing my dissertation as a series of online videos plus a blog. Lee (2008)
wrote a series of 8 short stories as her dissertation, including 1 autobiographical account of her lived experience. Read together, the stories embark on contradiction, but this is done intentionally as a device for furthering thought and interpretation, in order to “confront, challenge, and steer readers into critical places and unexpected spaces” (Lee, 2008 p. 25). Perhaps the most well-known art-based dissertation, however, is one by Spencer J. Harrison. Harrison (2010) was awarded his doctorate degree in education in 2010 after working as an artist-in-residence at Georges Vanier Secondary School in Scarborough to complete a large painted circus tent as his dissertation (Harrison, n.p.). Grounded in queer theory and critical pedagogy, Harrison utilized painting as the medium for his arts-based methodology to display circus-inspired imagery and text of his experience, growing up gay. The piece is entitled, “Freak Show,” indicative of his nickname in high school. Bright colours and ploys inviting voyeurism and othering/marginalizing mentalities decorate the outer shell of the tent; this is meant to portray how the outer world ideologically understood and subsequently came to treat Harrison, as a then closeted gay young man. On the inside of the tent, Harrison lines the walls with painted renders of family photographs, along with textual thoughts as if from a diary; this intimately-natured side to the piece pulls the viewer closer to what the lived experience of marginalization, homophobia, public vilification is like. Perhaps the most powerful aspect of the piece is the juxtaposition of the inner and the outer parts of the tent; through the elements and principles of design, Harrison visually and tacitly builds a dichotomous story of spectacle and closeting, of the extrovert and his loneliness, of group think and individual resistance, and ultimately of acceptance of who he is, but not of the way he was treated by others.
What all of these works have in common is novelty and relevance, which are key components of creativity (Robinson, 2007). They speak to their topics in appropriate formats designed especially to fit, and in so doing they make a greater, more effective and more memorable impact. This is exactly the outcome I hope my own research will have, and having a creative format within which to present my work on creativity will make all the difference.
References


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An IEP for Everyone

In a documentary about creativity, I would be remiss if I did not discuss individualized approaches in education. Creativity is as diverse and unique as are people. It's a wonder and a shame then that mainstream schooling is served in a one-size-fits-all framework, as this post will go on to elaborate.

The Ontario Curriculum (or any mandated curriculum, for that matter) is a prescription of what to learn and when (in what year) it is to be learned. It is written in terms of expectations and outcomes. There is only one set of curricula: one for each subject and grade. There is however a provision made for those students who can't cognitively execute the said curriculum as such—these students, once given proper recommendation by a specialist, are put on what's called an Individual Education Plan, or IEP for short. The IEP modifies and/or accommodates the curriculum for students so that they can "handle it." But there is no IEP though for those who just don't want to handle it, which from anecdotal experience as a classroom teacher, I can say is a fair number. School is a premeditated political exercise imposed upon a group of stakeholders (i.e., students) who are traditionally left out of what should be a democratic decision of what and when to learn. Teachers can ask for student input during class, sure—but that input is the furthest reduction of decision-making available. Freire (1970) writes,

For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human.

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (p. 72)

Looking back on my education—that is, the entirety of what I learned and came to know
and understand—I would testify (and it's no surprise) that I truly *learned* that which I
cared about: the arts, the environment, the natural world, social smarts. I was also taught
a great many other topics and subjects because "they" said so, but I cannot honestly recall
these things enough to be articulate and make sense . . . so I have to conclude that I really
did not actually learn these things. How much more could I have learned along the vein
of that which excited me? that was inherently motivating? that inspired me? How much
further ahead could I be today had I had a customized, individualized education?! In fact,
I did have an IEP for many years as a child, but sadly never once did it allow for more of
that which lit me up. I can't help but wonder, how much of my time was wasted???

Ricci (2012) describes: “A child, like an adult, learns most and learns best when he or she
learns according to his or her will. Following her own will leads to the development of
her 'willed curriculum,' her entirely personal, customized education experience” (p. 1). I
know this is true; I shudder and cringe at the squandered opportunity. . . personal and
collective.

This one-size-fits-all approach is becoming evermore peculiar-looking in today's
reality. Never have standardization and homogenization seemed so antiquated as in our
present era of customization. The advent of Web 2.0 (i.e., participatory) technologies in
particular within the past decade has allowed the average person to interact with web
applications, spawning social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, and
YouTube (to name but a few) and allowing people to tailor their web experience (and I
might say, lived experience) to their personal interests, tastes, and aptitudes. Similarly,
tech gadgets such as Smartphones are unquestionably designed to be customizable to
whatever the user wants; they start as a standard skeleton with the intention of being
altered and added on to until they are as unique as the user himself/herself. The ability to adapt a framework to individual preference provides an element of novelty and caters to the malleable morphing nature of personal interest. Certainly when clients come to me with an idea for a painting commission, they are looking for something unique, something from their (or my) imagination that isn’t available to the general public—they want what is one of a kind. Standardization is not always (perhaps even seldom) desirable. Imagine what the freedom of a customizable education might mean—to individuals, and to humankind as a whole! The argument for standardization perpetuated in education is misinformed and out of touch with present-day trends. Education must move from one-size-fits-all to one of a kind.

In the video below (part of my Director's Commentary video series, related to the Raising Creativity documentary project), I speak on this subject with reference to a drink advertisement I happened upon. I found it bemusing that something as unimportant as beverage mix is marketed with customization in mind, yet something as critical as education is not.
References


Art-Based Research in a Nutshell

Although I am employing bricolage (i.e., a combination of methodologies for a customized application; Kincheloe, 2001), there is one main methodology that I draw most heavily from: Arts-informed Research (AIR). Based upon another post I wrote located at rebeccazak.com, this post will discuss AIR succinctly, for easy reference. I have synthesized the following key tenets of AIR from Knowles, Promislow, and Cole (2008):

1. the work must validate multiple truths over conclusive facts;
2. the work must be accessible, meaning that it is both understandable and within reach for the average person;
3. the work should seek to produce a transformative outcome; and
4. the researcher’s presence can/will be recognized throughout the process and in the final product.

Emphasizing Multiple Truths Through Exploration and Interpretation

Art-based research is by nature less rigid in structure, often nonsequential, and offers multiple points of entry (Loi, 2008; McDermott, 2008) that can “empower [viewers] rather than alienate them with one-way choices” (Loi, 2008, p. 90). A standard codex style (i.e., sequential, linear book) dissertation would be ill suited and inappropriate to my topic of creativity and to my background as a "scholartist" (Knowles et al, 2008) because it stifles the audience’s ability to approach it uniquely and it limits interpretive exploration. With respect to pluralism, I require a format that can be visually rich, flexible, dynamic, and nonlinear so that viewers can engage easily with the material and decide for themselves how they will navigate it. At the same time, my format must be
conducive to the openness of illumination as an outcome as opposed to the narrowness of conclusive findings. I've chosen a five-part multimodal video series and blog website as the best way to meet these needs. This way, the research will unfold uniquely for every viewer as he or she so chooses.

**Ensuring Accessibility, and Working Towards Transformation**

Twenty-first century information technologies are offering researchers new advantages and affordances in their scholarship. Online participatory websites provide an ideal platform for art-based research in particular because they support dynamic visual and multimodal applications, which have become part of everyday life for many people and are shifting the way people think and come to know (Robertson, 2010). The reality of technological evolution and its effects on society is something that academia cannot ignore: New epistemology going forward will incorporate technological innovation.

Furthermore, Sameshima and Knowles (2008) assert, “[as part of arts-informed inquiry,] there must be a commitment to making the work accessible to the audiences beyond academe” (p. 116). In uploading my videos and posting my blogs to the internet, I am making it possible for all members of the public here and around the world—indeed, everyone with access to the internet—to view, read, and digest my work. Ultimately, I hope that by planning and allowing for an extended viewership beyond the limited scope of my committee members (in both my portfolio and my doctoral research), my work will somehow (in ways I will undoubtedly not be aware of or be able to measure) serve others, as greater visibility helps to have a greater transformative outcome (Wells, 2008).

**Recognizing Researcher Presence**

Conducting research through artistic means points to inherent subjectivity in the
work. No artist can ever create something without infusing his or her biases, beliefs, values, et cetera into his or her piece. Therefore, to acknowledge the presence of the researcher in AIER is to admit openly that the research came from a particular person and is therefore tainted characteristically in the likeness of that person. In AIER, this is not a deficiency but rather an advantage because it helps contextualize the points made. In *Raising Creativity*, I chose to narrate and appear in the videos because what brought me to this position of researching creativity in education was my own unique lived experience. *Raising Creativity* is my story, but I hope to write and edit it in such a way that the audience can relate to it as well.

In essence, AIER is completely untraditional, a "methodless method" (McDermott, 2008). It is a total reconceptualization of how knowledge is arrived at and therefore what research can be. It needed to exist before I would ever have identified as a scholar.
References


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Autonomy, Support, and Evaluation

"For creativity to flourish, people need to be autonomous, they need support, and they need to not be judged. Really these areas are interdependent.” In reference to my observations video (part 4 in the series), in this post I'll discuss in detail why these elements are so crucial and how they affect one another.

Creativity is fragile. I say this from firsthand experience; I make art, and I teach it, and in either situation it is not always easy to manifest that coveted spark. The research supports the notion that it takes certain circumstances to promote creative development. While these circumstances are often referred to in isolation, I've synthesized together a set of interconnected conditions from the research and based on what I've experienced as an artist/researcher/teacher as prerequisites for fostering creativity. These are autonomy, support, and no evaluation. How well these three tandem conditions are met determines how well the opportunity for creativity is maximized.

The first in the triad of conditions is autonomy. Creativity is based in imagination, discovery, experimentation, and play; therefore autonomy matters, because without a sense of freedom to explore ideas and a sense of power to execute ideas, creativity doesn't stand a chance. As my Master's research (Codack [Zak], 2010) demonstrates, creativity can suffer when the activity is not learner-centric, whereby learners are limited by regulated objectives and/or time constraints. Gatto (1992) warns that students’ lack of control can produce “intellectual dependency,” which is antithetical to creativity (p. 8). Holt (1989) also warns, “teaching that the learner has not asked for is likely to impede and prevent his or her learning” (p. 28). Likewise, Harrington, Block, and Block (1987) find in their study that children’s creativity can flourish when adults relinquish control
and promote a sense of freedom instead. Csikszentmihalyi (as cited in TEDtalksdirector, 2008) finds that self-direction and freedom make a situation conducive to “flow”—the trancelike state of having lost consciousness of one’s whereabouts to the creative impulse. Upitis (2005) observes that teachers who are practicing artists understand the value of “flow” yet find it nearly impossible to evoke this phenomenon within their students due to the unfavourable conditions of the mainstream school structure.

Though providing autonomy and providing support are not the same thing, it is nonetheless generally true that where autonomy is granted to a learner, support is also, because the two go easily hand-in-hand. Support does not necessarily mean direct teaching; rather support can span from unsolicited encouragement and trust (e.g., leaving learners alone, granting autonomy) to solicited facilitation (e.g., providing the appropriate materials or environment) to solicited instruction. In any situation, genuine support isn’t possible without autonomy. As was stated previously, unsolicited instruction (i.e., outward control) can discourage creativity. Holt (1969) observes, children are sensitive to what adults value; therefore learners who receive support will be more likely to pursue creative ventures.

Finally, evaluation. It would be quite difficult to feel supported and autonomous if ultimately someone else were to have the final word on one's output. Amabile (1996) demonstrates that the expectation of evaluation decreases creative activity. Eisner (2003) also recognizes that the process of discovery is undermined when a heavy value is placed on outcome. Even seemingly positive evaluation such as an A or a gold star has been shown to diminish creative performance (Kohn, 1993). Freed and Parsons (1997) argue, “grades perpetuate the notion that the teacher is the absolute authority” (p. 125), which is
in contrast with the inclusive pluralistic sensibility of art and creativity.

The mainstream system where I teach is a prime example of how these conditions are interconnected. In traditional schooling, lessons are derived from provincial curriculum by the teacher and usually delivered with an attempt to engage learners. Students are expected to complete all assignments regardless of whether or not they want to or find the topic interesting. Teachers are available to support student learning with regard to the assigned work. Ultimately student work will be evaluated by the teacher and typically given a grade or a level (which is the same thing) and/or formative feedback. Oftentimes the evaluation tool (e.g., rubric, checklist) will be made available in advance of students beginning to work on their assignment, which is meant to direct students towards the expected (fundamentally uniform) outcome. In this model, the threat of evaluation looms over students from the outset, autonomy does not genuinely exist, and support is conditional. If this were to change and just one of these three conditions were consciously provided, the opportunity for creativity would increase by virtue of the interconnection between autonomy, support, and evaluation. For example, if evaluation were omitted, students would be freer in theory to follow their intuition, curiosity, and play instinct without fear of being punished. If control were relinquished to the learner, then students would likely feel supported and could again follow their inner drive and allow their intrinsic motivation to guide them, which could supersede other considerations (like a rubric). If support were bolstered in genuine ways, then autonomy would also flourish through cause and effect, and the impact of evaluation would be reduced to a minimum because it would be interpreted as being of lesser importance. Because these three conditions affect each other, the opportunity for creativity to prosper
is within an all-or-nothing context. Creativity is either challenged or it's given its best chance to thrive. My goal with this research is to establish what can be done to transform every learning occasion into one that fosters creativity.
References


In constructing an appropriate method for this research, I have borrowed from various methodologies (namely, A/r/tography, Arts-informed Research, and, to a lesser extent, narrative inquiry) to develop something specifically fitting for my purposes. In doing so, I’ve effectively implemented bricolage as a research orientation. This post will explain what bricolage is, from both a research and visual arts point-of-view.

Kincheloe (2001) describes bricolage as the use of a variety of educational methods used together synergistically to offer multiple perspectives and promote greater rigour. I am most familiar with bricolage, however, as an art medium, in which materials and content are chosen for their availability (i.e., whatever’s on hand) and combined to produce form (Bricolage, 2013). Bricolage is an appropriate term for my research from both of these perspectives: I’m utilizing only what I feel are the most relevant aspects of A/r/tography and narrative inquiry and combining these with Arts-informed Research for a customized comprehensive methodology, AND I’m using what have now become ubiquitous tools (e.g., YouTube, my video camera, and a blog) to produce it. I expect the results will be as Kincheloe describes: more conceptually complex work, richer and more rigorous, thanks to the bricolage approach. It should be no surprise that a new era would demand a new way of researching, of thinking, of understanding. If creativity is what’s unique and novel, and relevant and useful, then my method itself is a demonstration of creativity—which, of course, is very fitting.
References


Collective Intelligence/Inclusion

The methodology behind *Raising Creativity* involves mining the "collective intelligence" (Jenkins, 2006) of YouTube for relevant clips that can be remixed together to form a cohesive illuminated response to the question of how creativity can be nurtured in education. In this blog I consider the merits of paying attention to multiple voices through the lens of "collective intelligence" and inclusion.

In the video below, Henry Jenkins (as cited in TEDxTalks, 2010) discusses "participatory culture" and how it plays out, particularly amongst young people in a 21st century context. He notes that young people are often active social agents capable of taking on considerable responsibility and will do so especially in areas of personal interest (and I would add, using methods of interest). He advocates that these interests must be taken seriously and that spaces are needed to support such pursuits. Participatory websites (i.e., social media) fulfill this need by offering accessible, user-friendly platforms for engagement and dissemination. Video-enabled cell phones are now incredibly ubiquitous, making YouTube a popular vehicle for communicating and for generating or adopting community around a given interest or cause (Godin as cited in TEDtalksDirector, 2009). It may therefore be now more appropriate to say "video is mightier than the sword."

From an unschooling perspective, participatory culture fosters play, experimentation, ownership, entrepreneurialism, passion, political identity, and integrity, all of which add up to rich educational opportunity. If ultimately what we want education to do is produce competent critical thinkers who can articulately contribute their thoughts and ideas, then many scholars and other education stakeholders (unschoolers or
otherwise) would agree that the Web 2.0 technology available today (e.g., YouTube) can certainly effectively aid in that quest (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012; Jenkins as cited in TEDxTalks, 2010).

Ultimately what I want this research to accomplish is (a) to highlight informal learning models and (b) to underscore the importance of creativity, particularly in young people. Therefore it is obvious to me that the voices of young people must be represented within my selection. I had always intended to include the voice of scholars in my work, since the plan for this video-based research originated from the traditional dissertation model in which scholars are routinely referenced. After considering the diversity implicit in the term "collective intelligence" however, it became clear that to reference only scholars was both narrow sighted and exclusive. To ignore young voices for whom this research is aimed and whose educational reality it attempts to transform, especially when it is they who can speak anecdotally from the front line, would be inconsiderate and inappropriate to say the least. Instead, I hope to “[honour] silenced voices in a world of multiple realities” (Fleet, 2008, p. 265). Voice is our means of emancipation (Freire, 1970); I will not deny that which I aim to foster.

“If the structure does not permit dialogue the structure must be changed” (Freire, 1970).

As mentioned, in the video below Henry Jenkins explains his concepts of collective intelligence and participatory culture, in detail.
References


Eisner, Freire, and I

As a new scholar, I have been dramatically influenced by a few senior scholars that have come before me—namely, Elliot Eisner and Paulo Freire. In this post, I describe my work and philosophical convictions in relation to those of Eisner and Freire, thus attempting to define my place in the spectrum of academia.

Though it may not be outwardly apparent, in my view Eisner and Freire exhibit similarities and complement one another on two main issues in education: voice, and an inquiry approach to pedagogy. Although I know I am by no means on par with these two luminaries at this early stage of my academic career, I would like to humbly suggest that my work provides a bridge between them, as I will explain.

Voice

In his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) articulates the criticality of dialogue between social groups so as to break down hegemonic barriers and challenge sociological conformity. He writes, “dialogue imposes itself as the way by which men [sic] achieve significance as men [sic]. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity,” (p. 77). For Freire, voice is a vehicle of emancipation and self-actualization. Similarly, Eisner (2004) advocates for voice in the multimodal sense; that is, expression through the arts which fosters (among other things) the development of one’s individuality. He writes, “the arts make vivid the fact that . . . the limits of our language do not define the limits of our cognition,” (p. 80). In *Raising Creativity*, I attempt to marry these two similar yet subtly different conceptions of voice more closely. I establish the importance of creativity from the outset and argue from personal experience as an artist/researcher/teacher and from the literature (referencing Freire and Eisner) that the
mainstream schooling system is not equipped to foster creativity as-is. I argue in the same vein as Freire that the education system is deeply oppressive—given that the curriculum is always dictated from above and that pedagogical practice is often circumscribed—and that creativity is unlikely to thrive under conditions which do not promote autonomy, provide support, and relinquish evaluative practices. My angle therefore (academically speaking) can be summed up this way: Where creativity is suppressed, voice is consequently oppressed.

**Inquiry**

Furthermore, Freire (1970) admonishes that, “dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s “depositing” ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be “consumed” by the discussants . . . [instead] it is an act of creation,” (p. 77). Thus, Freire strongly advises “problem-posing education,” (p. 68) whereby learners are invited into the crux of an issue and implored to work through it to establish meaningful, personalized solutions. On a grand scale, this method can work to subvert status quo, as it “strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality,” (p. 68) whereas on a smaller scale, it simply and effectively leads to rigorous learning by means of its engaging, inquiry-based approach. Rather than learners being spoon fed information and assigned formulaic activities as the basics of their educational methodology, Eisner (as cited in Vanderbilt University, 2009) encourages creative approaches, where the outcome isn’t known or anticipated. He states, “the arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution and that questions can have more than one answer. There’s so much that we teach in schools that is essentially convergent in nature. Life is not that way.” (n. p.). In part 2 of *Raising Creativity*, I explain Freire
and Eisner’s unique perspectives on an inquiry-based model (as I have here), pulling the two together to create an argument for creativity as an effective response to problem-posing pedagogy.

Though the individual work of Freire, Eisner, and I exhibit similarities and nuanced differences, ultimately it is all about agency and transformation. Freire’s scope is broad in that he discusses emancipation for oppressed persons within society, whereas Eisner’s focus is narrower in his advocation of the arts for school-age learners. I have come to see my work as a bridge between these two through one key overarching argument: That the creative process is the means by which we capitalize on our individual and collective talents, thoughts, and beliefs for the purpose of asserting our agency and effecting transformation in the world. Indeed, nothing changes without action that is informed by new ideas (Freire, 1970).
References


Because art and research both hinge on discovery, emergence (that which is unplanned that reveals itself) is held up as a critical element of an art-based researcher's process, as this post will discuss. As Picasso once said, "if you know exactly what you are going to do, what is the point of doing it?"

While creativity can be defined as “the process of having original ideas that have value” (Robinson cited in TEDtalksDirector, 2007), emergence is an element on the journey towards developing such original ideas, as I will discuss in my literature review video (part 2 of the documentary). Discovery has a well-documented physiological effect on the brain (Kandel cited in Big Think, 2013), making us happy with the release of dopamine and activating the lateral habenula part of the brain which motivates us to keep seeking out discovery-based experiences (Tulley as cited in bigideasfest, 2010). It's no wonder then that so many art-based scholars have indicated the importance of surprise in their work. For example, Eisner (as cited in VanderbiltUniversity, 2009) reports on the benefits of “outcomes you hadn’t anticipated” that come from “the opportunity to work at the edge of incompetence” (n.p.). McDermott (2008) advises, “as artistic inquirers we need to always be aware and awake because the 'answers' are unfolding each minute,” (p. 146). Norman (2008) observes, “the white spaces that always look empty but are ready at any moment, borrowing from Helene Cixous, “to burst into letters” (pp. 58–59). My own personal experience with art and research confirms the same. How often have I walked away from a painting or a piece of writing, only to be struck with the most brilliant next step when I am nowhere in front of my work! How many times has one little word or phrase or image or sound inspired a thought, helping me to make a connection and tie
things together in a way that no planning or studying could. Emergence represents trust and openness in relation to the universe, to collective intelligence, and to the natural, grand, and inexplicable processes of the mind. Cole and Knowles (2001) explain art-based research in the following way:

    Process is informed . . . by knowing how artists work. It is about fusing into one’s scholarship the inspiration of an art and its processes and representations . . . This knowledge of process is infused into researching procedures in ways that make inherent sense and enhance the possibilities for gathering a different quality of information, analyzing and interpreting and presenting it creatively (p. 5).

Eisner (as cited in Vanderbilt University, 2009) puts it simply, "surprise: it's on no one's list of goals, but it should be" (n.p.). Relinquishing finite plans and cultivating openness creates the opportunity for emergence and the creativity that flows from it to thrive. The aim of this research is to stress the importance of creativity for everyone and to illuminate alternative options to the status quo in educational practice and, secondarily, in research. Emergence is reliably fickle and predictably serendipitous and exciting—what an excellent recipe for working and learning.
References


First Video (Rationale) is Live!

In this post, I'm very pleased to present the first of five videos in the *Raising Creativity* series/polyptych, part one of my research documentary.

Since the five videos I have proposed are meant to cover the same content as one would find in a traditional five chapter dissertation, this video is an introduction to my intended research. In it, I essentially explain the issue I'm focusing on and provide a rationale for my investigation. To sum it up, this video contextualizes the importance of creativity including its role in learning, and establishes the idea that mainstream schooling is not adequately fostering it. I then present my research question, "How can we nurture creativity in education?" and follow that up with subquestions surrounding alternative educational models. Finally, I use this video to also introduce myself and present my personal narrative of me as artist/researcher/teacher to establish credibility for the viewer and explain why I care about this issue so passionately. In so doing, I also plug art-making as a method of inquiry, which will be further explicated in my third video, on methodology.

The challenge with writing multimodally as I am doing (i.e. making a video) is that the piece must be cohesive and comprehensive, yet also concise. There is never any shortage of content; rather my challenge is that there is always a chance that the final piece will be unwatchable if I do not keep a keen eye toward clever editing. Finding the balance between presenting enough and not presenting too much means everything to each video's efficacy. For this reason, I am planning to be flexible artistically in terms of what content fits where, in order to minimize redundancy, aid the flow of each piece, and bridge the video sections so they read as one unit and keep the viewer interested in
watching on. All of this said, I feel there are plenty of engaging ideas that surface in this first video—both content-wise and in terms of design themes and motifs—to draw viewers in and captivate their attention.

A second challenge to working with digital mashup, which O’Brien and Fitzgerald (2006) define as “a visual remix, commonly a video or website which remixes and combines content from a number of different sources to produce something new and creative” (p. 1), is that sometimes the quotation excerpts I assemble alongside one another do not fit precisely well together at first. Occasionally there occurs a grammatical disagreement that would be easily amended with block parenthesis if I were using text alone, but which I have chosen to overlook given the video medium because it tends to be forgiving of such disagreements. More frequently a speaker makes an important point in a video that I wish to utilize, but in their quote they do not use a specific pronoun (instead replacing pronouns with “it,” “they,” etc.) which renders the context of what they are saying not completely clear. In this instance, I have tried to edit their quotation by taking a snippet from somewhere else in the video where the speaker says the pronoun to which they refer indirectly later on and inserting it where it makes sense to create a coherent, usable sentence that meets my needs. At times the flow and intonation of the speaker’s voice is rendered slightly incompatible when I do this (not to mention there can be a slight jumpiness to the speaker visually), however I do not mind; I am not attempting to hide the fact that that is how I have troubleshooting the adaptation of visual quotations for my purposes. In every case, I have ensured that the original context in which the quote appeared has remained intact so as to preserve the integrity of the quote and of my research. Without any further ado, here is Part 1 of Raising Creativity:
References


How I Nurture Creativity

My research into how alternative educational models nurture creativity has prompted renewed and ongoing reflexive praxis for me as an elementary public school teacher. This blog discusses how my pedagogy has been influenced and adapted to further foster creativity as a result.

As Part 4 of *Raising Creativity* (2014) fleshes out, creativity has the chance to thrive when the learner is granted autonomy, support, and is not subjected to unsolicited evaluation. Here I describe several of my personal pedagogical practices, organized under each of these conditions, and I end with a list of unavoidable limitations.

**Autonomy**

1. Classroom Democratic Agreement

   For the past 2 years, I have started out the school year by introducing the concept of democracy to my grade 7 students. Students at this age are very familiar with and fond of fairness, but are rarely offered a say in how “fairness” will play out in their scholastic experience. Quite intentionally, I present my students with the idea that our year can be whatever we imagine it could be; it can and should evolve as we want it to—and by “we,” I mean all of us as a collective of equal members, myself included. Students are invited to make suggestions for motions that they would like to see appear in a kind of classroom contract, with the understanding that for any motion to go forward, it must adhere to 3 stipulations: (1) it must allow for learning, (2) it must not interfere with anyone else in any way, and (3) it must be approved of by majority vote. Really, there is nothing that could possibly be enacted in the contract that I could not back professionally with these provisions in place. After justifying the provisions for students, appealing to
their common sense and garnering their support, my duty is to then facilitate the discussion around potential motions to help students decide what is appropriate and what is not, under the provisions. Ultimately what we create is a democratic agreement document that comes from the class, is written in their handwriting, and is posted in the room as a declaration of what we stand for and what we will abide by. Moreover, it is a device to level the field of power between the students and I, and to promote a spirit of equity and agency in the classroom. Students learn quickly that what the democratic agreement says actually goes, which prompts them to reimagine it as the year goes on. They can vote on amendments whenever any class member envisions something they’d like to see enacted in their learning environment and within the classroom community. Relinquishing control to the learner this way results in a more autonomous, more satisfied student body overall, which in turn satisfies me.

2. Proposal-based projects

In order to steer clear of the creativity-inhibiting formula-based assignments that students are accustomed to, wherein each step to completion is explicitly laid out for students in sequence and they are expected to follow along, toe the line, and produce something standard, I have adopted an open-ended approach. I “construct” assignments along a loose theme or idea (like a general framework), then encourage students to articulate their own objective within that framework and propose their own path of production. I often provide qualitative feedback on these proposals to help students flesh out their process, anticipate problems, and enhance their overall plan. The result is an activity of their choosing that appeals to their interest and fosters engagement. Providing freedom this way has consistently led my students to produce a greater amount of work,
and of deeper, more rigourous, and original quality because they operate toward their own self-defined standards, under the influence of intrinsic motivation and according to their own autonomous investment.

3. Teach techniques, prompt imagination

Similar to the proposal approach, I also regularly prompt students to extrapolate what they can do with what knowledge they have acquired. For example, much of what I do as an art teacher is teach techniques for effective use of art materials. I explain that these techniques are like tools and the possibilities for their use are endless, instead of the traditional approach where students learn and practice a technique for the sole purpose of executing it in the context of a specific teacher-derived assignment. Students are never actually limited to the use of a technique one way or another, but the implication is there unless they are prompted otherwise. My students are offered examples of how the technique could be implemented, and then prompted to think of other examples for use and encouraged to demonstrate the technique in whatever way they desire. In my experience, this is an especially beneficial approach in teaching pre-service teachers—demonstrating how to interpret concepts broadly and transpose skills widely in their pedagogy.

Support

4. Art for art’s sake

To promote a sense of creativity as a lifestyle, I offer artistic/creative opportunities to students that are completely unrelated to their regular academic programming. One such opportunity is what I call the “doodle board”—a bulletin board that is informally curated by students and therefore frequently evolving. It is a space to showcase their
creative work and a platform to display and honour work done outside of the classroom, stemming from their own autonomous pursuits and interests. I also organize a school-wide extracurricular mural club, which comes entirely from the students’ creative process (though facilitated by me), from initial brainstorming to first sketches, to revised plans, to plotting and painting, to finally mounting the finished piece on the wall. Participants in mural club are from all different grades and collaborate as a creative collective over the course of the school year to produce massive pieces that have a big impact not just visually, but communally as well.

5. Frame and display

Because “children are sensitive to what adults value” (Holt, 1969, p. 135), I have an assortment of picture frames available to display student work around my classroom. To frame a piece of art is to qualify it as valuable, no discussion (or grades) necessary. I also like to bring in my own artwork from time to time to show students that I practice what I preach, and to implicitly convey to them the importance of engaging in creative ventures at any age.

6. Create a welcoming, hands-on environment

Materials must be held and played with before they can be utilized proficiently or productively. Eisner writes, “what was not first in the hand cannot be later in the head.” (p. 108). For this reason, I like to leave art materials out in the open and encourage students to pick them up and look at them, test them out, get a taste for them. Rather than be locked or hidden behind cupboard doors, paints, pencil crayons, and inks are on display, creating a tantalizing colourful rainbow, while off-cuts of construction paper are made available in a box with a written invitation to take at will, marked with a smiley
face. I have an organized, open cupboard door policy, where students are encouraged to help themselves, touch and see. Creativity cannot exist if students do not feel at liberty to explore materials.

No evaluation

7. Self evaluations

Nothing has bothered me more, philosophically speaking, in my experience as a mainstream art teacher than the task of marking student artwork. Students can and should be trusted to form their own opinion on how well they have done, as well as what they would like to focus on next for improvement. The imposition of external evaluation is superfluous and undermines what the student already believes about his or her achievement. I have found it helpful to coach or facilitate the self evaluation process along (since this not a regular practice in mainstream schooling), to assist students in determining and articulating their thoughts. I like to keep a simple framework by asking, (1) what are you happy with? (2) what did not work out as well as you had hoped? (3) what surprised you along the way? (4) what would you do differently next time? And finally, (5) how would you rate your work? The first four questions provide a rationale for the final question, which I let stand as the students’ mark in my grade book, so long as the rationale is complete and makes sense. At times I have also asked students to think of alternate ways of rating their work besides a letter or a number grade in an attempt to subvert academic tradition. On one memorable occasion, I had a student rate her work “interesting;” indeed, what better valuation to strive for than creative work that merits being deemed “interesting.
8. Flexible “birthlines”

Productive creative work takes time, and often requires failure as part of the natural creative process (Robinson as cited in TEDtalksDirector, 2007). To impose a strict timeframe on this delicate process is to induce stress, and thereby impact the productivity and quality of the work. Therefore, I do not assign deadlines; instead I use the positive language of “birthlines” to connote the idea that finishing creative work means to give life to something original—a visual, an idea, a story, et cetera. It is something positive to work toward, and should not be expected to happen in an environment of impending doom.

9. Minimize evaluation, maximize feedback

According to Csikszentmihaly’s (2008) Flow theory, students will improve in their creative work if they are challenged appropriately. In the context of the art classroom, this means challenging students in the way they think about the work they are producing. While evaluation is simply a formulation of external judgment, and is therefore unproductive in assisting creativity to move ahead, qualitative feedback on the other hand can be very helpful. In my classroom, I mark work minimally but maximize the talk around student work in order to prompt their thinking forward. Often this takes the form of questioning, so as to push their thoughts around and have them decide for themselves what they think and why, as opposed to providing them with thoughts that are not their own and are therefore less meaningful.

Limitations

Regardless of what I am doing to nurture creativity in my classroom, there still
remains a list of systemic hurdles I cannot avoid or overcome with the model being as-is.

This list is below.

1. I must cover ministry-developed curriculum
2. I must evaluate and report on student progress regularly
3. I occupy a position of power in the classroom as teacher
4. I must comply with the school schedule/timetable
5. I must operate within a given budget
6. I must comply with board and ministry-developed initiatives and mandates
7. I am expected to operate as a team with colleagues of varied pedagogical perspectives
8. Classroom learning does not provide context for the learner

Education is a field in which there is always room for change. The ideas presented in this blog for nurturing creativity are ones that, reflexively, do make a degree of difference in my experience. There is still much further to go in the way of change however, and getting there will require greater collective input.

I have assembled these thoughts more concisely in video format, as a bonus feature to the Raising Creativity series.
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Learning From My Garden

I grow a garden in my backyard every year, and every year I am taught new things from it. In observing my vegetables and fruit trees this year, I’ve witnessed several truisms of life in general that can be applied to pedagogy, which best amplify the unschooling approach. Please read on . . .

All life wants to grow and keep on growing

My husband and I start our garden from seed, indoors in March. I am always amazed by the simple yet complex "technology" of a tiny seed, that once it is planted and watered, its life force engineering takes over and produces its stem, leaves, flowers, and eventually fruit. Its programming is predetermined, though it is forever susceptible to environmental stimulus. Within its programming is a powerful will to survive and thrive, despite the challenges that it may face. Our bean plants, for example, suffered after being transplanted in late May without having had a proper chance at hardening off. We staked them with the only poles we had lying around: 12 foot off-cuts from our newly built deck. Two months later, our beanstalks (unbelievably) are approaching the apex of their poles. So it is as well with people: We come into the world with genetic coding and predispositions and with an inner directive to mature physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, et cetera. We begin to grow and learn from the first day we are born (not the first day we go to school), and we often face hurdles that may interfere with our learning or with our innate drive to learn the way we are inclined. Like beans, people often grow according to the expectations and limitations created for them; and like beans, we have the capacity to realize our potential, usually with a little help along the way.
Life grows better when it’s given space

I am always tempted to plant small seedlings together in an effort to conserve space in the garden, or in disbelief of their actual growth potential. The beans taught me that one little seed will grow as large as you let it, but in addition to that, I've also learned that plants grow better (i.e., more efficiently and healthier) when they are given space around them. Like fish in a tank, a plant grows to size in relation to the other plants around it. The more cramped it is, the less it can flourish. It's the same in a classroom; learning (i.e., growth) is unquestionably better facilitated with a lower students-to-teacher ratio, and learners (i.e., all humans) do better when they are given space . . . space to breathe, space to make their own choices and decisions, space to have a voice, space to stop, space to be. Instead of planting several herbs in the large planter on my deck like usual, this year I chose to plant just one parsley seed, and I've watched it grow tall and strong ever since, filling the whole space and yielding its healthiest crop yet.

Some living conditions are better than others

On the topic of planters, I must add that my parsley is thriving in its planter because, as a herb, its roots go only so deep. Had I planted any variety of vegetable in the planter, I would have most definitely wound up with viable yet stunted results. As living organisms, we depend on the conditions we find ourselves in to determine how well we can thrive; in effect, we are our environment. For example, last year I taught grade 7 math (in the mainstream system) for the first time and found, as one might imagine, there are many methods of teaching and learning mathematics, each with varying degrees of efficacy. Since I was a novice math teacher, I tried different approaches to try to find what might work best for most. It didn't take long for me to realize the traditional
textbook desk work that I had been brought up with wasn't the best choice. My students were busy people who liked to move, so I developed a series of outdoor math games that addressed math concepts while requiring a lot of running and jumping on the side. This was an improvement, but still did not provide the authenticity of real-life mathematics that I believe was the missing link between their understanding and not understanding. Mainstream schooling is full of abstractions; virtually everything students learn in school is divorced from its context in everyday life. Alas, I wish we could have boycotted our classroom and gone on daily field trips to the grocery store, the gas station, a construction site, et cetera, to offer the in situ opportunities that are conducive to true learning and growth. After teaching math last year, my anecdotal professional analysis is that students have difficulty understanding math due to the way questions and concepts are framed—not with the math itself. These are not one and the same! Learners whose understanding arrives from relevant, authentic contexts have the advantage of their learning being inextricably linked to their lived experience, thus eliminating abstraction and necessity for complicated conceptualization.

**Life is more prolific with a little help**

I've gotten to know my garden well enough in the past few years to know that many plants need help to grow to their max. In addition to staking the beans, we weave the cucumber vines along and through mesh, build extra hoops above the tops of the tomato cages (because they're never tall enough as-is), string up the peach tree branches so they don't snap under the weight of their own fruit, and prune and weed as necessary. Our support is constant but limited, so as to remain nurturing. When I go too far with my well-intentioned help (like when I pin vines too taut to their stakes, or pick off fruit
blossoms too soon, etc.), the plant responds by withering under my "care." Comparing this to pedagogy, I see that my duty as a teacher is to facilitate learning, which oftentimes means leaving students alone.

**Life prefers naturalness**

While installing our deck this year, we also erected a 10 foot high water tower which holds our rain barrel. Rain water collects in the barrel from the eavestrough and runs down a pipe to a faucet on the fence for when we're ready to use it. We haven't watered the garden from the hose once this year, and the result is a healthier yield. Plants prefer the unchlorinated warm water that they're used to in nature. Wherever possible (which is almost 100% of the time), I've learned that it's best to let nature be nature, to let it run its course, because it knows what its doing. Two more examples: There's nothing richer than compost for fertilizer, nothing more effective than ladybugs if you've got an aphid problem. Nature knows best. Why do we doubt this in education? Children grow up naturally learning from day one, yet for some reason by the time they get to be school age, we believe this process needs servicing. If my garden is any example, the suggestion is to let nature be nature (i.e., allow children to learn according to their natural inquisitiveness) and watch it (them) thrive.

**“Trowel and error” is the best method**

In observation of how a plant grows, it is obvious that a plant puts all its energy into growing itself. It grows without hesitation and corrects for error wherever necessary. It is resilient and persists with growth despite any damage it may have suffered. The result is its best effort, a plant that's grown to its maximum potential. When my cherry tree was cut back substantially earlier this year due to disease, the little tree tried, tried again and
sprouted new leaves, though it was already midseason. I was proud of it. Similarly, the
best method for any gardener (no matter his or her experience or expertise) is to jump in
and work the garden as best he or she can, given that conditions change in any garden
from year to year and the growing season is limited. Trial and error, or "trowel and error"
in this case, is so productive in every life scenario. At school, my students' learning is
stunted for systemic reasons: They believe they need explicit instruction so as to execute
perfectly (or as close to it as possible) with their first shot; and they are afraid to try
because their effort is typically evaluated. If these conditions were removed from them,
they would be freer, they would be more open, and they would reap the benefits of a trial
and error approach to learning.

**Peace is precious and productive**

Is there a more peaceful place than the garden? In my opinion, there isn't. In a
typical Ontario summer, the weather is warm and adequately wet. The garden thrives, and
so do I as its tender. We take care of each other in a beautifully simple symbiosis. The
peace I reap from my garden cannot be underestimated; it calms my mind and energizes
my spirit, revitalizing me for whatever other activities I have planned. And that's before
I've eaten from it! When I consider what cultivates my own mental preparedness, it's
being unstressed and having a feeling of wellbeing that comes from being connected to
nature. I must try to recreate such conditions for my students as best as possible, though
the mainstream system promotes stress through such things as testing, standardized
curriculum, and strict scheduling.

**In conclusion . . .**

These reflections on nature and life learned from my garden describe a gentle
paradigm. Gentle is not a word I typically associate with pedagogy, but I wish it were.

Why shouldn't pedagogy be soft and supportive, peaceful and productive all at once? It should.
Limitations

While there are many strengths to my research, I recognize it is also not without limitations. In this post I discuss several potential limitations to my work, in terms of both method and outcome.

Method

My data collection involves mining the "collective intelligence" (Jenkins, 2006) of YouTube for coherent thoughts from the general public. Although I see great value and promise in utilizing user-generated online video for prospective research, there are admittedly several limitations to using this platform. For example, I must acknowledge that while YouTube operates as a communication host for the general public, certain members of the public are excluded from this due to inaccessibility of technology. One must first have the tools and know-how to be able to film a video and upload it to the internet to be able to take advantage of the YouTube platform before one could potentially be included in my data analysis. Then, once a video is uploaded, it becomes merely one part of a plethora that may also render it inaccessible. YouTube (2014) reports, “100 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute” (n. p.). Because I cannot possibly scour every video related to creativity in educational contexts, I made the decision to accept clips on a first come, first served basis (provided they adhered to my selection criteria). I halted my search under each subquestion for each educational model once the content of the clips combined became redundant and it thus became clear I had exhausted the spectrum of response. Because of this, it is possible that there may be variance in the ways some of the models operate on a local level that may not be captured in my data.
In organizing the accepted clips, I grouped clips for each model under each subquestion together, then further ordered clips within each section according to a logical flow. For example, under the subquestion of support, for any given model, I often grouped the clips that talked about teacher practice together, followed by those that talked about the learning environment, and so forth. I recognize that in manipulating what clips go where, I am able to construct a narrative one way or another. If I end a particular section on a negative point, it may convey to the viewer an overall negative sense regarding that educational model (or vice-versa), thus impacting their overall interpretive conclusions.

Of those voices that are represented in my data section, it may be that some could be perceived as being more "official" given the way in which they present themselves, that could influence a viewer's interpretive analysis of which educational models nurture creativity best. For example, the clips in the collection range from people recording themselves on their smartphones to traditional news broadcasts, from all over the English-speaking world and from as far back as video technology has been in existence. It is possible that the quality of the footage could have a bearing on the viewer's interpretation of the message they intend to convey. Likewise, with me as the narrator throughout the video series, I have consciously attempted to present content in an articulate, upbeat, and engaging way that is consistent (as a general rule) with good public speaking. Because of this, and because the platform I've adopted is atypical of a traditional dissertation, it may be said that I have blurred the lines between pop culture and scholarly activity. Personally, I do not see this as a limitation but as part of the inevitable evolution of scholarly practice. Smith (2012) asserts, "the importance of
working with doctoral students so that they understand themselves as speaking to multiple audiences and of translating scholarship to larger publics and developing modes of public scholarship" (n. p.). Scholars must use the media of the day to connect their research with the people who may be impacted by it.

**Outcomes**

Just as inaccessibility of technology can be a limitation to whom can participate in the data collection of this research, it can also limit the viewership of my work. Access to the internet (namely YouTube and this website, raisingcreativity.com) and a general familiarity with how to navigate it is essential to the consumption of my work. I have chosen this online format because today, generally speaking, inaccessibility of the internet is not an issue; in fact, I argue that my work would be more inaccessible if it were not online. The dissemination benefits of posting my work to the internet far outweigh any limitations of technological inaccessibility, in my belief.

My research has been presented as nonlinear pieces of a polyptych that function as a coherent body of work. Each individual piece has been constructed so that it may stand alone, however the viewer/reader will no doubt develop greater understanding by digesting all (or the majority) of the pieces rather than just some. Within this view, a limitation to the blog and video format may be that viewers/readers are not implored to start at a particular point and continue through to a defined end point.

Because art-based research aims to provide insight over answers, some may see this inconclusiveness as a limitation to my research. I disagree with this idea; I believe that it is a mature strength of arts-informed research methodology that it demonstrates inclusiveness and accounts for multiple nuanced conclusions instead of providing one
generalized prescription for everyone. It asks the viewers to make informed decisions for themselves about the ideas presented based on their own thought processes and life journey. This echoes the independent critique (i.e. critical thinking) aspect of the creative process and positions the viewer as an active participant.

Finally, as I uncover how the various educational models account for creativity, I am not necessarily simultaneously uncovering which model is best overall. It is plausible that a model that appears to foster creativity very well could have major downfalls at the same time (for example, it may cost a lot of money meaning few could afford it). This is a limitation on an individual suitability level, based on individually perceived rationale and personal circumstance. Again, because this research aims to illuminate and not dictate conclusions, every viewer will be left to their own thinking, of which perceived limitations will vary.
References


Matters of Copyright

Foundational to its art-based methodology, *Raising Creativity* co-opts snippets of copyrighted material to produce original documentary videos. In this post, I will discuss the details of the Copyright Act and explain how remix is justly used in my research.

I will admit from the outset, as an advocate of creativity I have never considered myself a real proponent of copyright. Copyright can sometimes seem outdated, stuffy, and stifling in today's 21st century context, which is largely defined by how we now share, consume, and produce (digital) content (Jenkins, 2006). Because I believe we should do whatever we need to do to encourage creativity to flourish, I have been more apt to support Creative Commons, which Cucinelli (cited in Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012) describes as "a non-profit organization devoted to promoting ‘copyleft’ licensing and building a community where people share and build upon the work of others” (p. 181). Remix (i.e. copy-pasting to create something new) is a relatively new phenomenon in a digital sense and may at first be seen as countercultural because it defies traditional assumptions about copyright and intellectual property; however as technology has changed our "prosuming" (producing + consuming) habits (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012), our laws have had to evolve alongside these so as to support new appropriated creative work. The good news is that the most recent edition of the Copyright Act does make some allowances within certain contexts so that information can be used and repurposed freely. This clause is called "fair dealing."

According to barristers and solicitors Wanda Noel and Jordan Snel (2012), "the *Copyright Act* provides that it is not an infringement of copyright to deal with a work for the purposes of research, private study, criticism, review, news reporting, education,
satire, and parody, provided the dealing is "fair" (p. 2). "Fair" means that only a short excerpt of a work can be used (less than 10%) and sources should always be cited. So, the fact that my work exists primarily as educational research (and secondarily as private study, criticism, and review) and that I borrow only short clips from cited sources designates my actions as "fair use." Further, the Copyright Act permits the production of new works derived from copyright-protected works. This right is referred to as "non-commercial user-generated content" and can be found in section 29.21 of the Act. Every clip that I remix originated freely within the public domain, on YouTube. "'Publicly available' materials are those posted on-line by content creators and copyright owners without any technological protection measures" (Noel & Snel, 2012, p. 18). Noel and Snel explain,

[Students are permitted] to use copyright-protected works to create videos, DVDs, or mash-ups . . . . The users' right permits user-generated content created under provision of the Copyright Act to be disseminated. Dissemination includes uses such as posting a video to YouTube or a Web site" (p. 12).

Therefore my videos—which lawfully contain appropriated clips from other YouTube videos—can be lawfully uploaded to YouTube as new videos for lawful distribution as part of a recursive, synergistic, collaborative process rooted in "collective intelligence" (Jenkins, 2006). In an innovative alternative dissertation such as I am producing, I recognize the importance of ensuring institutional requirements are satisfied from all angles; copyright is one such consideration that my work is adhering to.
References


Noel, W., & Snel, J. (2012). *Copyright matters! Some key questions & answers for teachers.* Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Teachers’ Federation.
Part 2 (Literature Review) Is Live!

The second installment of my five-part video series is complete and now live! This installment of Raising Creativity constitutes the literature review of my research-based documentary.

Just as in a traditional dissertation, this second "chapter" of my multimodal dissertation provides a comprehensive overview of what others have said with regard to the topic of the importance of creativity in education. I begin with a discussion that breaks down what creativity is and how it happens (i.e., the creative process) and where discovery fits in to this. Then, I discuss the link between creativity and intrinsic motivation, cognitive psychology, higher order thinking, and holism in order to build the case for the necessity of nurturing creativity.

Ultimately my desired outcome of this research is for it to bring about change, anywhere from an individual level to a policy level. After all, arts-informed educational research seeks to be essentially transformative in nature (Knowles, Promislow, & Cole, 2008). I believe that change will transpire only if and when people feel strongly enough to be moved into action; therefore I see my duty here as an artist/researcher/teacher to exploit the multimodal medium of video for that purpose. I aim for the heart, whether it be through catchy music that seduces the audience to keep listening, or the attractive colour palette of bright yellow, hot pink and black that unifies the piece and pleases the eye from scene to scene, or the crescendoing sound of a heartbeat reminding the audience that the matter at hand references real human lives and is therefore critical, or the shameless shots of an innocent little girl running and playing happily alongside Sir Ken Robinson’s voiceover powerfully asserting that we “rethink the fundamental principles
on which we’re educating our children . . . and the only way we’ll do it is by seeing our
creative capacities for the richness they are, and by seeing our children for the hope that
they are” (Robinson as cited in Raising Creativity, 2013). By the time the credits roll, I
hope to have influenced the audience enough that they will be motivated (as a first step)
to participate in any of my calls to action (i.e., “share this with a friend,” “please add your
thoughts by posting a comment,” “watch the rest of the videos”). Dissemination and
participation are the first steps toward a transformative outcome (Wells, 2008), and I
believe the degree to which both of these are achieved will be correlational to the
affective sensibility I am able to evoke in the presentation.
References


Part 3 (Methodology) is Live!

The third installment of *Raising Creativity* is now live! This part outlines art-based research methodology and how I've adapted it specifically in my dissertation.

Art-based research "plays by rules that differ from those applied to more conventional research" (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 101). As such—and although it has been in legitimate academic use for roughly twenty years—I consistently find it necessary to explain, justify, and defend this kind of research. Originally when my work was still in the planning stages, I thought I would simply blog about my method instead of putting together a video so as not to disturb the flow of the series (if anything, I saw this piece as existing akin to a bonus feature on a DVD), however it soon became clear that that would not happen. As a beginning art-based researcher, I myself looked and longed for an explanatory video that could succinctly present the basic tenets and advantages to this kind of work, but to no avail. Searching "arts-informed research" or "a/r/tography" will pull up a few matching titles in YouTube, however none of the video options are very clear and to the point. I felt strongly that a video describing art-based research needed to exist to align with my values of accessibility and dissemination. I think I was able to work it so that it still offers a compelling narrative and various cinematic and dramatic devices to keep the audience engaged. The final result is below!
Reference


Parts 4 & 5 Are Live!

The observations and illuminations segments of my research are now complete, wrapping up my documentary dissertation!

In the fourth installment of the five part series (observations), the viewer is presented with my audit of the internet as I mine the “collective intelligence” (Jenkins, 2006) of YouTube for coherent thoughts in answer to the question, “how can we nurture creativity in education?” This forty-five minute video is the longest of all five videos, as it offers a comprehensive response from the perspective of seven unique educational models (unschooling, homeschooling, Sudbury Valley free schools, Montessori schools, Waldorf schools, alternatives within mainstream schooling, and mainstream schooling). The results of my audit will be received and interpreted uniquely by every viewer, which is why I have titled the fifth and final chapter of Raising Creativity, “illuminations.”

In the illuminations video, I debrief and provide justification for not offering absolute conclusions for the viewer, beyond asserting what I believe was made obvious throughout the documentary, that the mainstream system requires major changes if it is to aptly foster creativity. I end with a call to action by referencing the creative process once again, stating that when something isn’t right, it is up to the individual to engage in critique, gathering, incubation, and production processes in order to make the necessary improvements. Then I present some of my own reflexive actions that I personally take in my mainstream classroom to nurture creativity. This appears as a bonus feature at the end of the fifth video.
References


Retrieved May 21, 2014, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QV4Xvf7czT8


Participation and Production

I just finished watching a remarkable research-based video on child-driven education that presented itself to me as a result of a chain of events in participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). The content of the video itself describes and mirrors the phenomenon that occurred in order for me to access it. Let me explain . . .

I have been blogging and uploading videos related to *Raising Creativity* for the better part of this year, 2013. As a result, I have received many viewer comments posted in reaction to the videos, and I have had many people subscribe to my channel to receive future updates. These participatory actions, made possible through online connectivity, are now contributing to my production in a couple of ways. First, the comments and feedback posted on the videos generate discussion and thereby contribute to "collective intelligence" (Jenkins, 2006). Sometimes viewers respond to other viewers, and more often I respond to comments to perpetuate discussion. Second, when a viewer comments or subscribes, his or her YouTube profile is accessible to me (indeed, it's public). I can (and often do) click on a viewer's profile to see what else they like, what else they have to say (as comments on videos), and who else they've subscribed to. I do this because chances are, if they've demonstrated somehow that they like *Raising Creativity*, they are likely interested in either creativity, education, or both, which may likely be demonstrated in their other YouTube activity—and if this is the case, then I would be interested in that content. To illustrate, in the case of what happened today, I clicked on the profile of a new subscriber and found that this person had recently liked a video by sulibreezy (2013; see below). I watched this video because I was intrigued by the title: "My Response To The Teachers." Sure enough, I found the content to be right in line
with that which I seek for part 4 of my research—the part where I access collective intelligence and remix clips together to satisfy my research question ("how can we nurture creativity in education?"). Then, as I watched, at 18 seconds in to the video, the narrator (presumably the person behind the alias "sulibreezy") suggested another video along the same lines: a TED talk by Sugata Mitra (QLFthailand, 2012; see below). This is the video I referenced at the outset of this post. Mitra's educational research demonstrates that learning can happen just as effectively or more effectively when formal teaching is replaced by online technology (i.e., when a teacher is replaced by a computer that cannot prompt the user to do anything). The learning that happens is a result of participatory engagement with online collective intelligence. Mitra's eventual goal is to develop a school in the cloud (i.e., online) based entirely in participatory culture which is generated and mediated by child users. Why not? Similarly, it was entirely through participatory action that I was directed to Mitra's work, which is now influencing the production of my own work. Indeed, participation and production constitute an important synergy in my research and in 21st century research, teaching, and learning in general.
References


Research Versus Creative Process

Scholarly work is widely regarded today to include that which is creative in nature. This post, taken from my online Comprehensive Portfolio at www.rebeccazak.com, explains the rationale for this.

The Brock University Faculty Association Collective Agreement (2008; and others like it) supports the use of creative work as evidence of meaningful scholarly activity in a faculty member’s application for tenure or promotion. This is very fitting, because upon comparison of the research process (Creswell, 2011) and the creative process (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009) in the two diagrams below, it becomes clear that the two bear a striking resemblance (please click to view clearly):

[diagram inserted in blog]

In each case, a problem/challenge/question is established by the researcher or artist. Then the researcher/artist draws on prior knowledge (his or her own/others’) in order to articulate what it is he or she intends to do with regard to the problem. Next, he or she gets to work, gathering data (this can take a variety of forms, from numerical to artistic). In both cases, what follows is a period of examining the data, finalizing them, and presenting/sharing them with an audience. The qualitative research process and the creative process are indeed so similar, Bates (2011) recognizes them as one and the same—and I agree with his observation. I developed the following chart as a visual reinforcement to show the many connections that exist between these two processes. The language on the chart has been borrowed from Creswell (2011, p. 8) and the Ontario Art Curriculum (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009, pp. 21–22) to explicate each step within either process. It is also important to note, as mentioned in the Art Curriculum
document (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009), that “the creative process is intended to be followed in a flexible, fluid, and cyclical manner. Students . . . are able to move deliberately and consciously between the stages and to vary their order as appropriate” (p. 20); this may allow for a more seamless overlap with the research process.
References


Response to Part 1 Feedback

In response to feedback I received from one of my committee members, I would like to clarify my thinking regarding a section of the first video of *Raising Creativity*.

Part 1 of this documentary series serves in essence as an introduction to the topic of creativity in education. I felt it necessary to establish from the outset why this matter is important, and to do so I invoked several scholars' thinking. These appear between 1:56 and 2:48 of the video below (Raising Creativity, 2013).

From Pink to Florida, to Amabile, to Robinson, to Eisner, I intended to assemble these scholars' ideas in sequence so as to go from a very broad, overarching rationale for the importance of creativity (e.g., present and future economies demand it) to a more local one (e.g., education should begin preparing students now so they can be successful given the realities that lie ahead). One of my committee members remarked that he was confused by the business discourse presented, considering my research question specifically focuses on education. It took me a moment to see his point; however now I do acknowledge the slight peculiarity of this; I think the many references to the economy did not initially register as being categorically different from education because ideologically so many people believe that that is what education is for, ultimately (i.e., we go to school to get a good job, period). I actually do not believe (nor have I ever believed since entering the teaching profession) that this is the most important goal of education; rather, in my opinion it is to empower a person to live life to the fullest, as he or she defines it, as a member of society . . . and for many, having a well-paying job may be a means to that end. To reiterate, in my opinion, these are not one and the same. In defence of education as something greater than a path to employment, another committee member
of mine, Carlo Ricci (2008), writes,

Are teachers mere commissars of the capitalistic system? Do we work for IBM, Walmart, and other big corporations? Are we willing to reduce our jobs to teaching our students how to become better workers, thereby replacing the nation state with the corporate state? Or should education be about something more? . . . I believe that we need to educate our students with the goal of the amelioration of society and the individual (pp. 145–146).

My thinking has been in line with Ricci's since I first encountered this kind of critical pedagogy in my Master's studies; therefore I hope that this explanation has cleared up the seeming discrepancy in the discourse presented. In sum, I understand the goal of education as being greater than mere job preparation; however I recognize that education and employment are undeniably linked and that employment is an obvious, practical, and well-deserved outcome for educated people. This is the context in which I wish my arrangement of the scholars' comments to be interpreted.
References


Starting the Dissertation Journey

My proposal hearing isn't for another 2 days, but I've already begun to piece together thoughts, ideas, and film experiments as the first few steps in this dissertation journey.

Of course, none of this is coming out of thin air; I've been ruminating over this project for a couple of years now. I've come to appreciate that gestational thinking periods are necessary to producing informed, complex work and are inextricable to the creative process. Sameshima and Knowles (2008) point out, "sound, qualitative research is that which is mindfully and artfully developed" (p. 108). Though I have experienced times during my doctoral studies when I have felt rather unproductive (admittedly sometimes going for months without producing anything), I can recognize now how those times were important in leading me to conclusions or ideas that could have only come/been constructed with time. In this case, I have been thinking about how I can investigate creativity by means of creativity, to effectively produce metacreativity. Art-based researchers, or "scholartists" (Knowles, Promislow, & Cole, 2008) like me understand art as a profound method of inquiry, a way of knowing and of coming to know. Today there are many multimodal, dynamic platforms at our disposal (such as YouTube and this blog), and I want to capitalize on the affordances of these, in the name of innovation, curiosity, engagement, and fun.

Because my research builds on Picasso's words, "every child is an artist; the trouble is how to remain an artist once we grow up," I invited my sweet little neighbour Emma to appear with me on camera to contextualize the essence and importance of creativity. This past weekend we painted together, played with plasticine, and rocked out on the drums, all of which was caught on film to be used as B roll footage in the documentary. Here's a
quick edit of our play date:

So things are off to a good start! My next step is to plan out and script each video in the five-part polyptych and keep blogging as I run into items that require discussion but that won't necessarily fit well as part of a documentary. Lots more to come . . . stay tuned.
References


Summer 2013 Update

It’s midsummer already, and a lot is in motion. I thought I would take a moment to report on progress so far and to reflect on the whole dissertation process.

After having my research proposal approved in January, I felt disburdened and revitalized to launch into my dissertation plan. I began writing loose scripts for each video chapter (rationale, lit review, methodology, observations, illuminations) that I have been refining one by one as each successive video enters into production. It is important to me that the scripts are succinct and engaging in view of the format I’m working with. While PhD research is typically narrow and deep (i.e., wordy), my PhD research cannot comply with this trend; it would be brutally unwatchable and ineffective. Instead, I am using this blog to stand in for any shortfalls my video model may present. To date, I have 20 blogs (roughly 15,000 words) written on topics relating to my overarching focus, the first of five videos done and uploaded to YouTube, and plans for filming part 2 this month. In addition, I have begun to put together some shorter videos along two veins: teasers and director’s commentary. The teasers are like movie trailers that showcase the content of each video part succinctly, with the intention of arousing viewer interest in the longer versions. They communicate and summarize the gist of each video. The director’s commentary videos are also short, aiming for a minute or less, but deal with new content. Usually the impetus for my commentary (I as the director) is emergence based; I do not plan for what I might talk about, nor do I script anything. My commentaries are casual and spontaneous (i.e., often spur of the moment), yet thoughtful. For example, in the latest video, I talk about the trend of customization that has largely and ironically bypassed education, after noticing an advertisement in a magazine about customizable
drink mix. The video is fairly raw, meaning minimally edited and produced, which I like because it affords me the opportunity to forge a more relaxed connection with the audience, as the onscreen personality. Also, I hope that these more amateur-looking videos may help encourage viewers (who, if anything, are most likely amateur video producers) to create and upload their own videos and participate in the conversation.

Upon reflecting on my progress thus far, I realize it has often come in bursts and waves, working when the time is right (according to my own judgment). I am most prolific when I feel in control of what I’m doing, when I have freedom in the modes of expression and representation I can use, when I know my work will be backed by my doctoral committee, and (perhaps paradoxically) when I stop caring about what anyone else will think or say . . . in other words, when my creativity has been nurtured through autonomy, support, and lack of evaluation. When I choose to see this work through the lens of a big art project rather than the more intimidating lens of a PhD dissertation, I feel much more free and unencumbered; I trust myself that I will produce compelling, thoughtful work. On the other hand, if I choose to see my activities as a series of requirements upon which someone else will judge my approach and effectiveness, my progress is stunted and retarded. I have found that I am at my best as a learner, a researcher, and an artist when I adopt an unschooling approach to my work; that is, when I operate according to my own schedule, capitalizing on my interests and intrinsic motivation, and satisfying my own high standards. To be a PhD candidate is to be an entrepreneur—someone who defines his or her own objectives based on personal interests, identifies targets and sets their pace towards meeting those goals, who is resourceful in accessing helpful people and tools along the way, and who assesses
him/herself regularly and holds him/herself accountable for getting things done. In addition, an entrepreneur often treads in unfamiliar territory and breaks new ground, which has certainly been the case in my journey (i.e., negotiating institutional definitions and traditions to reimagine contemporary scholarly activity). I believe this can and should be the modus operandi of our mainstream education system too, from kindergarten through high school and beyond.

If education does not empower one to think for oneself and therefore come into one's own, it is merely, as Freire says, "pedagogy of the oppressed" (1970, n.p.). Earlier this summer I spoke on this topic while being interviewed by David Peck, a fellow PhD candidate at Guelph University, CEO at SoChange International, and the voice behind the new podcast, *Face 2 Face* (Peck, 2013). *Face 2 Face* is a talk show featuring everyday people doing interesting things. I was honoured to be a part of it. The link to our conversation (really, that's what it was--just a chat, no editing) is below. Listeners can subscribe to *Face 2 Face* for free, through iTunes.

Face 2 Face Episode 25 - Rebecca Zak

All in all, it has been a productive summer, but with lots left to accomplish. I'll check back in with another progress report in about 3 months time.
References


Raising Creativity. (2013, July 31). *One-size-fits-all education (RaisingCreativity.com vlog)*. Retrieved July 31, 2013,
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Teachers’ Duty of Agency

In my interpretation, agency is an embedded responsibility within the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession*. In this blog I discuss the wording of these standards from the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) and the understanding I glean from it.

The *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* exist essentially to articulate the shared vision for the teaching profession, as well as the values and skills that inform and support teacher practice (OCT, 2013). These are: commitment to students and student learning; professional knowledge; professional practice; leadership in learning communities; and, ongoing professional learning. The Ontario College of Teachers website (2013) states,

Members strive to be current in their professional knowledge and recognize its relationship to practice. They understand and reflect on student development, learning theory, pedagogy, curriculum, ethics, educational research and related policies and legislation to inform professional judgment in practice . . . . Members refine their professional practice through ongoing inquiry, dialogue and reflection . . . They recognize their shared responsibilities and their leadership roles in order to facilitate student success (para. 4–5).

In addition, a set of *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* exists to outline teachers' ethical responsibilities and commitments. These are: care, respect, trust, and integrity; all are self-explanatory.

In my own words, because the standards call for a commitment to currency and growth (both personally and for students), this therefore implies a subversion of the status
It is our responsibility as educators to keep informed of educational theory and research, which suggests we must avail ourselves to change and adaptation as new understandings are brought to light over time. Our praxis is manifested through not just what we know of research but also through our own anecdotal experience; therefore it is our responsibility as teachers to be critically reflexive. Because there is no absolute right and wrong in education, only left and right, teachers are left to define for ourselves as individuals what, in our opinion, is of critical importance in education and to thereby adapt our practice accordingly. And, because education is so subjective, it is especially important that teachers participate in discussion around educational issues from the front line. As a teacher-scholar interested in critical pedagogy, I believe it is a teacher's duty to act principally with empathy and democratic fairness as his or her guide. This means, therefore, that in the current mainstream schooling system, it is necessity for teachers to be agents of change and outspoken advocates of matters pertaining to student welfare. It is presently culturally taboo for a teacher to speak ill of the system that is meant to enrich the minds of young children; for this reason I have been slightly worried about how *Raising Creativity* may be received. However, growth can come only by being honest about weakness, and the gumption to force positive change comes ultimately from a sense of care, respect, trust, and integrity. Freire (1970) tells us that engaging in dialogue is how we can transform our reality; change starts with the recognition of the power of voice and the will to stand up for those who may be unable to speak for themselves (like young students). In sum, teachers must cultivate their capacity for agency as they seek to model the standards of practice and the ethical standards for teaching.
References


The Artist/Researcher/Teacher

I identify with the artist/researcher/teacher (a/r/t) construct born from the methodology A/r/tography. In this post borrowed from rebeccazak.com, I describe what it means to be an a/r/t in practice.

The a/r/t is a single self-concept forged from three intersecting roles (artist, researcher, and teacher) that function with a tightly woven interactive and interinfluential synergy. These roles are automatically integrated by virtue of their concurrent presence (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004); after all, when I am in teacher mode, I am still an artist, and when I am making art, I am building skills that I will inevitably call on in the instruction of my art students. Further to that, since 2007 I have been a graduate student interested in researching creativity in education. I have illustrated this triadic relationship in the Venn diagram below, wherein the a/r/t construct would be located directly in the center—the brown section. It is symbolically coloured as such to visually and figuratively represent a mélange of the three primary roles, shown in the three primary colours: red, blue, and yellow. In colour theory, when all three primary colours are mixed together, the result is a brownish hue. Chalmers (as cited in Irwin & de Cosson, 2004) points out, “research, art, and activism are [not] mutually exclusive terms” (p. 19). Further, Irwin and de Cosson argue that this unified triad is vital to any progressive art education practice. It is from this perspective that I question, examine, think, theorize, critique, synthesize, write, create, and come to understand, and it is in this context that I have found belonging and purpose in my PhD program. Self-identifying as an a/r/t is what allows me to thrive in my environment, be it the classroom, the studio, the office, or otherwise. I hope that Raising Creativity will be a testament to that.
Reference

The Creative Process Simplified

My conceptualization of the creative process, as illustrated in Part 2 of *Raising Creativity* (2013), differs from that in the Ontario Arts Curriculum (OAC) document (Ministry of Education and Training, 2009, p. 20). I have purposely synthesized and simplified this version from the Ministry of Education (MOE) for a few reasons, which I will explain herein.

There are undeniably many different ways to conceptualize the creative process. Below is the OAC version, followed by my edited version. The MOE's version seems especially geared to teachers, in that they specify and articulate certain aspects of the process that teachers would/could/should be involved in, such as "challenging/inspiring" for example. In the classroom this is certainly part of my pedagogy, but in my studio it is something I do on my own (or something that happens to me by chance). Because this documentary will investigate alternative methods of education (informal as well as formal), I did not want to suggest from the outset (embedded in how I represent the creative process itself) that the process is dependent on formal pedagogy.

Further, I find much of what is included in the MOE's version to be very explicit, perhaps unnecessarily so. For example, I find steps 3, 4, and 5 to be one and the same. Yes, one could view "planning and focusing," "exploring and experimenting," and "producing preliminary work" as separate, but I am more inclined to view these as one. Personally for me, it is through the production of preliminary work that I explore and experiment, and refine and focus my intentions (i.e. the act of exploratively sketching things out provides me with direction). The word "production" which I chose to use covers all these steps, in my opinion, especially when juxtaposed with "critique," another
broad but rich word I have used for simplicity and to avoid redundancy. With all four words I use, I use them broadly and for simplicity.

Additionally, the MOE version is drawn to look like a circle or a cycle, whereas I observe that the creative process is much more convoluted and tangled than this. In the MOE's description, they indicate that students may not always follow through with every step (p. 20), which is true; however I wanted to stress the recursive nature of how (arguably) most people experience the process of creativity.

Finally, I think that concepts are much easier to understand when they're packaged neatly, clearly, and simply. Given that the vehicle for presenting the creative process in this case is through film, I want it to be easily grasped and memorable so that I can build on it for the rest of the documentary series.
References


The Learning Environment

In *Raising Creativity*, a range of different settings constitute the backdrop from video to video. Because this series deals with education in its broadest conception, it is intentional that the scenes in which my narration take place do not only show the traditional classroom, as this post will explain.

The first video in the series which provides an introduction and rationale for the documentary was shot in my grade 7 classroom (I work in a 15-year-old public middle school in a suburban area of Ontario). In my opinion, the scenes that appear are very typical of what one would expect to find in today's publicly funded schools—blackboards, desks, lockers, tiled floors, bookshelves. Nothing too fancy, nothing outside the mental images one instantly conjures up at the idea of what school looks like. But this documentary is not about school, per se. It's about education, and there is an enormous difference between schooling and education (Ricci, 2009). So, in the second video I am purposely switching it up to show no classroom scenes. Having already visually and stereotypically established what the documentary is about in video number 1, I need to round out that explanation by presenting the other end of the educational spectrum—that is, education that stays as far away from the traditional model as possible. A proponent and contributing founder of the unschooling movement, John Holt (1969) posited that "living is learning" (n.p.), which is to say that learning is a byproduct of simply living life. If this is so (and I definitely agree that it is), then I could literally choose anywhere for the setting of the next video and it would be appropriate: the grocery store, the movie theatre, the bank, a farm, a home, et cetera. The advent of mobile computing (e.g., Smartphone technology) reinforces the notion of every environment being conducive to
learning by virtue of our now ubiquitous accessibility of information. The Smartphone will actually be showcased in the next video for this reason. That said, I have chosen to film at the Muskoka river for its complete dissimilarity to my classroom (i.e., the last backdrop) and for its beauty and calming effect. Again, I do not think of schooling as being particularly calming (think testing, bells, regulations, standards, coercive teaching strategies, symptomatic misbehaviour, etc.), but I do think of education as inherently calming, inspiring, edifying, reflexive, peaceful, productive, and paradoxically stimulating. In the latter scenario, learning occurs by way of life; in the former, learning is objectively manipulated (though not necessarily achieved) in spite of life. In the videos still to come (#3–5), the backdrops will vacillate from typical school scenes to vastly alternative scenes and everything in between. Ultimately this variety of settings all function as visual devices for reinforcing the documentary's focus: alternate conceptions of education.
References


The PhD Must Change

At the time of this posting, the all-time most read and commented on article in University Affairs (UA) online magazine is one entitled, “The PhD is in Need of Revision” (Tamburri, 2013). I couldn’t agree more, and in this blog I’d like to explain why.

At the age of 30, I can remember living without the internet, and at the same time I can’t envision living without it anymore. As we know, the information age boasts many affordances, the greatest of which might be accessibility. Case in point: In my undergrad years only a decade ago, I carried pounds upon pounds of library books and journals home with me from university to reference as I wrote papers, and I bought a 2 megapixel digital camera (that probably also weighed at least a pound) to capture images to reference as I composed paintings. Nothing could be further from the method I now employ as a graduate student: As I write this blog (something most of us had never heard of 10 years ago, me included), I am concurrently at work on a series of YouTube videos (something else we had no clue about), where most of my reference material—whether textual, visual, auditory, static or dynamic—is located online, freely available in the public domain. I doubt I even need to verbalize this (it's so obvious), but I much prefer today’s methods.

Accessibility is not just convenient, it is an assertion of values. Open access internet publishing, in its various manifestations, supports democracy, free speech, and contributes to the global knowledge economy. Although the UA article doesn't even mention these reasons, it is for these reasons most importantly that I think the PhD must change. As-is, the expectation is that PhD hopefuls will produce a written dissertation of
about 90,000 words that will sit on a shelf in a library with an extremely limited readership. Dr. Daren C. Brabham (2011) says frankly, "No one will read your dissertation . . . . Seriously. No one." (para. 1). Dr. Dan Cohen (2010) writes on his blog, your work can be discovered much more easily by other scholars (and the general public), can be fully indexed by search engines, and can be easily linked to from other websites and social media (rather than producing the dreaded 'Sorry, this is behind a paywall'). . . . When you publish somewhere that is behind gates, or in paper only, you are resigning all of that hard work to invisibility in the age of the open web. You may reach a few peers in your field, but you miss out on the broader dissemination of your work, including to potential other fans (section 4, para. 1–2).

Similarly, art-based researchers Sameshima and Knowles (2008) write, "There must be a commitment to making the work accessible to the audiences beyond academe” (p. 116). Richardson (1997) writes, “it seems foolish, at best, narcissistic and wholly self-absorbed, at worst, to spend months or years doing research that ends up not being read [or viewed] and not making a difference to anything but the author’s career” (p. 87). Last, Hedges (2009) writes, "the contemporary self . . . wants to be recognized, wants to be connected: It wants to be visible" (p. 22). I have argued along these lines time and again during the course of my doctoral studies—why put in the effort if no one will pay attention? With the support of my supervisor, Dr. Jennifer Rowsell, I was able to make a case for preparing my comprehensive portfolio in the form of a website, www.rebeccazak.com, (Zak, 2012), which I successfully defended last year. By putting my work online (then and now), I circumvent the silo effect and allow for global viewership to help and inform whoever may be interested in my line of work. I know as a
schor I would have appreciated having an example of an alternative online comprehensive portfolio like mine to reference as a precedent. At the time of this posting, people from 53 countries have visited my portfolio website. So if it worked for the portfolio, why not look at online alternatives for the dissertation too? Dr. Graham Carr (as cited in Tamburri, 2013), president of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, has expressed his support for just that: “The default position has always been that the dissertation should resemble a manuscript that will become a book. Is that the only appropriate vehicle?” (para. 14). Surely we must be able to capitalize on the technology available to us today to come up with more innovative forms that capture and showcase more effectively what knowledge and expertise a PhD candidate has acquired. In my research (which has yet to be officially approved at the faculty level), I am mining the collective intelligence of YouTube (Jenkins, 2006) for video clips explaining diverse educational models and how they account for creativity, before remixing them into a new YouTube video to address my research question. Jenkins (2006) explains, collective intelligence[:] None of us can know everything; each of us knows something; we can put the pieces together if we pool our resources and combine our skills . . . . Collective intelligence can be seen as an alternative source of media power (para. 6)

By using the voice of the general public and aiming my research at the general public by situating it within social media, this is how I can have my best chance at effecting change in my area of research (Wells, 2008).

YouTube is shifting the way people think and come to know (Jenkins, 2006) not just because it makes information easy to find and consume; it is also accessible in the
sense that YouTube supports dynamic, highly visual content. Visuals can fill in the gaps to create a more complete, less abstract picture (literally and figuratively), thereby facilitating communication. Kress (as cited in Jeff Bezemer, 2012) argues, "writing actually gives you merely a partial account of what's going on. It's like sentences that aren't completed . . . . If you say, 'I'm only interested in writing,' you've made it impossible for yourself to answer the question that's being asked by your PhD" (n.p.). Eisner (1995) writes, “research with no coherent story, no vivid images, and no sense of the particular is unlikely to stick. [Artistic research formats account for this by offering] us a narrative that helps us to make sense of what would otherwise be incoherent complexity” (p. 5). Images provide alternate points of entry via multimodality that provide “diverse ways to access ideas [to] empower readers” (Loi, 2008, p. 90). In the case of digital video, multimodality means I am layering various kinds of static and animated visuals, sounds, and text together to produce differentiated supercommunication to enhance understanding. Since words can't justifiably explain what I mean here (Kress, as cited in Jeff Bezemer, 2012), I have prepared a multimodal digital video trailer to elucidate my ideas, below. I am by no means the first academic to implement video and multimodality in my work; recently, many scholars have begun to produce video abstracts of their papers to generate interest and community (AmerGastroAssn, 2009), while others have taken to "dancing" their PhD, in which an explanation of their work is acted out through movement to help clarify the major ideas (TEDxTalks, 2011). Besides all of this, videos are engaging to watch, which I believe will lead to extended viewership. "Engagement" is probably one of the most frequently used terms in teacher jargon because we know from research and firsthand experience that engagement begets
learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004; Deci cited in TEDxTalks, 2012; Holt, 1989). I believe that by prioritizing "engagement before information" (Cohen, 2010; i.e., presenting my dissertation research as a documentary-style YouTube video), this will be more powerful for those whom the research will affect most (e.g., children, parents, teachers, etc.).

Engagement $\rightarrow$ viewership $\rightarrow$ learning $\rightarrow$ transformation.

Video trailer: "How can we nurture creativity in educational contexts?" (July 2011)

Another area in which the PhD is in need of revision in my opinion is in regards to objectivism. Education research in particular is perhaps more flexible than other academic fields when it comes to the perspective from which a researcher writes, thanks in part to emergent methodologies like narrative inquiry and art-based research. As an art-based researcher myself, I resonate with Polanyi's notion of personal knowledge:

"The personal [is] not to be minimized but understood as the element that [is] essential, the one that [leads] us to break out and make new discoveries, and not at all an unfortunate imperfection in human epistemology" (Gelwick, 1991, p. 48). It's no wonder that in art-based research there is an emphasis on, or an awareness of, the researcher's presence in the work; no artist creates anything without naturally infusing him/herself into his/her creation. It is the same for writing. Sameshima (2008) opines, "we are no longer mere creators of text, we are text ourselves" (p. 154). Indeed, considering how far technology has advanced and how fully it has infiltrated our lives since my undergrad days, considering how willfully mediated our lives have become through YouTube, Facebook, blogs, and the like, it does not seem like a stretch to say we have become texts ourselves: published works with (a) message(s). I will be appearing in the videos I produce because the overarching message the videos will convey is something that is
personally important to me. The idea for this research originated from my lived experience as a student, a teacher, and an artist learning independently. I am comfortable and feel it's important to discuss creativity in education from my personal vantage point for that reason. By having my own narrative (me as artist/researcher/teacher) running through the video, I can evoke a personal connection with the viewer, making the issue of creativity in education feel close up and authentic (Wells, 2008). Lee (as cited in Lee & Gouzouasis, 2008) reports that many artist-scholars find the boundary between their work and themselves quite blurry; I believe I'm no exception, and I believe this makes my work stronger. The PhD shouldn't shy away from showing its subjective side.

What I think all of this (i.e., online access, multimodal access, subjectivity) amounts to is that the PhD must adapt to allow for creativity and flexibility, to create conditions under which researchers can be themselves, trust themselves, and thrive. As Tamburri (2013) reports, at present the way the PhD is constructed shows that academia is more concerned with conformity and tradition than it is with imagining new possibilities. Dr. Jay Doering (as cited in Tamburri, 2013) states,

Part of the problem, I think, is that a large part of the academy still believes they are creating Mini-Me’s or clones . . . . The only way I see it changing is to get a buy-in from the vast majority of the academy that this is a problem” (para. 24).

Research has demonstrated that control is no way to motivate learners; instead what works is autonomy and support (Deci as cited in TEDxTalks, 2012). It is ironic to me that my dissertation will attempt to uncover the best educational methods for fostering creativity from within a framework that quite obviously requires reform itself. Tamburri
(2013) tells us, "the dissertation is one of the major impediments responsible for high attrition rates and long completion times in the humanities" (para. 15). By the time graduate students get to the dissertation stage, they must know what they're doing, what rigorous work looks like, and they must undoubtedly be disciplined and have set high standards for themselves. All of this being the case, they must be trusted to construct appropriate models for pursuing and presenting their research; if this were to happen consistently, perhaps the dismal attrition stats would soon dissolve. Ricci (2012) writes, “A child, like an adult, learns most and learns best when he or she learns according to his or her will. Following her own will leads to the development of her 'willed curriculum,' her entirely personal, customized education experience” (p. 1); Gray (2012) writes, “Ultimately, the purpose of education is that of finding meaning in life, and each person has to do that for himself or herself” (p. 2). In my opinion, the illuminations from my research (in answer to the question, "how can we nurture creativity in education?") can and should be appropriately applied to all levels of learning, from young children to PhD candidates like myself. Policy-related decisions that are made bureaucratically must be loose enough to account for the personal decisions made individually that matter so much to how research is carried out and conveyed, and ultimately, what kind of impact it can have on the world.
References


The Unschooled Art Student

In looking back on my own schooling experience in the public system in Ontario, I consider myself a product of the mainstream system only in part. There was not a year that I did not attend mainstream school, yet honestly I think much of what I know and what I feel defines me has come from an unschooling approach to learning. Let me explain.

As an artist/researcher/teacher, it should come as no surprise that I consider the visual arts to be inextricably linked to my identity; it's how I derive pleasure out of life and how I earn a living. It's also basic to my beliefs and values as a teacher and researcher, which is why my PhD research is now focusing on creativity in education. Like my Master's work, I am drawing reflexively on my pedagogical and ideological perspectives to inform my dissertation (blog and videos; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004). I recognize, however, that the rest of the world doesn't necessarily share my experience or passion. It is obvious from the way school subjects are ordered, with the arts consistently at the bottom of the hierarchy worldwide (Robinson as cited in TEDtalksDirector, 2007), that ideologically the arts aren't a priority for many people—or at least not to policy makers. I can confidently recall that my peers and I received limited time for art in school, depending on the grade and the teacher. This is the first reason why I consider myself partially unschooled: Though I didn't do much art as part of the school curriculum, I consistently made it part of my "willed curriculum" (Ricci, 2012) at home, and it's these experiences that have proven to be the most formative and have held enduring meaning for me. I'm positive I am not alone in this regard. Crum (2007), who is also an art teacher, writes,

When I look back at the artistic experiences I had as a child, I think
mostly about what I made in my home . . . I think I remember these
activities so vividly because they meant something to me . . . I think I
do not remember more about art at school because these experiences
were not that important to me (p. 39).

So what makes home-based creativity so meaningful? The research into what makes creativity flourish (as reflected in the documentary) can be synthesized this way: People need to be autonomous (Amabile, 1996; Harrington, Block, & Block, 1987; Deci as cited in TEDxTalks, 2012), they need support (Holt, 1989), and they need to not be judged (Kohn, 1993; Pink, 2006). Even if I had had more dedicated art time in school, there's nothing to suggest it would have been an autonomous, supportive, nonjudgmental experience such as is necessary, such as it is at home. At home it can be quiet or musical, dark or bright, lonely or in the company of one's choosing. At home, no bells ring dictating that one starts or stops being creative. At home you simply work when the mood is right, when you're intrinsically motivated, when you can define the problem and the method for yourself and deal with it at your own pace and to your own satisfaction. The unschooled learner is an entrepreneur. As a teacher in a mainstream school, I can confirm that this entrepreneurial spirit is not fostered in schools. I'd like that to change.

The second reason why I consider myself partially unschooled is due to the discovery nature of learning art (or anything through the vehicle of creativity). As reflected in *Raising Creativity*, discovery is inherent in the creative process (Eisner as cited in VanderbiltUniversity, 2009), and discovery is the means by which real learning takes place (Holt, 1969). So whether I was engaged in creative activities at school or at home, the learning that flowed from them was all a result of that personal engagement. In
other words, the learning and the teaching were all mine, inherently, through lived experience, and not due to direct instruction. Wilson (2005) states that children's self-initiated production of visual culture qualifies as pedagogy, based on the entrepreneurial decisions children make when they create. I agree; I focused my Master's research paper on the nature of learning in an art context, and in it I wrote this: "As I continue with my painting, I am convinced by means of the process that it is only from a self-guided exploration of media and thought that creativity meets its maximum potential" (Codack [Zak], 2010, p. 35). As a classroom art "teacher," I do not see myself as responsible for whatever learning may occur—instead, I see myself as a helpful facilitator with a research-based do-it-yourself philosophy. I may inspire my students with the images and discussion I present to them in class, but I do not believe what (if) they learn is to my credit. Elkins (2001) opines,

[Teachers] know what they are saying, but they don’t know when it will connect, or whether it will do any good for the student. To some people, this is not a bad way to work . . . but it still means that art is not taught (p. 99).

No, art is not taught, though we "teach" it in school, and I am not completely mainstream schooled, though there was not a year that I did not attend mainstream school.
References


The Value of Ambiguity

Something I have always loved about art is that it resonates in naturally unpredictable and diverse ways. When something is "in the eye of the beholder," interpretation and subjectivity are in play. These moments, I believe, are conducive to rich pedagogy, as this post will discuss.

In the video below, renowned neuropsychiatrist Eric Kandel (as cited in Big Think, 2013b) explains in layman's terms a phenomenon called "the beholder's response," also known as the "beholder's share": "You have a painting. That painting is not complete until the viewer responds to it" (n.p.). In other words, what the viewer sees is not objective; it must be interpreted before it can be grasped. Viewed from this lens, the responsibility of creation belongs to both producer and consumer, and the work is created anew with each different beholder. There can be no denying that although a painting may be physically painted only once, the diversity of interpretation (and thus, the complete painting process) will happen with innumerable frequency. This plurality, brought on by subjectivity, is why the early psychologist Ernst Kris (whom Kandel speaks of in the video) said, "Great works are great because they're ambiguous. They allow for alternative readings" (n.p.).

Besides fostering plurality, ambiguity has another advantage: It prompts discovery due to the fact that what may be present is not made readily apparent. As noted in the second video installment of Raising Creativity, which provides a review of relevant literature, our brains are hardwired to pursue discovery and surprise (Tulley as cited in bigideasfest, 2010; Kandel as cited in Big Think, 2013a; Eisner as cited in VanderbiltUniversity, 2009). The search for that which is unknown just beyond our grasp
is a powerful intrinsic source of motivation that engages the mind and nurtures the desire to learn (Tulley as cited in bigideasfest, 2010). However, this is not typically how students in mainstream schooling are permitted to approach their education. By contrast, in keeping with the metrics-obsessed ideology of our time, I have repeatedly been advised in a professional development context to "teach with explicit instruction." This means: Teach in a way that minimizes any opportunity for the beholder's response; that objectifies children and views teachers as machinists; and that attempts to take the flavour, joy, and humanity out of a fundamentally sentient process. Fortunately my philosophy of education has been informed by several perspectives, not just that of the Ontario Ministry of Education. For example, Holt (1982) observes, “The spirit of independence in learning is one of the most valuable assets a learner can have, and we who want to help children’s learning, at home or in school, must learn to respect and encourage it” (p. 132). Similarly, Gray (2012) expresses, “Ultimately, the purpose of education is that of finding meaning in life, and each person has to do that for himself or herself” (p. 2). Needless to say, I choose not to follow the "professional advice" at my school, but instead employ the Socratic method, whereby I withhold conclusive responses and prompt my students with questions that can inform their own conclusions—conclusions derived from the beholder's response.

Paradoxically on the other hand, while "great works are . . . ambiguous" (Kandel as cited in BigThink, 2013b), it is also true that the arts make things noticeable. In other words, if an artist showcases an issue or a phenomenon (e.g., the status of creativity in education) through some kind of artistic representation (e.g., video), it is inevitably done to draw attention around the given cause, usually for a transformative purpose. Eisner
(1995) writes, "works of art . . . make empathy possible" (p. 4). What's out of sight is often out of mind, so if an audience's attention is directed to a topic by means of an artistic format, they may be more likely to pay attention and address the topic in real life as well. In putting together this documentary, I aim to capitalize on the widespread dissemination capability and engagingness of YouTube while respecting multiple truths and the beholder's response. I anticipate that everyone who views these videos will come away with differing opinions, which is great. For this reason, I will not offer my own conclusions at the end of the series, but rather I will lean towards ambiguity in prompting the viewers to think and decide for themselves. The point is, people need to see the videos first before they can come to that. If and when the moment arrives wherein many members of the general public are jostled into considering this important issue from an illuminated angle, then my research will have accomplished what it set out to do.
References


Winter 2013 Update

It's December 2013, and the progress continues. In this post I will review what has been done since my summer update as well as what is left to do.

Early November saw the release of my second video in the Raising Creativity (2013) series, comprising my literature review. This video is 13 minutes long, heavy in content, and moves quickly. It is also heavy in motion graphics (i.e., animation) that add interest and help bring concepts to life through multimodality (e.g., the side-by-side animated brains that illustrate Freire's notion of banking education versus problem-solving education; the animated diagram illustrating Csikszentmihalyi's concept of "Flow"; etc.). Because there was so much involved in the production of this video, I felt a huge sense of accomplishment and relief when it was finally completed, uploaded, and live. But what was really exciting was what happened after that point . . .

Like other scholars (Cohen, 2010; Smith as cited in FedCanada, 2012; Wells, 2008), I have long argued for the necessity of wide dissemination in (my) research, which was one of the main reasons I wanted to produce my dissertation in video format. Once Part 2 was uploaded to YouTube, I shared it on Facebook and Google+ as well as with my 1500+ YouTube subscribers. The video's views accumulated quickly by means of these networks (including the extended networks of those in my networks), and within a month it had received roughly 8,000 views. This was and is so exciting to me because it demonstrates the model is working as expected. To be clear, these metrics are of viewership, not of transformative change in and of itself, which is the ultimate purpose I seek as an art-based researcher (Knowles, Promislow, & Cole, 2008). Viewership however is the first essential step in the process (Wells, 2008). Not only have people been
watching, they've also been participating by liking the video (which notifies their network, thereby contributing to the buzz around the video) and by posting written comments under where the video is played. For example, Mary Beth Colman (2013) writes, "Some teachers are brave enough and committed enough to take the time to provide the learning environment necessary to nurture creativity; are school boards willing to support them with resources and $$$$$$$??????" Doug Stratford (2013) writes, "You're right. We really need to rethink this. It is important." And, Annie Bowker (2013) writes, "this video is awesome!! . . . I feel inspired to create." Some have even responded to other respondents in dialogue with one another, which means altogether that this video has become a catalyst for conversation: another crucial step towards transformation (Freire, 1970). I am spurred on by this success seen so far.

Meanwhile, I have continued to blog (I am up to 27 posts now) and have reworked my original script for part 3 for conciseness. YouTube clips are in place, and filming for my narration will likely begin in January. All this, and I would be remiss if I did not note one big update of a personal nature since August: I'm pregnant. This is an important detail deserving of mention because of the fact that my research is naturally so reflexive; it stands to reason that having a child of my own will impact my perspective in multiple ways, and indeed I can sense that it is already shifting. Now the outcome of my research will not just affect my own teaching practice and have transformative potential for my viewership, but eventually my own child too. This knowledge has deepened my commitment to this research in a new way . . . and she's not even born yet! I expect to blog another update in the spring, when hopefully I can say I am seeing the light at the end of the dissertation tunnel.
References


Writing Versus Visually Scripting

Producing a dissertation in video form has its challenges. In this post, I discuss the political and technical challenges of scripting visually as opposed to solely writing.

The PhD program I’m in at Brock University attempts to support doctoral students working with research methodologies appropriate for the 21st century. After all, anything else would seem out of date. The program’s mission statement reads this way:

The Joint PhD in Educational Studies Program aims to promote scholarly inquiry and the production of new knowledge within the context of a research culture. We are committed to methodological advances in educational research, as well as the integration of theory and practice. We nurture our students as developing scholars and leaders . . . . We are committed to excellence in our students and faculty, and to producing graduates who are life long learners [emphasis added] (Brock University, n.d., para. 1).

This being the case, I still experienced some hesitation when I proposed video as the platform for my dissertation. Even though I can think of no vehicle more appropriate for "[promoting] scholarly inquiry and the production of new knowledge" in the screen-dominated culture of our time, or no better example of a "methodological [advance] in educational research," there have been times when it seemed that the ideology of writing as the ultimate form of academic communication remained securely intact. Of course, writing is certainly still an effective mode of communication, but it has limitations nonetheless. Same with video. In fact, every form of communication carries with it affordances and limitations which must be considered when preparing something like a dissertation. My video proposal was eventually approved (after negotiating a new
multimodal format category of dissertation with Dean Michael Plyley) because of what it can do that writing cannot: video incorporates several modes at once, such as visuals, sounds, and text together to produce supercommunication, providing “diverse ways to access ideas [to] empower readers” (Loi, 2008, p. 90). Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) describe multimodality this way:

[In multimodality, modes] may for instance reinforce each other (‘say the same thing in different ways’), fulfil [sic] complementary roles . . . or be hierarchically ordered, as in action films, where action is dominant, with music adding a touch of emotive colour and sync sound a touch of realistic ‘presence’ (p. 20).

Video is engaging by virtue of this dynamism, as well as its emerging ubiquitousness. Kress (2003) refers to this as the "new media age," wherein the screen has replaced the book as the dominant medium of communication, making the image, rather than writing, the centre of communication. To work in video, a scholar must pull together a comprehensive presentation that moves along at an appropriate pace, is visually appealing, technically skillful, and concisely edited. Multimodality today is a technology-enhanced version of Wagner’s vision of Gesamtkunstwerk, a term meaning “total art work”: one piece that synthesizes many art forms at once (Gesamtkunstwerk, n.d.). In Wagner’s day (late 19th century), theatre was the epitome of Gesamtkunstwerk; today, it has evolved into online video. With video being as useful as it is thanks to evolving technology, both in terms of its production and consumption, it merits consideration as to why in many academic circles writing is still hierarchically most respected.

All of the above said, writing still accounts for a large part of my process as an artist/researcher/teacher. After sketching out a crude graphic organizer to help provide a
cohesive framework for my thoughts, my next step has been to write a script that I will narrate throughout each video. I then cut and paste my script into an audio/visual graph, where I make notes on what the viewer will see on screen next to the words they'll hear. And of course, whatever gets left out of the scripts on account of conciseness will land here on this blog, which is written. As a scholarartist, I definitely see the value of writing (I couldn't function without it), yet I also see the value of that which writing leaves behind, and that is what I'm interested in preserving.

In a related vein, the videos below discuss multimodality and the principles and elements of art and design (i.e., the building blocks of how art is made). In the first video, Kress describes multimodality, and in the second video, I argue that any description of multimodality is in effect a description of the principles and elements of art and design.
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**YouTube Clips as Data**

As outlined in the methodology segment of *Raising Creativity* (part 3), arts-informed research exists in part as a response to the limitations of traditional research methods. As such, it stands out as being very different in terms of process, form, and objective (Knowles & Cole, 2008). In this post, I discuss and justify the use of YouTube clips (i.e. my data) as the driving force that has shaped these inextricably linked elements.

Knowles and Cole (2008) write,

>The dominant paradigm of positivism historically has governed the way research is defined, conducted, and communicated and consciously and unconsciously defined what society accepts as Knowledge; however, it is not a paradigm that reflects how individuals in society actually experience and process the world (pp. 59).

User-generated digital content has shifted the means by which people regularly consume information and come to know because of its accessibility and ubiquitousness today. I have chosen to capitalize on this phenomenon in my research by employing the “collective intelligence” (i.e. user-generated content) of YouTube videos to inform my research question (“how can we nurture creativity in education?”). Because of the inherent subjectivity in my research question, I recognize that my data set must also have “sufficient ambiguity” (Knowles & Cole, p. 67) so as to allow for interpretive readings, of which YouTube videos are conducive.

Knowles and Cole (2008) explain,

>the defining art form guiding the inquiry or representation must be readily
apparent by how and how well it works to illuminate and achieve the research purposes . . . [Further,] there must be an explicit intention for the research to reach communities and audiences including but beyond the academy” (p. 61).

Once my data is collected, it only makes sense to represent it in turn through video format, which effectively means producing a “mash-up.” Whereas “remix” commonly refers to the editing of a sound recording to make it sound different from the original (Remix, n.d.), O’Brien and Fitzgerald (2006) define mash-up as “a visual remix, commonly a video or website which remixes and combines content from a number of different sources to produce something new and creative” (p. 1). I am then uploading this remixed video/mash-up series to YouTube (where all of its pieces originated from), where it can further participate in “collective intelligence” and the knowledge formation process consistent with 21st century practices. Ultimately the goal is that this would “involve the reader/audience in an active process of meaning making that is likely to have transformative potential” (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. 62).
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Website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remix
YouTube Clip Selection Criteria

In preparation for my conducting my art-based research which invokes "collective intelligence" (Jenkins, 2006) by remixing YouTube videos to illuminate my research question, I have developed a schema for determining which clips will be usable and which will be necessarily bypassed. In this blog, I present my criteria as well as the rationale behind them.

For the questions below, I must be able to answer yes in every case before possibly including a particular YouTube clip as part of my research. This will ensure quality, consistency, and relevance in my presentation.

1. Does the clip exist in the public domain and is it publicly accessible (i.e., is it housed online, namely on YouTube or another platform that supports user-generated video content)?

   Concerning "collective intelligence," Jenkins (2006) writes, "none of us can know everything; each of us knows something; we can put the pieces together if we pool our resources and combine our skills" (p. 4). The term therefore fundamentally implies accessibility of knowledge. For my purposes, I am limiting my search to user-generated online video, which means that the content I uncover must exist online (i.e., in the public domain) on YouTube, or another website like it. Clips will be retrieved initially through a YouTube search using relevant general terms (e.g., "unschooling," "sudbury valley," "homeschooling," "school," etc.) or a combination of appropriate terms (e.g., "unschooling + autonomy," "homeschooling + evaluation," etc.).

2. Does the clip focus on one or more of the educational models in question, namely in terms of autonomy, support, and evaluation.
Each clip must relate to at least one of the educational models I have identified (i.e., unschooling, homeschooling, sudbury valley, montessori, waldorf, mainstream schooling, and alternative models within mainstream schooling) in terms of the conditions through which creativity can best thrive. This is, after all, the objective of my research: to illuminate how creativity can be nurtured. As I will establish and justify in the course of video part 4, these conditions include autonomy, support, and no evaluation.

3. Does the information in the clip appear to be from an informed source, namely someone who has experience with the model(s) in question as either a student, teacher/facilitator, administrator, policy maker, or parent?

I want to avoid uninformed content (i.e., opinionated statements stemming from limited or no experience) for the obvious reason that I seek only progressive contributions toward the illumination of my research question. Weak opinion not based in lived experience of some kind does not have a place in my research. I think by listening to what is said and how it's said, and cuing into body language, et cetera, I should be able to tell whether the content comes from an informed source or not.

4. Is the content of the clip coherent?

I have chosen the word "coherent" quite intentionally to describe the quality of clips needed. While what is communicated must be readily understandable, this does not necessarily mean it must be articulate. I make this distinction because I anticipate using clips from young people who may not have the linguistic capacity to communicate articulately but who are able to make a valid point nonetheless. Furthermore, in video form coherency is aided by the other various modes available beyond language.

Collective intelligence does not discriminate by age, and neither will I.
5. Does the content of the clip contribute to the larger picture of what the given model is about (in terms of autonomy, and/or support, and/or evaluation) in the context of the other clips used that are representing the same model?

I do not anticipate finding the holy grail of clips that will provide everything I'm looking for in one succinct package. I am expecting instead that each clip will likely provide only a piece of the puzzle and that I will require several clips from various sources to establish a cohesive picture of what each educational model is like with respect to autonomy, support, and evaluation. Therefore I must possess vision for the overall video (part 4, that is) to ensure that the clips I do use provide valuable information and that I avoid redundancy at all costs. Any viewership would expect this of a well-crafted documentary.

6. Is the clip of acceptable digital quality (a) visually? (minimum 360p–720p), and (b) audio-wise?

In borrowing and co-opting video clips, I will no doubt run into videos of various quality in terms of resolution and audio. Ideally I would like the videos I use to be at least 720p (which refers to the number of pixels along the height of the video frame); however 360p (the next lowest size) will do. This size is noted under the settings icon (which looks like a tiny gear) in the lower right hand corner of the YouTube video player. The videos that I produce as part of the Raising Creativity series, comprising all the remixed clips, will have a final output of 1080p (YouTube HD). It may be possible to use a video with poor video quality so long as the audio is clear. Creative solutions can be applied to videos with poor visuals, such as animating text to audio (as seen in parts 1 and 2 thus far), so as to preserve the content of the clip, in essence. As far as a measurement for
good quality audio, I will simply have to listen attentively to the clarity. With most YouTube videos I have come across, audio is rarely an issue.

Note: There is nothing set within this criteria to prevent or subvert bias. This is intentional because the focus of this research is education, which is an art, not a conclusive science. As such, all content will be naturally biased, and that is perfectly acceptable. Gelwick (1991) writes,

Polanyi would . . . explain that the personal was not to be minimized but understood as the element that was essential, the one that led us to break out and make new discoveries, and not at all an unfortunate imperfection in human epistemology (pp. 380–381).

Similarly, Clandinen (as cited in 239MikeO, 2012) argues that personal stories are "really an important piece that’s often missing in the research" (n.p.). Again, the overall goal of this research is not to produce conclusive findings but to illuminate the issue for individual consideration. In the end, the understanding each person takes from this will likewise be acceptably biased.

Further, there is nothing stipulated within these criteria that defines a minimum age or set of credentials that each contributing person (within the video clips) must have. This is intentional, since collective intelligence does not discriminate in any way, and I hope that young people will have their voices heard through *Raising Creativity*, especially considering the documentary concerns young school-age people (among others).
References

