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Can’t Sleep: Capturing a Collective Imagination as a Process of Creativity, Professional Development and Academic Activity

Creativity, as a site of academic practice, culminates as a powerful and uniquely individual experience. “Human creativity—the power to invent, to discover profound new truths, to "see" into the future...” has, been thought to be the outcome of an intervention from some sort of deity (Lombardo 2011, p.21). Being visited by a muse (originating from Greek mythology; the Nine Muses) is one of the most common terms used to express this process. Early, and historically significant, pedagogues such as Pestalozzi, Montassori and Dewey (in Sawyer 2011) all argued that creativity was central in teaching and learning contexts, and that teachers were the persons to organize this activity; and so this belief became a central tenet for progressive education. In Rogers’ Towards a Theory of Creativity (1954), explaining creativity as a cognitive process of self-actualization, it was argued that to be truly achieved then complete freedom should be felt to enable its expression. On the contrary, and at the time, Skinner argued that a highly structured and organized environment would elicit creativity. Both however agreed that “love and affection” (Lombardo 2011, p.26) would lead to its expression and that emotions played a significant role in manifesting it. Ideas of democracy also congregate around creativity and post-war critiques emphasized the condition of utmost freedom to create and to be free to express whatever one felt to (Stein 1961). Furthermore, Chomsky (1966) has frequently described that human language is a “highly creative act” (cited in Lombardo 2011, p. 26) and for that reason, the freedom of expression, a core condition of academe, can be argued as a working space for constant creativity. Education reform, in the last 20 years, however, has led to greater levels of accountability for individual educationists, which has resulted in the feeling that there is, in fact, far less freedom (Pawlaczek 2009). In many ways Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, and in particular the banking Model, can be argued as being a present shadow on the identities of academics.

Through the lens of a critical pedagogy, this pecha kucha attempts exchange ideas on a creative collaboration, in the discipline of arts. Participants in this study academics and artists, reflected upon their identities through devising an original piece of musical theatre funded by the Australian Federal Government (Regional Arts Victoria). Reflections on identity were framed within a professional development context and participants were asked to think about and describe how, through a creative collaboration, they were acquiring new ways of thinking, practicing and therefore, being. Furthermore, they were asked to reflect upon how this process articulated towards a greater sense of being creative and imaginative in both an individual and collaborative context. The opportunity to explore a collective imagination, of a world that exists in the free and emotional space of each others minds, was seen as a
unique location for building upon ideas of playfulness, sociability and creativity within a professional life and more acutely an academic life.

**Key References:**

**Through The Looking-Glass, And What I Found There**

This paper proposes the theoretical lens of governmentality (Barry, Osborne, & Rose, 1996; Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991; Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1999) for making sense of the historical, political and ethical constitution of the learning advisor in Australian higher education. To begin, the paper draws on Lewis Carroll’s *Through the looking glass, and what Alice found there* as a narrative tactic to demonstrate how the space of learning advising can be understood as a most curious place to dwell. Rather than stepping *into* the looking glass to discover this world of strangeness, I suggest that we must step *out* of the looking glass to turn and see - clearly, darkly - how strangeness is already part of our professional lifeworld with its spatial contortions, its temporal reversals, and its illogical diversions.

I then suggest that if we venture to examine ourselves through the lens of governmentality we can begin to see how learning advising is merely a fragment of the liberal imagination - an effect of the dynamic interaction of power, knowledge and ethics in liberal society. Through this lens, learning advising can be understood as a discursively complex, relational, polysemic and contested space in the academy that is ontologically vulnerable to political thought and action, and epistemologically and axiomatically vulnerable to its ebb and flow.

To elaborate, I suggest that learning advising is a relational space because its intelligibility is an effect of the convergence of historical circumstance, political reasoning, and perceived social and economic crises that reconfigure the university as an apparatus of government, and reconstitute the higher education student as the object of government. I argue that it is in this three way moral relationship with the university and the student that the learning advisor is politically and ethically constituted. I go on to suggest that the historical proliferation of these configurations and constitutions have layered and folded through this space multiple truths that intersect (polysemic) and compete (contested) for domination causing its inhabitants speak with an ontological stammering (Lather, 2003).

The final part of the paper suggests that agency in this space is not simply a matter of attempting to ground one’s identity, politics and agency in the notion of a foundational subject or teleological notions of progress, but to learn to dwell ethically and tactically in the complexity of the space willed to us by history (de Certeau, 1988; Readings, 1997). Dwelling, I suggest, requires us to live poetically, with a ‘commitment to thought’ (Foucault, 1997; Readings, 1997) and a healthy skepticism for all things that resemble reification (Fendler, 1999), as a provocation to ever more critical and creative practice (Gitlin, 2008).

**Key References:**

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1 This paper has adapted narrative excerpts and themes from Lewis Carroll’s (1871, 1977) *Through the Looking-Glass, and what Alice found there*. Thanks and apologies to Lewis Carroll.