Steps to a Manifesto to Advance Imagination and Creativity in Higher Education Learning and Educational Practice

In a world consumed with uncertainty and a growing sense of the obsolescence of our education systems, how can we ensure the success of ourselves as individuals, our communities, and the planet? We need to evolve education.
Manifesto 15: Evolving Learning **https://manifesto15.org/en/** Imagining a different future in which more attention is paid to the development of learners' imaginations and creativity in higher education, is one way of evolving education.

Why do imagination and creativity deserve our attention?

Imagination and creativity are central to human culture. Without them, no past or present culture would look the way it does, and no person would be able to participate in and contribute to that culture. Nor would cultures change and evolve the way they do, in response to our ideas and beliefs, our aspirations, our ethical insights and technological innovations. And yet this essential human capacity is extraordinarily neglected in educational thinking, practice and research.

The need for education to pay more attention to the development of learners' imaginations and creativity has been recognized for many years. As we get deeper into the 21st century the future we might have anticipated at the start of the millennium has proved to be even more fantastic, uncertain, turbulent, disruptive and challenging than we ever imagined. For example, we have witnessed the massive growth of the internet and the opportunities and benefits it has brought for communication, learning, collaboration, work and commerce, together with all the challenges it has posed society and individuals in terms of dependency, security and vulnerability. We have experienced the global recession of 2008 and the massive social impacts brought about by austerity measures, and in the UK we are currently grappling with the consequences of Brexit with all its challenges and uncertainties. Coping with these disruptions at personal, organisational and societal levels requires all our imagination, ingenuity and resourcefulness.

Disruptions to an orderly and productive existence are likely to increase as the world becomes more connected and turbulent. But there are also more gradual changes affecting the very nature of work. We continue to move towards more flexible arrangements where the individual is working with multiple companies at the same time. A lot of it is knowledge work, which can be done from anywhere. Stephane Kasriel, co-chair of the Global Future Council on Education, Gender and Work, says entrepreneurs and freelancers represent the future of the workplace, as traditional office jobs become less and less relevant.[3]

> Work is changing rapidly as we enter a new era fueled by exponential advances in digital technologies. In particular, the rise of smart machines and the decline of the full-time employee are reshaping the ways people work and are creating significant uncertainty about what readiness for further learning, career, and life will look like.[2]

Coupled to this are technological developments including the rise of smart machines, global production networks, and technological acceleration are transforming the work landscape. More and more we realise the extent of technological job displacement through automation and augmentation and the profound effect this will have on the productive contributions of humans through work.[2] People will need to harness their creativity, ingenuity and resourcefulness to survive and flourish in such a volatile and unforgiving environment.

Government views education as a vehicle to employability: we educate people to serve the economy. The engines of economy are the products and services that people want to buy and their continued supply requires business to continually invent and innovate. We might view innovation as the "successful creation of needed change through ideas. This broad

> 'Work in the modern British economy will increasingly involve creativity and innovation as a mass and everyday activity, applied not just to leading edge high-tech and cultural industries, but to retailing and services, manufacturing and sales. Britain will need an education system that encourages widespread development of generic skills of creativity which include idea generation; creative teamwork, opportunity sensing; pitching and auditioning; giving criticism and responding to it; mobilising people and resources around ideas to make them real...'[4]

definition has "creation" as its key activity. When you are innovating the most prevalent form of activity that you will be involved in is "creation". What will you be creating? You will be creating change. What change? The needed change. How will you create the needed change? It will be through ideas. What are ideas? Those thoughts [that often spring from imagination] that bring in genesis for change."[5] From an economic perspective, individual and collective imagination and creativity are valued for their potential to lead to innovation and this is the economic or commercial argument for higher education to do more to help and enable learners use and develop their imaginations and creativity, in the belief that creative dispositions and skills may be transferred from educational to business contexts.

But higher education has a pivotal role to play in enabling young people to prepare themselves for the unimaginable challenges they will face as they journey through a complex learning life and supporting adults in their continuous learning and developmental needs. An education system that does not commit to the development and recognition of learners as whole creative beings is not enabling them to prepare themselves for the unimaginable challenges they will encounter or create for themselves.

The educational value proposition underpinning any consideration of why creativity is important in higher education is inspired by 'the moral purpose of education: to make a positive difference to students' lives' [6:18]. If the purpose of higher education is to help students develop their potential as fully as possible, then enabling students to be creative should be an explicit and valued part of their higher education experience. This is clearly not the experience of many students in higher education.

> 'Even though personal creativity may not lead to fame and fortune, it can do something that from the individual's point of view is even more important: make day-to-day experiences more vivid, more enjoyable, more rewarding. When we live creatively, boredom is banished and every moment holds the promise of fresh discovery. Whether or not these discoveries enrich the world beyond our personal lives, living creatively links us with the process of evolution' [7:344].

Creativity and imagination lie at the heart of students' own sense of who they are, 'even where creativity was not taught, not considered teachable and not valued in assessment, it was still relevant in defining how the students saw themselves'[8]. Creativity goes to the heart of what it is to be a human being and higher education has a responsibility to help learners develop their understandings and awareness of their own creativities as they develop their own sense of who they are and who they are trying to become. A learner's creative develop is as important as their academic development.

1.0 schools [colleges and universities] cannot teach 3.0 kids. We need to redefine and build a clear understanding of what we are educating for, why we do it, and for whom our educational systems serve. Mainstream compulsory schooling is based on an outdated, 18th century model for creating citizens with the potential to become loyal, productive factory workers and bureaucrats. In the post-industrial era, this should no

longer be the end goal of education. We need to support learners to become innovators, capable of leveraging their own imagination and creativity to realize new outcomes for society. We do this because today's challenges cannot be solved through old thinking. And, we are all co-responsible for creating futures with positive outcomes that benefit all people in the world. [9]

But to evolve learning in this way we should not view creativity as a rare mysterious gift: the activity of a few exalted geniuses, rather it should be viewed as an attitude and capability that connects, in a productive and insightful way, perception, reasoning and imagination. Imagination enables us to visualize new possibilities, new ideas, new things and new meanings and our creativity enables us to realise the potential and value in these imaginings. Our imagination and creativity enable us to express ourselves, solve problems, realize ambitions, cope with failure and achieve success[10]. If creativity is the productive and inspiring entanglement of perception, reasoning and imagination, an important role for higher education is to help learners' develop and use their imaginations as well as their critical thinking.[11]
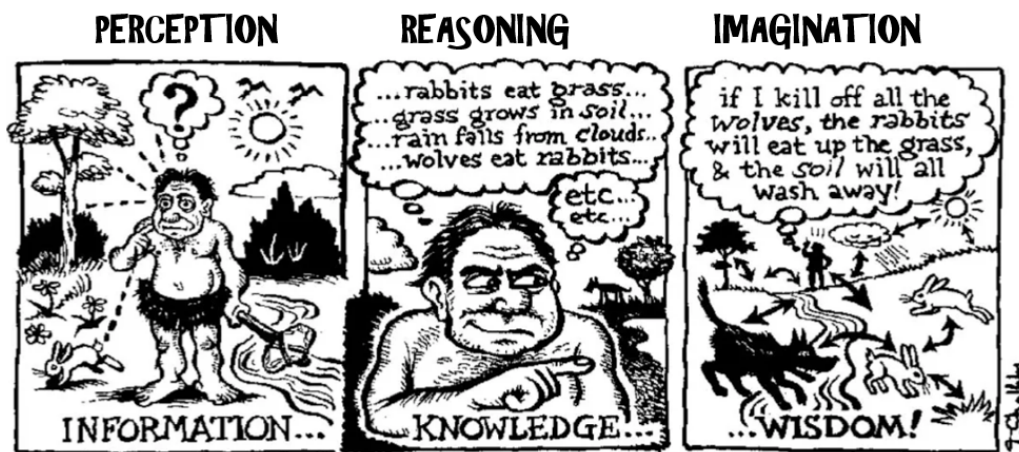
Sternberg and Lubart[12] argue that we need three different sorts of abilities to be successful in any context: analytical abilities – to analyse, evaluate, judge, compare and contrast; practical abilities – to apply, utilise, implement and activate; and creative abilities – to imagine, explore, synthesise, connect, discover, invent and adapt. Successful people (people who generally achieve their goals and ambitions) do not necessarily have strengths in all areas, but they find ways to exploit whatever pattern of abilities they may have in any given situation or context and align them in a way that value and meaning is created in their lives and in the communities they inhabit in any given situation or context.

Matthew Taylor argues that we all have the power to create[13] and we are on the threshold of a new era for human creativity. Across the world more mobile, more educated, more questioning populations are seeking out and discovering new routes to self-expression, collaboration, enterprise, and thanks to the power of the social web, people everywhere are creating and connecting in a host of new ways. Encouraging, valuing and recognising the imaginations and creativity of our students is one small step towards creating a more creative society. The promise in this positive message should encourage universities to take on the challenge of preparing their students for the rest of their creative lives by valuing their creativity and encouraging them, through the opportunities they provide, to use and develop their imaginations and creativity, as an integral and important part of their higher education experience – both academic and non-academic.

Preparing learners for a lifetime of learning and tackling problems that emerge from ever increasing complexity, is higher education's 'wicked problem'. We live in a world of emergence, a world in which we have to experience, make sense of, imagine, make judgements and respond to, often in creative ways. There are few right answers, many possibilities, and lots of uncertainties requiring us to take risks and try again and again until we succeed. The trouble is our educational environments minimize uncertainty and risk taking. Programmes demand conformity and prescribe learning outcomes that value learning that is predicted. While we espouse the desire for originality in the products of learning our emphasis on formal learning and the reproduction of decontextualized explicit knowledge at the expense of the tacit and contextual is at odds with the epistemologies of successful practice in work and other social environments.

> "We are on the cusp of an unprecedented opportunity. Powerful social and technological change mean that we can realistically commit to the aspiration that everyone can live a creative life. What do I mean by a creative life? It's a life that feels meaningful and fulfilled, where we are free to express ourselves as individuals. We have access to the power of resources to shape our own future. We can make our unique contribution to the world. Creativity is in all of us." [11]

The challenge is to change the prevailing culture in higher education so that greater value is placed on the development of learners' imaginations and creativity alongside more traditional forms of academic development. We must start by appreciating what we already do and imagine new and better ways of enabling learners to develop and use their imaginations and creativity. This is the spirit in which we conduct this open discussion around the formation of a manifesto to advance our thinking about the educational practices and cultures that will make higher education a better place for the development of learners' imaginations and creative potential.

Who thinks we can do more to encourage students to develop and use their imaginations and creativity?

Towards a manifesto to advance imagination & creativity in HE learning & educational practice

Q Are the propositions valid?

Q What other arguments might be included for why higher education needs to take seriously the development of learners' imaginations and creativity and invest in educational practices that encourage and facilitate such development?

Sources & further reading

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3 World Economic Forum https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/11/by-2030-will-we-all-be-our-own-boss/

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