

CREATIVITY IN PRACTICE

While we are happy to recognise creativity in others most people don't like talking about their own creativity. This is partly because culturally it is considered inappropriate to publicly broadcast our own achievements and processes, and partly because we are just not used to talking about it and don't have the words to describe it in a meaningful way. Which is why people like Steve Jobs have helped by explaining creativity in simple down to earth language. He is famously quoted as saying, "*Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That's because they were able to connect experiences they've had and synthesize new things.*" Steve Jobs

If we want a more creative world there is a job to be done in encouraging people to share their own stories about being creative and what creativity means to them in their own everyday practices and circumstances. All too often in education we talk about creativity in a way that is not contextualized or situated in time, or a place, a circumstance, a culture, a problem or an opportunity that someone - a particular person, cares enough about to want to put effort and imagination into doing something that brings something into existence. But for creativity to have value beyond an individual: it must be relevant to others and a particular context or purpose.

Creative Academic is concerned with understanding the nature of creativity in different contexts and the ways in which teachers encourage learners to use and develop their creativity. Over the last three years we have been developing the idea that creativity, like learning and achievement, are ecological phenomena. Drawing on Carl Rogers' ecological concept of creativity namely, 'the emergence in action of a novel relational product growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, or circumstances of their life'² we have tried to visualize how creativity emerges from the ecologies we create to learn and achieve something.^{3,4}

*"In order to fully understand creativity and what influences it, and in order to confidently prescribe ways in which individuals, organizations, and societies can enhance it, we must undertake studies of creative behavior - and the accompanying psychological states and environmental contexts - in situ, as it is happening... this is only one of the many pathways that creativity studies should take in the coming years. But, I believe, it is one of the most important."*¹

In the next stage of our work we want to focus our attention on the practice environment and examine the *ecologies of practice* people create in environments that are not structured specifically for learning.

By 'practice' we mean 'action rather than thought or ideas'⁵, 'the application or use of an idea, belief, or method, as opposed to theories relating to it for example, the practice of teaching.'⁶

By gathering stories of people's *practices* in different settings and contexts we want to see if the idea of an 'ecology of practice' makes sense as a means to describe and theorize the way people interact with their environment and the people and things in it, to fulfill a particular

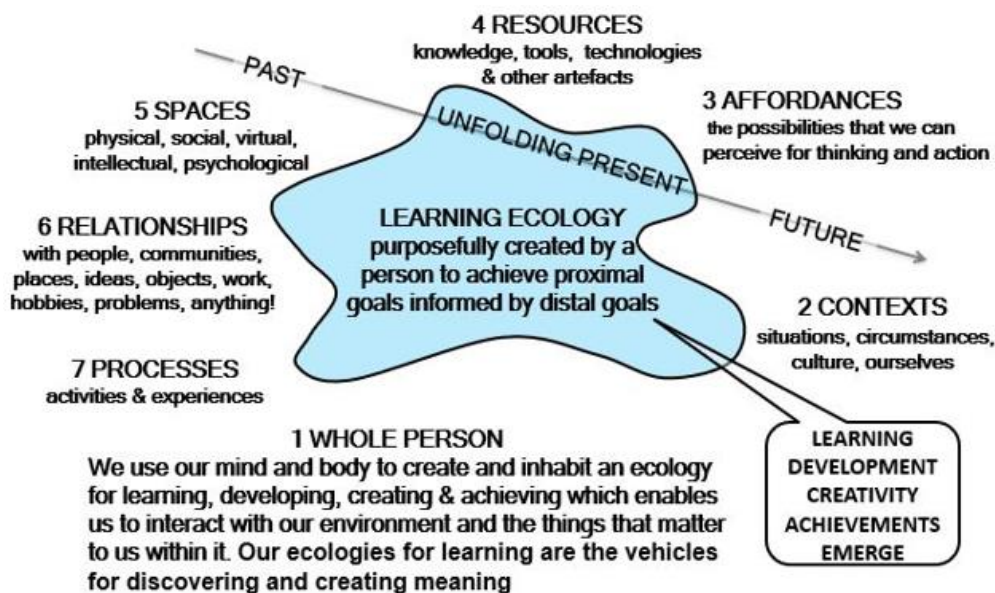
purpose, achieve a significant goal, solve a problem or make the most of an opportunity. Through these personal illustrations, we want to explore how creativity featured, or might feature, in a particular ecology of practice.

But to practice as a teacher or perform any other complex role also involves the development of skills, behaviours and ways of thinking that are relevant to teaching through *practice*, ‘to perform (an activity) or exercise (a skill) repeatedly or regularly in order to acquire, improve or maintain proficiency in it.’⁵ We are also interested in exploring how practitioners develop themselves through practical experience, education and training to be able to practice in creative ways. In this way we might connect the practices of teachers in higher education to the practices of practitioners in the world beyond formal education.

Our open learning project has three aims:

- 1) to use the framework we are developing (Figure 1) to explain learning and practice as an ecological phenomenon to characterise a particular problem solving process in a practice setting and reveal the ecological relationships and interactions. Through this approach we are trying to understand what an *ecology of practice* might mean in lots of different contexts.
- 2) to explore what creativity means in different practice settings and consider how it emerges and is manifested within an ecology of practice.
- 3) to consider how practitioners develop the necessary understandings and capabilities to inhabit their professional environment in a productive and creative way. In other words, how they come to know how to develop their own practice ecologies. In this way we might connect the development of practitioners in a field to the signature pedagogies and signature learning experiences developed in different domains of higher education.

Figure 1 Learning ecology framework we are developing and evaluating



OPEN INVITATION

In an attempt to gain new perspectives into the meanings of creativity in different practice settings, we are looking for people who would like to collaborate by sharing a written or oral narrative of the way they or practitioners in general tackle a typical problem or challenge in their work-related field of practice, or any other contexts where they regularly engage in practice eg pursuing a hobby or interest. We would like collaborators to try using the learning ecology framework we are developing to characterize their practice and from this narrative identify the meanings of creativity in these particular contexts. Contributions will be published and curated in [Creative Academic Magazine](#) (CAM9) which will be published 4 times while the project runs between December 2017- December 2018

If you are interested in creating a similar written narrative or providing an oral narrative which can be transcribed, please contact the project leader Professor Norman Jackson normanjjackson@btinternet.com.

To join the project and view an example narrative please visit <http://www.creativeacademic.uk/creativity-in-practice.html>

Sources

- 1 Teresa M. Amabile (2017) In Pursuit of Everyday Creativity Working Paper 18-002 Harvard Business School
- 2 Rogers, C.R., (1960) *On becoming a person*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin
- 3 Jackson N J (2016) *Exploring Learning Ecologies* Chalk Mountain / Lulu <http://www.lulu.com/au/en/shop/norman-jackson/exploring-learning-ecologies/paperback/product-22603535.html>
- 4 Jackson, N. J. and Willis, J. (eds) *Exploring Creative Ecologies* Creative Academic Magazine Issue #5 September 2016 Available at <http://www.creativeacademic.uk/magazine.html>
- 5 Cambridge Dictionary available at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/practice>
- 6 Oxford Dictionary available at <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/practise>

Version 13/11/17