Exploring Play in Higher Education

Issue Number **2B**

creative academic magazine

CONTENTS CAM2B

Guest Editors: Chrissi Nerantzi & Alison James

Origami planes, in the classroom? How could you use them? Could they enable pan-participation?

A Promising Start

We are delighted with the start Creative Academic has made. We launched our enterprise in January 2015 with a small team and a handful of members. In February, when we published the first issue of our Magazine, we had just 30 members in our community. By June the number of people who have subscribed to our mail list has risen to over 200.

While most of our members are based in the UK or Ireland, it's really encouraging that we are connecting with people all over the world. Our community includes people who live in Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Egypt, France, Greece, Netherlands, Hungary, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Taiwan and the USA.

As we go to press on CAM2 we can see that the first issue of the magazine has been downloaded nearly 1700 times with readers from twenty three different countries.

So thank you to all of you who have joined our community and we hope that you will spread the word. We look forward to interacting with you in the coming years and we welcome your ideas and suggestions for how we might support creativity in higher education.
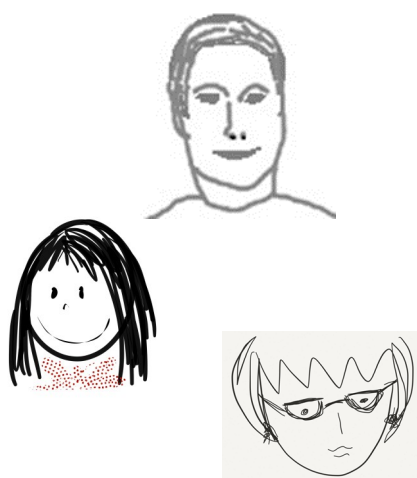
Norman, Chrissi and Alison

Creative Academic Co-Founders

CREATIVE ACADEMIC SURVEY OF PLAY IN HIGHER EDUCATION
Jenny Willis

Jenny's career has included teaching, educational management and research. She holds a PhD in socio-linguistics and has a wide, multi-disciplinary interest. She first worked with Norman on aspects of professional and personal development, creativity and lifewide learning at the University of Surrey Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. She is a founder member of Lifewide Learning, conducts research and writes for its publications. She edits Lifewide's quarterly magazine and is also executive editor for CAM. Jenny is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. For more information about her go to http://no2stigma.weebly.com.

Background to the survey

As part of Creative Academic's aim to further the understanding of creativity, we devised a series of brief, open-ended questions for the second issue of Creative Academic Magazine (CAM) on the theme of 'play'. The survey was offered via SurveyMonkey on the web in the months of April-May 2015, and potential interested parties were invited by email and other electronic user groups to take part. Responses were confidential and no biographical data were collected.

An open invitation was extended to all Lifewide Education's subscribers and via email lists and established professional networks (several higher education Linked-In Groups). Readers should therefore be aware that this is a self-selected group of respondents. Responses were confidential and no biographical data were collected. By the date of closure, 47 valid responses had been received. The survey will remain open to enable readers to add their views if they wish to contribute to a more substantial article in the near future.

This report provides a summary of the findings. Since respondents were not asked about their personal circumstances, we cannot comment on their ages, gender balance or professional backgrounds other than as revealed through their own words. Having read the submissions for this magazine, though, I couldn't help engaging in my own game of 'guess who said this' as I analysed the survey. You can play the game too!

Responses to the six research questions show the following trends, which reflect the themes of many of our articles in CAM2:

1. What does it mean to 'play' in any context?

Before considering the role of play in the context of Higher Education, respondents were asked to define the meaning of play in general. Five common and closely related dimensions emerged from their replies:

Fun, enjoyment

Play is predominantly associated with having fun. As one person remarked,

> *as mammals we learn through play.*

This might imply that learning is an intrinsic objective, but the same respondent hastens to dispel the notion by adding:

> *Play means recreational diversion rather than a serious activity. This ignores professional sport or performance definitions.*

Freedom, lack of structure

Many responses allude to the freedom of play, though here enjoyment is distinguished from fun:

> *To engage in unstructured, or less-rigidly structured activities giving the player scope to engage in the task with a measure of freedom and personal involvement. This is distinct from "fun", where the object is for enjoyment.*

Again, a reference is made to expectations of the activity: play does not have a predetermined objective. Play enables instinctive response: it means

> *To have your own time and do what you feel will make you happy*

> *Being creative, open to possibilities, listening to the body as a means of offering insights, being curious, thinking outside the box, being flexible, trying out and experimenting, metaphor to enhance understanding.*

No predetermined outcomes

The idea of openness of outcomes is made explicit by some respondents, e.g. play is

> *To be open to possibility, to explore ideas without any expectation of a specific outcome.*

This allows player to take risk without fear of failure.

An interactive activity

Respondents associate play with interaction with others, whilst recognising we

> *Can play alone and with others.*

And play may also involve more than people: we may

> *play with others but also with ideas and concepts.*

Drawing from theory, one respondent explains that Fusetti describes Lecoq's concept as

> *the ability to react, the attitude of the performer of reacting to everything that happens on stage. There is a relationship between the body and the space where it exists. The actor is one element of the stage and exists in relation to all of the other elements: space, the other performers, objects, time, optics, music, design…Everything is in relation to everything else.*

Transitional knowledge

Given the unpredictability of outcomes, where learning results it is seen as transitional. This respondent refers to Winnicott's theory where

> *Playing is the process of finding through pleasure what interests you, but it is by definition a state of transitional knowing, creative by virtue of being always inconclusive. And, of course, though there is word-play, playing is not exclusively verbal.'* (Phillips 1988: 144)

In sum, play is perceived as an open-ended activity which may be solitary or social, and involves interaction with objects, concepts or people. It is a space where risks can be taken and the outcome may be further understanding/learning, but this learning is dynamic. Enjoyment is a component of the process but this is distinguished from fun.

2. Do you use, or have you used, play in your teaching and learning activities? If you have used play, how did you use it?

This second question directs respondents back to their professional role as teachers. The first part asks whether they use play, and the majority of responses are affirmative, as these examples show:

> *play is embedded in my everyday practice*
> *Very much so*
> *I teach Acting, so a lot of what I do involves play*
> *Yes in all of my teaching wherever possible.*
> *All the time as a Drama teacher*
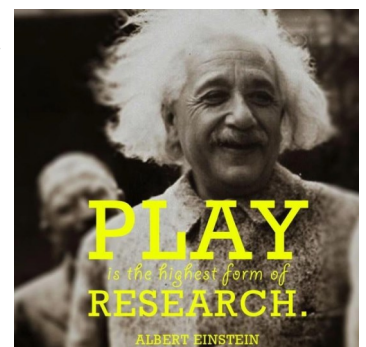
Anticipating a later question, one respondent confesses

> *I do not actually use play for instructional purposes but for personal use. I think this is most probably influenced by the restricted environment I work (in).*

Respondents admit that they use play to motivate others as well as for personal enjoyment:

> *This keeps me alive, happy and excited as I love surprising people and creating playful moments that will be memorable and help others learn and make discoveries.*

The second part of this question asks for examples of how respondents use play. Clearly, the opportunities will be affected by, amongst other factors, the nature of their discipline. Nevertheless, responses reveal a wide degree of ingenuity across disciplines. To cite just some:

> *As part of students learning what it would be like to be in a KS1 classroom we built a submarine through a problem solving group activity together. Students had previously looked at the learning objectives and others then took video and stills noting group dynamic and learning during session. These were then reviewed against the early years curriculum and teachers standards grid.*

> *We had a big play board (3 meters by 2 meters) with a route on it. The students threw a dice and when they hit a certain spot, they have to do a short assignment. In the case where it was about physical handicaps, the assignments would be like going through a door in a wheelchair, getting a cup of coffee while using two crutches, being led while blindfolded etc.*

> *use of garden wire to make anatomical model of arteries in brain - the students were shown a model (here's one I prepared earlier) and they had to make and label the arteries of the Circle of Willis. They were all judged - everyone received an 'award' .*

> *I have set "lab" activities where a broad task and set of goals. The students got to try different things, coming up with their own designs, trying them out, making their own apparatus, and just generally seeing what happened.*

In other words, teachers of even more 'fact based' subjects are able to use play to bring about learning in novel ways.
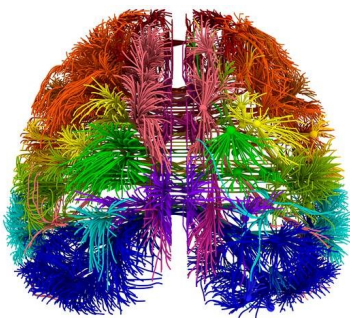
3. What have been the benefits of incorporating playful approaches into your learning and teaching activities?

The third question asked respondents to explain the effectiveness of their use of play in teaching. A number of common, iterative themes emerge once more, some of which relate to the nature of resultant learning, others to learner engagement.

Nature of learning

Respondents believe that their students achieve greater degrees of learning as a result of play:

> *Students learn more through play than formal teaching methods, they make connections that were not obvious*

> *Students expanded their thinking and their ideas... Challenged more and considered future possibilities as a strategic approach to career.*

Closely related to this, some respondents suggest the learning is deeper, and, in this instance, unexpected:

> *Deeper learning, and learning in areas I hadn't anticipated.*

Risk-taking

The notion of feeling confident to take risks without fear of ridicule is an important element of the learning outcomes

> *Playing made the classroom a 'safe space' - students were free to make mistakes and not feel judged by peers.*

> *students can enjoy an activity that requires collaboration, role play (being someone else), exploring an activity a space where it's ok to fail.*

Community building

The last quotation refers to collaboration as another outcome of play. It is a theme mentioned by others, e.g.

> *Engaging everyone and having fun and building community*

> *Group bonding as a team.*

Motivation/engagement

The other key outcome of play is that students are motivated and engagement increases:

> *learners are more engaged during the session, and more likely to return to future sessions*

> *Improved engagement even from the usually reluctant.*

> *Students enjoy the class and say that they have fun and find it relaxing - which results in better attendance and retention. Students actually remember the concept or internalize the critical question that I am trying to teach*

And as one respondent reminds us, it is also important to keep the teacher engaged:

> *It keeps students interested. It suits different learning styles. It encourages challenging and creative responses. It makes learning enjoyable. More fun for me too.*

These examples illustrate the effectiveness of play, both in immediate learning and in longer term commitment. They show that 'fun' does not have to be contradictory to academic achievement.

4. Have you encountered any resistance to play or playful approaches? If you have, what form has this taken and what has been the effect?

Question four is again multiple: whether respondents have encountered opposition to their playful methods and, if so, where and with what consequences.

No, there has been little or no resistance

The majority of respondents confirm that they have found resistance, and even the minority who have not quality their answers. As the following examples illustrate, they appear to have obviated resistance by putting in a great deal of preparation:

> *No. But it takes much time so that it could be linked to learning.*

> *Not hugely, but it surprises students who sign up to learn history to be asked to do open ended field based tasks and to engage in role play to make sense of census materials and newspaper articles.*

> *There is a tendency to see play as superficial, so we do have to explain what we're doing. Working with first year undergrads is much easier because their expectations are not so fixed. We have to spend a lot of time undoing some of the lack of play from the 'A' Level system but they are open to this early on.*

The last quotation indicates that there is a resistance to play even at A-level teaching. The respondent goes on to suggest that play is less appropriate as students move from first year of undergraduate study.

Yes, there has been resistance....

The sources of resistance are found to be diverse, including students, academic colleagues and structural constraints (indicative of institutional opposition).

By students

Students may fail to engage due to a sense of embarrassment:

Some students feel that games are childish and will not participate

For other students, resistance is due to their unfamiliarity with the role of play in HE, as described here:

some students claim to have been unable to engage because they are used to being 'told what to do' and found themselves 'Frozen' without any idea of where to begin

One respondent offers a strategy for dealing with such students:

> *This approach may be very uncomfortable to some participants who are more familiar with a passive receiver role. Allow them to observe rather than participate*

A more political, cynical explanation is offered by some respondents: HE had been commodified and students expect value for money and have not understood the potential benefits of play:

> *Some students, in this marketised model of education we are working in, are resistant because they think it is frivolous and they are paying for us to tell them what they need to know.*

By academic colleagues

Echoing early references to play being perceived as childish and not a serious medium for learning, some comments explain why their academic colleagues are resistant:

> *Some colleagues (and students) feel that play devalues the seriousness of the discipline.*

> *It was unacceptable as an instructional method or approach*

> *...faculty colleagues. They do not take you serious because they do not believe learning can be fun.*

As with students, resistance may reflect unfamiliarity and fear of trying something different:

> *Some staff lack confidence to try approaches which give them less control.*

Institutional constraints

Lack of commitment by senior colleagues may manifest itself in institutional and systemic constraints, ranging from a packed curriculum to the need to demonstrate achievement of targets as summed up by one respondent:

> *We operate within a time-bound, results-driven culture, and have to meet specific outcomes with parity, in a pressurised environment (timetable, student numbers etc.). This results in a lack of flexibility.*

Effects of resistance

Respondents allude to the negative effects on potential learning of excluding play:

> *Academics sometimes see play as not proper teaching or learning....this hinders and inhibits thought.*

> *It worried me that teachers were more influenced by it being fun for them to play, than by the likely learning outcomes for their students.*

They also admit to the affective impact negativity has on them as individuals, as expressed by this person:

It is hurtful. Extremely hurtful. But we need to develop a thick skin when this happens.

The sense of defiance and resilience captured in these words is shared by most respondents, who are so committed to their pedagogy that they persevere against resistance. Most examples relate to students, and focus on building trusting relationships and student confidence:

I encourage people to suspend judgement and hopefully what things we have done through out will allow them to soften and be open. Building trust and rapport is important.

Some students say they are 'not creative' so I tend to not use that term and talk instead about playing around and creating in lots of different ways. This usually encourages them enough to take part more confidently.

One person explicitly uses resistance as a means of personal development:

But exploring resistance and fixed ideas about self is actually a valuable activity as well, so they are encouraged to reflect on the experience and learn from it, and also encouraged to entertain alternative views of their abilities to do various things.

A few respondents discuss their approach to colleague resistance. One strategy proposed is to conduct research in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of play, but central to all is the open attitude of the teacher, as expressed here:

But I think tolerating, respecting and accepting each other are vital.

5. What factors encourage you to utilise play in your learning and teaching activities?

The factors that encourage respondents to persist with play in their teaching are a mixture of philosophical, experience and affective, but all are underpinned by a desire and belief in improving the learning experience of their students.

Philosophy

Several people refer to their pedagogical belief, and almost apologise for their idealism:

Philosophical - I believe it makes for better engineers. Pragmatic - my experience suggests that students have better learning.

Students can learn about their own development, but also become the flexible, playful, sane person who will be successful in work and in leisure. Perhaps a bit idealistic? Why not?!

My overwhelming belief that this is the way forward in education.

When they discover play it will keep them going for a long time and they will turn into playful experimenters with their own students. How can I transmit the play bug? I guess, this is my mission ;)

Experience

Closely linked to this, respondents' experience has demonstrated the effectiveness of their pedagogy, reiterating ideas that were expressed earlier, in response to question 3. Typically,

It works and the results tend to be better.

Because it makes students happy and learning becomes permanent, they always remember the play
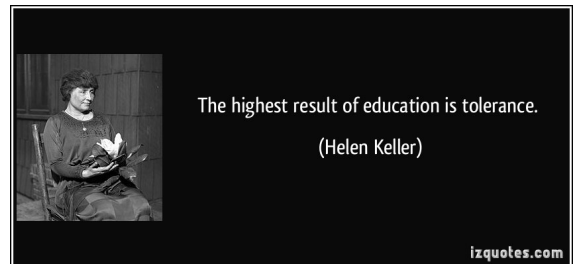
Affect

The sense of pleasure and enjoyment recur:

> *It makes it more fun for me as well as the students.*
>
> *The response of learners and my own enjoyment and enhanced learning from it.*

One respondent notes that it is important to their motivation to receive positive feedback from students. Another reminds us of the constant change we experience as teachers and the new opportunities these bring:

> *changes in the curriculum, new subjects and each cohort brings a different relationship to their learning.*

These examples illustrate again the determination and commitment of respondents to the value of play in HE.

6. What factors discourage you from utilising play in your learning and teaching activities?

The final question asked the converse question, what discourages the use of play in teaching? Once more, responses reinforce comments that have already been made, particularly in reply to question 4. As there, factors relate to students, colleagues and institutional/systemic obstacles.

Student related factors

We have already heard that some respondents are reluctant to force resistant students to accept play, and may respond to their negative feedback. Similar views are expressed here:

> *Upsetting the shy students.*

> *Clear feedback from students that the majority' prefer not to do play based activities when given a choice*

> *Student cynicism and doubt about their value; dominance of belief in the importance of cognitive and verbal understanding and reasoning*

> *Student expectations and resistance, especially later in their studies. Sometimes it's just easier to comply rather than test the boundaries.*

When worn down by exhaustion or repeated resistance, respondents may give in:

> *Fear. Tiredness. Habitual playless behaviours.*

This response shows, though, sensitivity to the readiness of a group to engage in play:

> *A sense that the group is not ready and requires more relationship building and trust.*

Colleague related factors

There are fewer comments in this section that refer to colleague resistance, perhaps to avoid repeating those made previously. Where a specific obstacle is cited, it once more reflects the lack of credibility play is seen to have in the eyes of administrators, managers and academics:

> *Having to justify things to ignorant administrators.*

> *Bureaucracy and risk to reputation....being dismissed as flakey!!!*

Negative responses from managers.

Really resistant people, hierarchical blocks, cynicism, an unwillinness to invest in the activity, even for a couple of hours.

Practical constraints

Practical obstacles may again be a reflection of non-commitment to the motion of play. They focus mostly on time, space and resources, all of which could be overcome if the role of play were valued. Comments refer to

Campus space, student attitudes.

When you are too conscious of time.

Time - time to think and create, and amount of module content.

Pressure of workload and the need to 'cover' the curriculum.

Lack of enough time for the play and also lack of adequate teaching materials.

One respondent reports, shockingly, that

I have to personally purchase most of the serious games and sims I wish to use...not recognized as supplies, the way book or journal articles are.

Resilience

Notwithstanding such obstacles, respondents remain defiant and true to their belief in the value of play. They observe

Now very little discourages me from working in this way.

I am not easily put off.
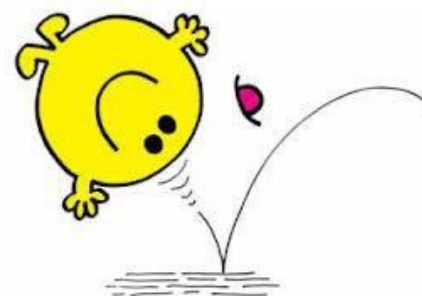
One person forces himself to imagine what it would be like if he were to give in to obstacles:

I'm not very discouraged, but these things might be relevant: students' / colleagues' perceptions of what counts as degree-level work; pressure of time; a culture of assessment-driven teaching.
Amount of time it takes to prepare, working within rigid time frames, large classes, suitability of rooms, quite often noisy

As before, resilience stems from a profound belief in the efficacy of play, and resistance makes supporters all the more determined:

When there is a negative person in a group who spreads the negativity... again I hurt, but it won't stop me. Difficulties make me more determined to make this work, to refine my approach, to get the evidence, and most of all to create learning relationships as I feel these will make a real difference to playful engagement

A final comment suggests a new point: teachers may be reluctant to pursue their belief in play for fear of losing their job:

I might feel discouraged from using playfulness in my teaching, because I might assume that other teachers and especially admin types don't value play. But I don't really care what any of them think, since my position is secure.

This remark reminds us of the courage displayed by proponents of play in Higher Education despite professional and student resistance.

Concluding thoughts

The comments provided by of our 47 respondents give us a persuasive account of the value of play in HE. They consistently display a genuine belief if the benefits play can bring to the quality and endurance of learning.

Perhaps surprisingly, resistance appears to be as much from learners as it is from academic peers. This stems from a culture in which play is equated with childishness and having fun, and has pervaded education in the secondary sector.

Our respondents offer a rich spread of experience and concrete examples on which further good practice might be built. We are indebted to them for generously sharing their thoughts and practices.

Editor's note: Alison's conclusions and tips for use of play, the final article in this magazine, reflect many of the views and experiences of our respondents. Her article is a neat complement to our survey.

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Chrissi Nerantzi: What's the problem with having fun?

INVITATION TO READERS
We welcome additional perspectives - please add them to the survey.
These will be incorporated into a more substantial report in the next few months. SURVEY LINK https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NKQSXM8

PLAY, PLAYING & PLAYFULNESS: LEARNING FROM WINNIE THE POOH

Lorraine Stefani

Lorraine is Professor of Higher Education Strategic Engagement at the University Of Auckland (UOA), New Zealand.

I used to think that if people knew that teddy bears, and one Ted in particular provide(s) a great deal of the inspiration I find for my academic work, they would consider me to be slightly odd – childish, immature, not serious or perhaps just playful! But then the Teds found their way into my office as well as into my home and even if I was considered odd, the Teds proved to be a talking point with almost all of my colleagues admitting to having a special Ted. What one finds with Teds is that they don't interrupt when you are talking, they don't outgrow you intellectually, they are never disloyal, critical or unkind and they listen attentively to all your problems. What more could an academic ask for?

> *"When you are a Bear of Very Little Brain, and you Think of Things, you find sometimes that a Thing which seemed very Thingish inside you is quite different when it gets out into the open and has other people looking at it."* [1]

The quote above is one of my favourites from A.A.Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* (1926) and it is suggested that Milne didn't write the 'Pooh' stories and poems for children. He intended them for the child within us all. Academia is almost always considered such a serious business that talk of play or fun in the classroom is rather outlandish, but as Sutton-Smith quotes in his 1997 classic, *The Ambiguity of Play,* 'play is a paradox because it both is and is not what it appears to be'[2,3]. The Teds in my life and my work both are and are not what they appear to be. The Winnie the Pooh quote above, to me epitomises the *'liminal'* space which I occupy during my critical thinking and reflection in the
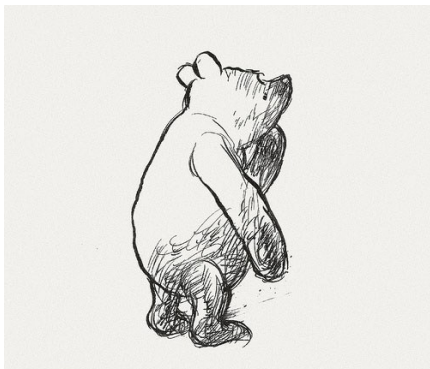
context of my academic role. Great thoughts in one's head are often tricky to articulate and once articulated they often seem to border on the ordinary and the mundane when one puts them out there for view! I use the term 'liminal' in a similar sense to Turner[4] in his suggestion that *'play occupies a threshold between reality and unreality'*.

So what of play and playfulness in the classroom? In my reality, play and playfulness in the classroom are about making learning fun, making it enjoyable and engaging. Building trust and relationships with learners is an active and deliberate process, making space for creativity and imagination. Fun in the classroom is not always interpreted in a constructive manner but the following cameo of my introduction to learning as an adventure, rather like those played out by Pooh and friends in the Hundred Acre Wood, is intended to give an insight into positive and negative interpretations of play during learning.

A number of years ago when I was still a science lecturer, I was so bored with the practical laboratory classes I gave that were a 'fixed' part of the curriculum that I couldn't imagine any joy, creativity or fun for the students in slavishly following a series of recipes with known outcomes if followed properly. In order to bring some excitement into these practical classes I organised a group of staff to work with me in devising a completely new approach for the First Year Biochemistry students.

Together we developed three innovative projects which required students to work in teams, which in itself was novel at the time. The projects provided authentic learning experiences albeit that as an academic team working on this we had never heard such language ascribed to learning. The projects were open-ended meaning there were no 'right' answers to the problems that were posed in the projects, rather the students in their group would set out on a learning adventure. The student groups would present their work in the form of a poster to be judged by staff, students and employers [5, 6], introducing peer and self assessment into a class for the very first time. A risky venture at the time.

While it may seem unbelievable today, there was shock and horror at the time from the Head of Department and other staff because the 'recipe' style practical classes had been running successfully (apparently) for over 20 years! But what was most interesting was watching the students in action, the engagement, the fun, the creativity, the competition. The 'evidence' that effective learning could stem from an apparently 'anarchic' approach to teaching came in the form of a national prize for innovation and several publications arising from the work. No longer were we looked at with scepticism for breaking down the decades old norms!

While this example of fun, allowing learners to 'play' with ideas, to be creative, to be adventurous, rather than stifled is quite an old example, amazingly the publications arising from this active and authentic learning approach are still being requested today! The 'new' format created something in the way of student power. The learning experience had been so much *fun* for the students while at the same time enabling the development of a raft of skills including team work, economic awareness, leadership, time management, problem solving and research skills that the students themselves pushed for more of this type of approach to all of their practical laboratory classes, not just during the first year of their study. The fun that the students had within class and outside of the time we could observe both was and was not what it necessarily appeared to be – an anarchic rabble! The posters presented by the students showed the significant levels of learning and engagement with the problems that had occurred.

Moving forward almost two decades, the idea of the 'flipped classroom'[7] is very much in vogue. Flipping the classroom also supports learning as 'playful' in the sense that it provides a platform for learning as an adventure – an adventure with the potential outcome of students co-creating new knowledge, a playful space where the unknown is the norm. As I look back on my own earlier teaching adventures, my view is that we were essentially flipping the classroom, giving learners more control over their learning, not knowing ourselves what the learning outcomes would be but knowing we were embedding a raft of critical learning skills into the practical classes!

Play, playing and playfulness in the classroom is a joyous experience but it should be borne in mind that it does require the facilitators of learning to take risks and have the courage to engender 'play' or the potential for the *adventure and fun* of learning to be realised and to be comfortable in a space that both is and is not what it appears to be!

"You can't stay in your corner of the Forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes."[8]

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CREATING EDUCATIONAL GAMES: BREAKING WITH TRADITION

Maha Bali

I am Associate Professor of Practice at the Center for Learning and Teaching at the American University in Cairo, where I also teach educational game design for undergrads and ed tech for teachers. I'm a MOOCaholic and writeaholic. I'm co-facilitator of edcontexts.org, columnist at Hybrid Pedagogy and editorial board member of the Journal of Pedagogic Development.

Some would argue that I have it easy. I teach an educational game design module as part of a co-taught 3-module course on Creative Thinking and Problem-Solving. This is at a liberal arts institution, the American University in Cairo, and my students are mostly first/second year undergraduate students from different disciplines taking this as a liberal arts option, which is meant to develop their written and oral communication skills as well as develop critical, and of course, creative thinking and problem-solving capabilities. I only meet my students for 8 class sessions over a 4-week period.

What I do in my classes (as also suggested by educational game design guru Ana Salter) is play games in class, help them reflect on games, and create their own games. You may think I have it easy (well, it's easier to engage students by playing games than it is to teach physics or economics in more traditional ways), but you'd be missing a really important part that makes this course difficult. I need to help learners think about how to make those games educational, and we all know how delicate the balance is between making a game fun/engaging and making it have educational value. I also add one more constraint: all materials used should be repurposed or recycled material: I don't want students to spend money on making this game look attractive; I want them to focus on the substance. The first time I taught the module, my students designed creative and fun games, but 3/4 were board games (limited in terms of creativity of format) and 3/4 tested memorization (limited in terms of educational value). So I revised the way I did my course, and I think these four changes I made helped tremendously, each in a different way; only two of these used technology:

Expand Game Imagination

I let students play games like nothing they had ever seen before - on Twitter: An hour-long Twitter Scavenger Hunt to introduce Twitter (watch this clip I created about it at https://youtu.be/CtmhQ3z5FVQ), and a 3-day international game, #tvsz, to promote digital literacy. This challenged their thinking about what counts as a game, and how one can learn through games. Almost all were confused at first, even those who had used Twitter before, but especially those who were less tech savvy or more wary of social media. In their blogs reflecting on the games, many had paradigm shifts about how Twitter can be used. Students who had used Twitter before said things like:

> *At first i thought it would be boring and i wouldn't learn anything new but i was wrong actually I spoke to people i would have never thought of talking to them and I [k]new how twitter [which] for me was only for fun can be also educational.*

Another student who was new to Twitter said:

> *I am not a big fan of twitter but yesterday I felt there is something new about it. It's not about expressing people's ideas only but sharing them also with others so others would benefit too...I don't mind playing this game again. I think there is more about twitter now than I thought and I think if educational systems started using social network in education, they will have better results*

One of the games we played (#tvsz) was one where they were encouraged to challenge rules and create new ones. Here is what one student said:

> *The twitter game is not like any other game you can think of and it definitely exceeded my expectations… But the marvel of the game lies*

in not all that but it has no rules and it awaits new suggestions for improvements which makes it different from any other game ever.

One key aspect of using Twitter in class was to ensure students knew they could create a separate twitter account for class use, and that they could choose not to post personal details of themselves on their profiles.

2. Let Them Discover Memorization Isn't Cool

I invited a guest speaker from here in Egypt, who showed them two versions of a game called Baladna developed by her company. The first version tested memorization, the second was more deeply engaging and educational. We did not tell them which game was newer. They played both games and judged for themselves why games testing memory were not a good option. It was experiential learning - I did not need to tell them a game testing memorization was not engaging or very educational; they figured it out themselves. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fq5l-GLnaM8

3. Invite Hacking

Here, I use the term hacking with a positive connotation as something that challenges norms, so I use "hack" to mean "remixes that repurpose text, media or physical objects for a new purpose" (as understood by the connected learning MOOC #clmooc I participated in last summer). I had a class hack-a-thon session where they hacked fairytales, then hacked existing games to meet random learning outcomes their colleagues had written down. This encouraged the concept of hacking; taking something that already exists and playfully manipulating it and remixing it into something new. My purpose was for them to recognize their capacity to do this in a one-hour class session, as a step towards spending more time designing a game from scratch.

4. Play with the Syllabus

I did something playful but not game-related at all. I asked them to liquefy the syllabus - to take one module of the course, recreate it in a multimodal engaging way, and change a couple of assignments/activities. This helped put them in the place of the teacher and give us feedback on the course in a playful manner. Students caught onto the value of the assignment as feedback to us as teachers; for example, one of them blogged, *"It's like an evaluation for the course in the*

sense of testing your creativity to make this course more interesting and more appealing". They also recognized the value of the assignment as part of the educational game design module, as one student blogged, the assignment *"made me think of the many possible ways that education can be an exciting means of learning and not just a forced one"*. Several students found it empowering to put themselves in the place of the teacher and imagine how to benefit from their perspectives as students. For example, see how one student made a Prezi of my module, and notice the tone he used in his writing. Reading it made me laugh, but also made me reflect on how I sounded to my students. I think this assignment helped them think of how to present their own games as they designed them.

Looking back, I realize that the thread running through all of these changes is encouragement of playful hacking and emergence. For students to imagine how to modify rules of a game (like #tvsz) or a course (liquefying the syllabus), or to recognize that creating a game does not mean you stop improving upon it just because you've produced and sold it - that creativity is emergent, always evolving… never really finished. As my friend Simon Ensor says, why would we want to finish anyway?

There were of course challenges, such as students feeling unfamiliar with Twitter and some being uncomfortable at first. Also, the "liquefy syllabus" assignment encouraged the use of new technologies but I allowed students who wanted to use simpler technology like PowerPoint or Prezi to do so, because my main goal was not the tech.

A major challenge for me is the very short amount of time I get with my students. I would love to have them test out their game ideas on authentic audiences and have authentic audiences assess the quality of their work, which I am trying this semester. Next semester I hope to have them develop games after discussing ideas with a community of possible users.

This semester I have invited my students to submit their "liquefy the syllabus" and "behind the scenes of making our game" assignments to Academic Creator. The blog posts describing students' work can be accessed at http://blog.mahabali.me/blog/pedagogy/games-pedagogy/excited-about-student-prototypes/

image credit: http://blogs.educationscotland.gov.uk/consolarium/2010/10/19/ea-create-new-game-new-

PLAY IS NOT 'A FOUR LETTER WORD': THE LECTURE-PERFORMANCE AS A PLAYFUL PEDAGOGY

Matt Connell and Lisa Clughen

Matt is Subject Leader of the Social Theory subject team in the School of Arts and Sciences at Nottingham Trent University. Lisa is Academic Support Coordinator in the same School, with a special interest in academic literacies also at the Nottingham Trent University.

What follows is a dialogue about a lecture-performance delivered at Nottingham Trent University, UK. In it, we discuss the embodied nature of what we call 'play-as-pedagogy,' which can serve as a serious critique of the sometimes sclerotic nature of contemporary academic culture. The dialogue is between Lisa Clughen, a Spanish lecturer and specialist in writing support, and Matt Connell, a lecturer in Media and Communications whose lecture-performance was the catalyst for the discussion. We have chosen to write about the lecture as a performance in the form of a dialogue because it's a more playful genre than that of the traditional academic article.

Lisa: Matt, I've heard about your Level One lecture on 'Remix Culture'. Is it true that you use a set of DJ decks as part of the lecture? I'm carrying out research on the 'lecture-performance' and it sounds like a good example.

Matt: Yes, it's true. The lecture uses some well-established aesthetic concepts, like collage and bricolage, as a way of showing the deep roots of contemporary remix culture. By using performance on the decks I try to bring these rather dry concepts to life in an accessible way. So, to evoke the bricoleur's construction of art from collages of 'found objects' I use the decks to cut together a few records, salvaged from charity shops, then I mash-up some cover versions to illustrate the notion of all culture being a palimpsest, that kind of thing. When you say 'lecture-performance', you sound like you are referring to something I should know about!?

Lisa: Well, the lecture-performance is a well-known practice in the Creative Arts. Through recognising the ways in which the explanatory nature of the lecture can enhance an acting performance and also the performative aspects of lecturing itself, lecture-performances mobilise the idea that teaching itself is an art. Milder[1] sets all this out. I'm very taken with the lecture-performance idea and can see that it holds some merit for lecturers even though they may not be performing artists as such.

Matt: OK, that's definitely what I'm up to here, though I should confess that this lecture is the exception for me: most of the time, I'm quite traditional. But by self-consciously making this lecture a playful performance, by performing play, I'm trying to give a kind of *permission*, framing academic work as something that can escape the hidebound. Both figuratively, and literally, I'm trying to wake up the students - for the last couple of years this session has been timetabled at 9am, on the day after the big weekly student night out!

Lisa: Framing the lecture as a performance certainly asks that we consider ways to engage our audience, a challenge we face daily. But what do you mean by 'performing play' and granting a 'permission'?

Matt: It looks like I'm messing about on the decks, but actually I've practised the routines extensively, and I'm hamming it up a bit - performing. And this performance of play is meant to say, 'you can do this too, you can introduce the free play of ideas into your work, academic work can bring the body into contact with the mind in the same way that a DJ works their creative ideas up into a form of physical practice.' I sometimes get one of the students to come down to the front and have a go.

Lisa: I really like the way you are connecting the body with the mind in your performance. And I can certainly see how activities like this can open up possibilities for audience participation and types of engagement which
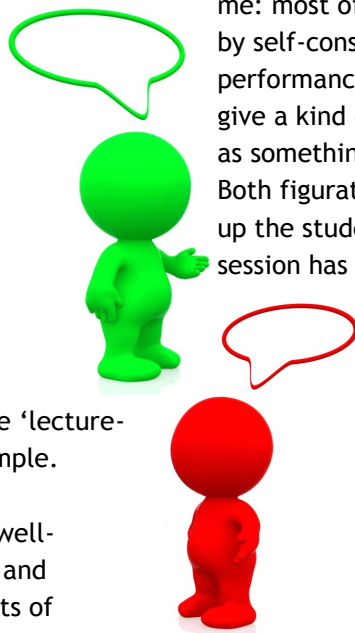
may involve imagining and play during the lecture. They also shine a spotlight on the *affect* in learning – performers, after all, don't merely want to make their audience think, they wish to move their audience, excite them, enthral them! I suppose it's a way of inviting the audience to embody the ideas they are presenting in their performance, rather than merely experience them intellectually. Having said that, though, lecturers aren't entertainers! Should we really take seriously the notion that the lecture can be a playful performance?

Matt: Well, the funny thing is that if you take the play out of learning, it becomes only playing at learning and loses its *seriousness*.

Lisa: Playing at learning!? That sounds like an insult to traditional modes of delivery.

Matt: Well, I'm simply turning around the form of scepticism which greeted my first proposals, years ago, to put on a module on DJing. Some greeted the notion of getting a pair of decks rather fearfully, as though I was proposing building a crystal meth factory in the Media Block and inviting accusations of dumbing down the curriculum: 'But Matt, is there really a serious side to this, surely there isn't a scholarly academic literature on DJing?'

Lisa: (*Laughs*). So how would you respond to their question?

Matt: Well, of course, there is - both a literature and a serious side to using performance and play for teaching. Seriousness is definitely a neglected aspect of play.

Lisa: Here – have a look at Nietzsche's[2 p260] paragraph 'Seriousness in Play', in which he recalls Plato: 'all in all, nothing human is worth taking very seriously; nevertheless…'. Nietzsche is famous for his playful games with language, his aphoristic style and above all for his venomous wit - yet he deals with really serious stuff using these techniques. You are working along those lines, aren't you? You seem to be saying that without play, learning risks becoming mechanical, shallow and less serious? For me, it also becomes somehow disembodied….

Matt: ….yes, the bodily dimension is crucial to play, and to performance. 'Passion' is probably the key word here, because it connects body and mind. I'm pretty Freudian about all this: play is serious because it sublimates the big bodily drives: sex and aggression.

Lisa: I knew you were going to drag Freud into this, you always do…

Matt: (*laughs*) … of course, you know me well. I could do a whole lecture on this (maybe I should!): Play has erotic (fore-play) and aggressive (play-fight) dimensions which are clear in the pleasures of art and the exertions of sport. The DJ 'battle' is a play-fight undertaken with deadly seriousness, underlined by the kung-fu schtick of hip-hop, which emphasises discipline, repetition and craft as the undergirding of creative play. The DJ plays with mixes on their own before daring to 'play them out'- perform them - so that they don't die behind the decks in front of an audience.

Lisa: I've noticed how violent metaphors like that are surprisingly common in this area of play: the DJ battle, the killer tune, the punchy mix.
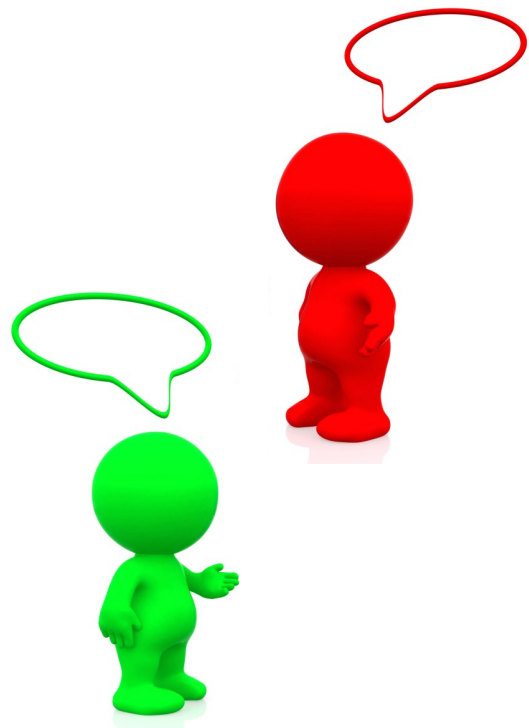
Matt: That's right. And as for sex, it's a commonplace that the tease–release pleasures of the artful mix which increases musical tension on the dance-floor before triggering the explosive payoff are a form of playfully sublimated eroticism. DJs playing on their own in their bedroom are playing with themselves; DJs who play out seek to foster a fertile exchange with an embodied audience. Woe betide DJs who get in front of an audience and then pleasure themselves without catering to the bodily-erotic needs of their dance-floor!
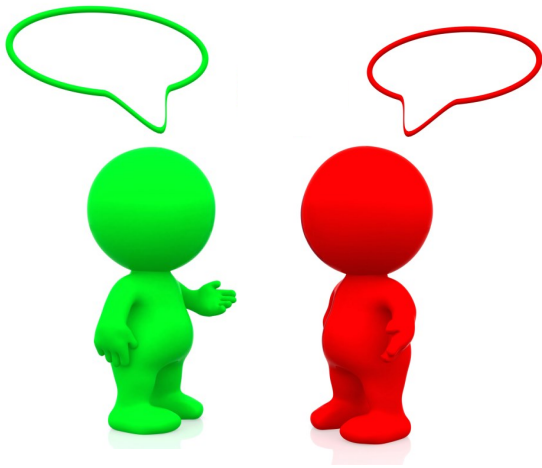
Lisa: And the lecturer has to remember something similar - if we simply show off how clever we are, we lose the students. You need to engage your audience and that means recognising their embodiedness as you do so.

Matt: Perhaps that's central. The lecture-performance is a genre that melds the mind with the body.

Lisa: I think so. Viewing the lecture as a performance provokes a move from seeing lectures as places where experts 'convey' ideas, to seeing them as spaces where students can be mobilised to make them their own – to embody ideas, rather than just 'think' about them. It's a way of countering overly rationalistic pedagogies and discourses around education[3] and admitting that the body is fully implicated in knowledge-production.

Matt: I also think it has a critical function as it gives permission for play and creativity within such a politically fraught university experience that increasingly promotes a power-bound and commercial transaction between student as 'customer' and university as 'dispenser of cultural capital.' Adorno's [4p177-8] point about the school system being totally administered can equally be applied to HE in the UK. In the impoverished atmosphere of the 'totally administered university', to paraphrase Adorno, suffocation beckons as a risk-averse strategic instrumentalism takes over…

Lisa: …meaning: students may become more concerned with learning how to pass than with real learning.

Matt: Exactly! - that's what I meant by the paradox 'if you take the play out of learning, you end up merely playing at learning.' Deep learning only comes through play *because*, not despite, play serves its own ends and not anything else's. If a po-faced mimicry of learning

eclipses playful exploration, conformity is the result. We abandon play as we become self-conscious: no one wants to look silly. The good educator must break this taboo and be unembarrassed, serving as a model for properly creative thought and action.

Lisa: Yes. And play allows for a more relaxed space in which creative thought can flow. I'm not surprised people raised their eyes when you told them you were going to be performing in your lectures, though. Playing with ideas doesn't seem 'academic', but maybe that's because to be 'academic' is still thought of as 'following the life of the mind' (as one of my friend's tutors put it when he expressed his pleasure that my friend was pursuing post-graduate study). I think the Cartesian split between mind and body still pervades the academy. Despite the demolition of that dualism by a range of disciplines, those same disciplines reproduce the dualism in their modes of delivery and language - it's easy to advocate something on a rational level and much more difficult to embody your point. I heard someone say that play is often considered a four letter word in education[5] referring to this taboo, whereby 'play' becomes an insult. Play, and its grown up expression in performance, certainly needs to be reclaimed as a legitimate part of academic practice. We should write something about this...

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Image adapted from http://cliparts.co/cliparts/yTk/rx5/yTkrx5o7c.jpg

SCIENCE PLAYTIME
Mike Wride

Mike Wride is an Assistant Professor in the School of Natural Sciences at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland and a visiting lecturer at Schumacher College, Devon. He recently completed his MEd degree at Trinity in Higher Education Teaching & Learning. The title of his dissertation was 'Re-Creating' Science in Higher Education: Exploring a Creativity Philosophy. Outside his job Mike is a creative soccer and athletics coach, loves gardening and garden design and loves to write, draw and paint! Mike has a a creative writing blog The Seagull Speaks at http://theseagullspeaks.blogspot.ie wridem@tcd.ie Twitter: @WrideMike

"It is the very nature of play that nothing is taken for granted as being absolutely unalterable and that its outcomes and conclusions cannot be known beforehand."[1]

"Any search for absolute, fixed knowledge is illusory since all knowledge arises out of the shifting, changing activity of creative perception, free play, unfoldment into action and its return into experience."[1]

A cold Friday in December in Dublin…as it often is, the wind is biting, blowing in from the North East off the Irish Sea, across Dublin Bay and up the River Liffey. Blustering its busy way between the buildings of Trinity College. It's 9:45 am. I'm heading towards the old Botany lecture theatre-a very traditional space…wooden benches for seats that seem to trap the history here within them. How many lecturers' words have fallen on sleepy students' deaf ears in this place?

So, I'm mulling things over in my head as I shuffle along against the wind: What is it I want to achieve today? The truth is I'm panicking ….slightly! As far as I'm concerned the wind can blow as hard as it likes if it pushes me away….What on earth have I let myself in for? Was this whole idea of having the students do creative presentations today a mad one? What if they don't engage with this at all? What if it's just a total shambles? Why oh why did I ever come up with this idea?

A couple of weeks ago, I'd had a tutorial with these Functional Biology and Plant Science students on Problem Solving and Creativity in Science. It seemed to go well enough….Now they have to present the results of their research on a creative breakthrough in science and/or a creative scientist – on any subject of their choice. But they have to do it creatively in groups!

> *"People have an interesting response to being creative or 'playing'. I think it is very healthy and it has opened my eyes to the fact that not all of the best work is done staring at a computer screen."*
> **Student Reflection**

We had started by playing with juggling balls in my first class with them in their third year. They're expecting some serious science and what do they get? ……juggling! Not quite what they expected! After the initial shock, they begin to drop their rigid preconceptions…. "Come on, let's juggle!" I say… "No, we can't juggle!" they say! "Yes, you can!" I say! … "It's behind yooooouuuu"! They gradually begin to engage with this 'madman'. They begin to let go of some of the protective methods they've set up previously in the anonymous classes of 200 plus science students lumped together in Freshman Science. Now they start to engage with their peers, they're getting to know each other. It's a relatively small group, which helps.

There are still some shy ones who don't participate, but even they're smiling…. There is a lightness developing. There is laughter. We try individual juggling and good old-fashioned ball throwing (one or two said they hadn't thrown a ball for years, since they were children!). Now there's a circle in the seminar room with everyone throwing and catching the balls…one ball, then two, then three! Patterns emerge and decay, we discuss chaos, complexity, emergence, the idea of flow…of what it is to play and have fun again. It's certainly not biology - maybe a bit of physics, but it helps bond them definitely.

But, but, but….that's history now. I've had a few sessions with them since then – discussing ethics and some philosophy of science…developing some more playful and creative ways of thinking I hope and more group work too.

But, but, but…what about these creativity presentations today? Well, it's the first time I've ever done anything like this….

I always viewed science as creative, working in the laboratory or reading - discovering new things and making novel connections between them. But, I'd become disillusioned with the pouring of the fixed, text-book 'facts' into the 'empty vessels' of the passive students. I'd concluded that we should move in a new direction in which greater freedom for the 'play of thought' is permitted[1]. I'd decided science teaching needed to be more playful and less rigid - to harmonise playfulness, ideas and creativity[2]. I'd discovered that Vygotsky described play as "imagination in action" – the creative process develops in play as new and unfamiliar meanings emerge[3]. There seemed to me that a narrowness of vision had developed in science, owing to specialisation and fragmentation. I felt that science and science education had lost the wider view of science as a creative, flexible and dynamic process rather then something rigid and fixed - there can be no creativity in rigidity. But, how would I learn about how I might practically alter this view?

So, I enrolled in the MEd course in Higher Education Teaching and Learning part time through the School of Education at Trinity and had been taking this during the previous two years. I had developed an interest in creativity in science education in the first module. I had always had interests in art and writing. I now felt inspired to explore this area further in the research for my MEd dissertation on 'Re-creating Science in Higher Education'. I began looking at this from a philosophical perspective of nature and science itself as dynamic and inherently creative processes.

During one MEd evening, we were asked to present a 'micro-teaching' session and my colleagues said…. "Well, it's obvious, you have to get the students to present science in a creative way if you're going to teach them about creativity in science". "Doh! Why didn't I think of that?"…Locked in my own dogmas I guess.

So, this was the first step – to go beyond my own risk aversion to try something creative and different with my students - to open up possibilities, rather than close them down with 'facts'. To help make science live again, for both me and for my students.

Anyway, a little (new) knowledge is a dangerous thing…..etc etc And I could always blame my colleagues if this all went horribly wrong…

Ok, here goes….I turn the corner and….. "Hmmmm! This is unusual."…several students standing outside wearing lab coats and goggles…engaged in animated conversations….a muffled "Good morning." from me as I walk by them and enter the doorway to the old building… they hardly acknowledge me, they're so wrapped up in whatever it is they're discussing.

I pass the stern (mostly) faces of the past Chairs of Botany who hang in their golden frames on the wall as I climb the stairs. I feel their silent eyes judging me from the past. "Play has no place in the serious and earnest business of learning the facts and truths of science young man! You should know better!" There's an audible din, a cacophony of student voices (certainly not from the massed Chairs of Botany), which get louder as I get closer to the door of the old theatre…this is definitely not the norm!

I'm expecting the usual placid and passive faces, but ....deep breath...and through the threshold!....There are various groups scattered around, animated, active and loud conversations, gesticulation, laughter... I realise that there are four girls in the corner dressed as old ladies, with sticks and purposely bent backs... I hear the word Viagra...Ah, I see, it's a play about the discovery and development of Viagra!... Over there, another group of young woman all wearing moustaches and lab coats, Nobody's noticed me yet..... I'm standing behind the lectern just surveying the scene. This is (not very) organized chaos...To my right, a group is blowing up balloons, there is a tray full of rice crispy squares (something about GM rice), another group is putting the final touches to a cardboard cut-out model of what looks to be (with some artistic license built in) a DNA molecule! Another group is rapidly going over a flip chart with some beautiful art work – wonderful illustrated figures ....that looks like Darwin, that looks like Wallace!

OK, so we're off....let the presentations begin!... No power points please....there's a silent, sepia-toned movie of Marie Curie written, directed and starred in by the students. Brilliant!!!! Black and white with 'plonky' 1920s piano music and lots of humour...

One after the other the groups of 3-4 students perform...and, and, and...they love it!!! One and all, they've engaged with it, the process, the science and scientists and each other and I'm loving it too. I'm still trying to grade...to think about the scientific content, but also to acknowledge the extent of their creativity...Bless them, the Viagra girls' play was hilarious – everyone in stitches with laughter, but sadly there could have been a bit more science...they admitted this later when they reflected on it all. The chemistry Who Wants to be a Millionaire Quiz was great – loads of audience participation. The lads who brought the real horse's heart in to talk about William Harvey, discoverer of the blood circulation, excelled themselves! Now, there's a puppet show ....now a day time TV interview show 'Cultured' – with one of the students acting the part of Lynn Margulis, who came up with the endosymbiotic theory.

Phew, I think it worked....A couple of hours later, it's all done... and the old theatre, to be fair, has had a bit of a makeover....balloons and party popper streamers strewn around the place...plenty of chocolate flavoured errant rice crispies now decorating the old benches. The DNA model now on the bookshelf on the far side sadly no longer upright and proud, but now more like the leaning tower of Pizza!

I have to make my apologies and depart - another lecture to give ....As I leave the theatre, the laughter and noise continues, but gradually fades behind me. Well, what a relief...now I just need to assess the assignment, consisting of the science as well as a reflection of each student on the process of engaging in this experiment....I guess the risk was worth it! Science playtime was fun!

I felt re-invigorated about science as a playful and creative activity and about the potential for science students to embody this! I realised that they're crying out for more creative ways of learning. I also felt like I had evolved in the process. I had overcome my own fears to try something new and take a risk! And I had thoroughly enjoyed it. The Botany lecture theatre had certainly been livened up a bit and perhaps the Chairs of Botany, fixed in place in their frames on the stairwell, might approve after all ...maybe!

URLs

Student Movies

http://functionalbiologytcd.blogspot.ie/2015/01/cultured-lynn-margulis.html

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BEYOND GAMIFICATION: PLAY IN HIGHER EDUCATION
Nicola Whitton

Nicola is Professor of Professional Learning in the Faculty of Education at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her research focuses on digital innovation in learning and teaching and, in particular games and learning in the context of Higher Education. Her research interests include interaction design, the impact of motivation and engagement, active learning design, and the pedagogy of play. She has led research projects in gaming for older adults, collaborative game building as a learning approach, alternate reality games for student induction, and an investigation into student conceptions of fun.

For many years, discussions of play in adult learning have centred on the use of game-based learning, however, this is fast being replaced with increasing rhetoric around gamification. Gamification is the use of game mechanics, such as points, badges and leaderboards, in non-game contexts, with the aim of increasing participant motivation[1]. The use of gamification techniques in educational contexts has increased rapidly in recent years, including many recent examples in Higher Education. Gamification techniques encourage engagement by providing players with clear and achievable goals and rewards, showing continual progression, and by supporting competition or collaboration within a community. Gamification has

advantages over traditional game-based learning in that it can still increase learner engagement but is relatively cheap and easy to implement, easily understandable by staff and students, and also allows lecturers to monitor levels of learner participation.

Despite appearing to be an obvious approach to increasing learner engagement, there are some serious issues associated with gamification in Higher Education. A model based on game mechanics will simply not be motivational to all learners, and may be seen as

inappropriate or childish by many; some aspects, in particular competition, are more likely to appeal to male learners than female[2]. There may also be a novelty value aspect to the approach, so that learners' initial motivational levels are unlikely to be sustained throughout a course of study. Equally problematic is that participants in gamified systems quickly learn how to 'play the system', for example, by exploiting loopholes in the game mechanics that enable them to win at the expense of intended learning.

The fundamental problem with gamification is the nature of the motivation that it encourages: extrinsic rather than intrinsic. This means that learners are encouraged to engage with game mechanics to receive external rewards rather than to engage with learning activities for their own intrinsic value. Gamified systems are underpinned by behaviourist principles, so they provide rewards in response to certain types of behaviour rather than recognising and rewarding deep learning. This is problematic for two reasons. First, unless the behaviour that is rewarded by the system is very closely aligned with the desired learning outcomes then students may be engaging with the gamified system but not learning what is intended; second, there is evidence that extrinsic rewards can actually undermine those who are intrinsically motivated to engage[3].

Gamification focuses on the mechanics of games and not on the real potential of playfulness to support learning by increasing engagement and making learning fun. It is missing the point of play in education. Using playful techniques for learning, such as storytelling, creation of mysteries, creative development or objects and artefacts, puzzle-solving or exploration and discovery, allows for the creation of a 'magic circle' of play [4, 5]. This is a designated play space, mutually-signified (tacitly or explicitly) by those who are immersed in the play experience, in which the normal rules and relationships of the classroom do not apply.

For example, by taking part in the game players of Monopoly tacitly agree to adopt capitalist principles (regardless of their real life political leanings) and abide by the game rules (to some extent anyway) in order to create a magic circle in which the game happens. These spaces allow learners to be free to experiment, develop creative alternatives, and practise skills in a safe environment. Crucially, and unlike most current assessment systems in Higher Education, failure is not penalised but expected and even encouraged. Failure is integral to any gaming experience – there is little point in playing a game where success is guaranteed. In play spaces, failure, practice and improvement are intrinsic to learning, and that failure does not have consequences in the real world so allows for learning and reflection in a stress-free environment. Play allows for exploration, for learners to take part in new experiences, explore new identities and perspectives; it promotes empathy, emotional understanding, and pro-social behaviour. The benefits of play go far beyond the motivational benefits of gamification.

However, playful learning is not a simple solution. Its adoption, particularly in Higher Education, is more significant than just a change in pedagogic approach. Play is, by its nature, removed from real world consequences, so how can it be seen to be appropriate or accepted in a context where the process of assessment is a primary motivation for many learners? I believe that the use of play in Higher Education requires a fundamental rethink of the systems, practices and policies of our institutions; it is much more than a pedagogic technique, it is a philosophy of learning. When I first began to research in this field, I was passionate about the potential of games and learning, and still am largely, while recognising its limitations. Gamification, and even games-based learning to some extent, may offer strategies to increase learner engagement, but they do not offer the possibility of real transformation. My focus is now on the potential of playful learning as a real opportunity to reconsider the purpose and nature of university study and engage with learners on a far deeper level.

> *Crucially, and unlike most current assessment systems in Higher Education, failure is not penalised but expected and even encouraged. Failure is integral to any gaming experience – there is little point in playing a game where success is guaranteed.*

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JUST HOW PLAYFUL IS BOB DYLAN?

Peter Gossman

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Just how playful is Bob Dylan? Here is an artist who 'went electric'. The famous heckle "Judas" being documented in 'Like the night: The Road to the free trade hall'[1]. Here is an artist who released a recording of Christmas 'standards' including Must Be Santa[2]. Here is an artist who even managed to record a lyric "wiggle, wiggle, wiggle, like a bowl of soup"[3]. Along the way, he has also managed, amongst other things, Like a rolling stone, Just like a woman and Forever young. As one writer noted "you can't get Hamlet or Like a Rolling Stone every time out of the traps, but Wiggle Wiggle?"[4p.126]. There are teaching parallels here. Each session taught cannot be a masterpiece but some ought to be.

So what drives Dylan creatively? Amabile[5] argues prosaically that creativity is a solution to problem. "A product or response will be judged creative to the extent to that (a) it is both a novel and appropriate, useful, correct or valuable response to the task-at-hand, and (b) the task is heuristic rather than algorithmic (p.35). For Dylan was the 'task-at-hand' to entertain? The sublime lyrics of Forever Young cannot have been written as a solution to a task-at-hand. For teachers is the task-at-hand to engage? Teaching arguably is actually making a connection between ourselves, our subject and with our students[6]. Are Dylan's songs a useful, correct, valuable and heuristic response to the task of entertaining? Perhaps. In the same way, that teaching is about engagement. Yet some intangible creative 'playfulness' and connecting seems absent.

Viewing such teaching creativity in Amabile's prosaically constraining way seems to do violence to the thinking process behind the idea. Does Dylan simply do what he does because he *needs* to – a kind of intrinsic creativity? In his work you get a strong sense of 'playing' for example the reworking of old songs in a new way see[7]. In a review Erlewine[8] notes " those moments [of song revision] work because of pizzazz, although those are the very moments that will make most long-term Dylan fans bristle" he then asks "who is this for?" Clearly, the reworking is not 'problem solving' unless we cast the problem as Dylan's own boredom with repeating songs as they were recorded.

There are teaching parallels here too. For teachers the creative 'problem-novel solution' issue, which might be constructed as a kind of extrinsic creativity, is mixed up between 'creative teaching' and 'teaching for creativity' and for the later an association economic prosperity. The two are arguably related[9] and it is hard to imagine how teaching for creativity can be undertaken without being a creative and 'playful' teacher. How much would or could creativity in students be enhanced by lecturing about the creative process? Cremin[10] notes that creative teaching "is seen to involve teachers in making learning more interesting and effective and using imaginative approaches in the classroom" (p.36). Sale[11] agrees and notes that "creative teaching occurs when a teacher combines existing knowledge in some novel form to get useful results in terms of facilitating student learning" (p.14). Both echo Amible's definition with the teaching seemingly 'solving' learning in the form of; for Cremin 'effective' and for Sale 'useful results'. In either case it is hard to envisage how they could be measured, perhaps more knowledge retained for longer. The alternative could be teaching for connection

with an aim of enhancing the student journey, a more humanistic/Rogerian 'becoming'.

Could it be that some teachers are playful with their practice and 'intrinsically creative', that is they seek to develop and rework their teaching, like Dylan and songs, with no more purpose that to keep interested and connected with their subject and students? I would suggest that when teachers stop trying to refresh creatively and playfully their work it is time to stop.

For me I find that music, and often that of Dylan, allows a playfulness to enter into teaching and the scholarship of it. Here are three examples.

♦ Example one, to connect with students on a first module I posed some rather obvious forum questions on the VLE, what do you expect …?, why are you studying …? and a rogue what is your favorite Bob Dylan song? In terms of response (and I hope connection), it provoked a great deal of discussion, including, and this is the truth, "I don't know any Dylan songs but my favorite song of all time is 'lay lady lay'." In addition, I also found out about the fantastic Magnet/Gemma Hayes version of the song.

♦ Example two, I was 'playfully' wondering if Dylan had ever mentioned 'teaching' or related words in his lyrics. Turns out he had and I managed a conference paper from my thematic analysis of them.

♦ Example three, I use songs in teaching sessions to prompt subject connections. Doing what I do (teaching teachers) this tends to lead to many student suggestions about 'Another brick in the wall part two' – "we don't need no education" although this then leads to discussion of meanings behind the lyric.

Teaching of course always has to have purpose, however, is such purpose (however you might personally define it) enhanced by a playful approach - perhaps with some Dylan music?

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Image credits:

http://imgkid.com/bob-dylan-cartoon.shtml
http://i.ytimg.com/vi/kbV_l-JKeyE/maxresdefault.jpg

PLAYFUL COLLABORATION IN DIGITAL ART CAN BE SERIOUS FUN

Ron Leunissen

Ron Leunissen works as a senior advisor in the Nijmegen University Medical Center in the Netherlands. He has got over 20 years' experience with developing medical education courses and integrating IT with education. Ron has got a great interest in digital storytelling and participates actively in the online Google-Plus community DS106. ronleunissen@hotmail.com

From serious study to storytelling

I am working as a senior advisor on developing medical education in the Nijmegen University Medical Center in the Netherlands. Because of my profession I am always trying to keep up with the newest developments in higher education. Since I read about open online courses as the latest disruptive innovation in education, I started to participate in so called MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) to have first-hand experience with them. It turned out that many of them were so engaging that in the last two years I have participated in more than 10 MOOCs. Several of these MOOCs, especially those on anthropology, triggered my interest in storytelling. Storytelling is in my opinion the most specific thing that distinguishes humans from other primates. Stories are also the most powerful invention of humans since a story can unite millions of people and make the do wonderful things together. Alas, it can also drive us humans into horrible wars.

Discovering DS106

In one of the MOOCs I took, I got in contact through the forum discussions with other participants who were interested in storytelling. They were members of an online community called DS106.
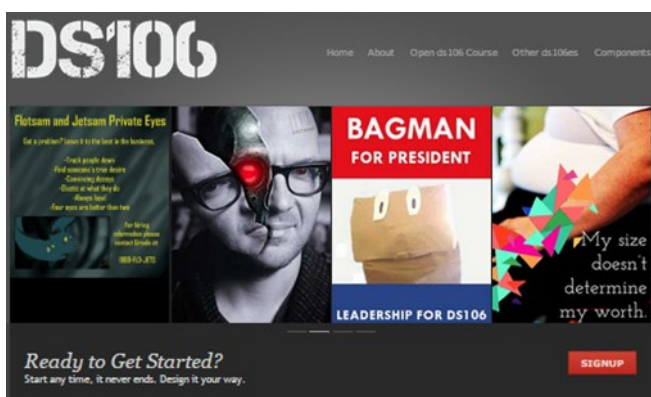
The name DS106 of the community originates from the course Digital Storytelling 106 of the University of Mary Washington in the USA in which students learn to make digital art. This can be digital stories, sounds, photos, videos etc. This course is an "open course" meaning that when it runs, it does not run just for students of the university of Mary Washington to participate, but everybody from all over the world can participate in the course at no costs. Since the course materials are digitally available all year through the website http://ds106.us, you could even do the course on your own at your own time and pace. But of course is much more fun to do the course together and interact with others.

Playing with art everyday

In the course DS106 there are so called DAILY CREATE ASSIGNMENTS: every day there is a new assignment on the web. Everybody is free to participate in an assignment or not. The assignment in itself challenges your skills and stimulates your imagination. You are still free to do your own interpretation of the assignment.

> *To view the Daily Create Assignments, surf to http://tdc.ds106.us. Use the link "yesterday's assignment" to see examples of daily create*

Hyperlinks to pieces of art I created. Pick any of these if you want to:
https://www.flickr.com/photos/93065039@N03/14763823897/in/photostream/
https://www.flickr.com/photos/93065039@N03/16971274629/
https://www.flickr.com/photos/93065039@N03/16537286233/in/photostream/
https://www.flickr.com/photos/93065039@N03/17123944976/in/photostream/
https://www.flickr.com/photos/93065039@N03/16932848429/in/photostream/
https://www.flickr.com/photos/93065039@N03/16912090480/in/photostream/
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https://www.flickr.com/photos/93065039@N03/17090078832/in/photostream/
https://www.flickr.com/photos/93065039@N03/17090081842/in/photostream/
https://www.flickr.com/photos/93065039@N03/17053923075/in/photostream/

Google Plus Community DS106

In the Google Plus community some 200 DS106-ers share additional digital work. We do this outside the context of the official university course; there are no academic credits involved. We do it just to learn from each other and to share our products. We appreciate feedback, especially when it helps us to make our work even better. While playing with art and having fun, we learn a lot about art, using software etc. If we get stuck we help each other with tips, tricks, hyperlinks to more information etc.

> Feel free to take a look at https://plus.google.com/communities/110252845880668147936)

Playful online collaboration: The Burgeron Family

In 2014, to have play even more together, we invented a non-existing family (the Burgeron family) and its history and had them meet on a family reunion at the family trailer in Bovine TX.

> *Surf to https://thebergerons.wordpress.com to meet the family members and to read about them. Click the link: "click here to read the unfolding story today" to read all the posts which were submitted. Two of my Burgeron stories are available as short videos on YouTube at: https://youtu.be/pKZKikP22DQ and https://youtu.be/g4_LavoYNGs*

All characters and events were invented by us. The story of the family developed while we each invented stories to tell. Each time somebody made up a character or a story, others would elaborate on that or stimulate the other to tell more. We made a website where we shared all the stories (text, video, sound, songs, animated gifs, photos).

We even managed to have a family singing together. I used an old guitar recording of my wife as the melody and made a text to it. Then I distributed this text over the participants and asked them to sing the text in their smartphone and upload it to 'Soundcloud' - the free online music website. Four people responded and submitted a voice track. Each singer sang her/his part at home in USA, England, Australia, Netherlands. From Soundcloud I downloaded the voice tracks and mixed them using Audacity into one MP3 song.

> *If you want to hear the family song of the Burgeron family, click this link: https://soundcloud.com/ronald_l/ds106-trailer-blues-rcmr-25-may-2014*

Digital is real

Making art together is not new. It has been done over thousands of years. But now we have got the Internet, it can also happen in a non-physical, digital world where the joy of creating and working together, the joy of helping each other, stimulating each other to try new things, to extent one's skill, are very much real; as real as in the physical world. The Internet makes this all possible and helps me to find people who want to share this with me all over the world.

What have I learned?

Through participating in DS106, I have learned, in a very relaxed and playful way, to use over 20 software applications (below).

Yet the most important thing that I have learned, is that in order to have a playful collaboration one should create a save environment: where people can try their skills, make errors and where they are encouraged through stimulating feedback that helps them and that challenges them to expand their skills. I found such an environment in DS106 and I am now happy to try to help new comers in the community to feel at home, extend their skills and most of all to have fun together.

My photostream is at: https://www.flickr.com/photos/93065039@N03/
The Burgeron family reunion video playlist starts here: https://youtu.be/62jIvoieo80?list=PLxnFy6a5xjuiFqMxa4ZOfcfVkEiIwg7Sk

Online stories by Ron: http://issuu.com/ron_leunissen

CREATIVE PLAYTIME

Sam Illingworth

Sam is a lecturer at MMU
Who links science with drama and the Arts.
He is a VERY amateur poet,
Now writing poems of ten syllable lines
That don't necessarily have to rhyme.
But sometimes it lends structure when they do
Read some right here if you really want to.

Whilst other articles in this edition of the Magazine may rightly espouse the belief that play is greatly beneficial for students in higher education, I believe that this does not go far enough. Play is also of great potential benefit to university staff, as both a fantastic way of sharing examples of best practice and as a facilitatory tool to promote interdisciplinarity.

Outside the classroom

The classroom is not the only place where learning can occur[1] and this is as true for educators as it is for learners. Whilst university lectures and seminars present fantastic two-way learning opportunities, they are not the only locale for such exchanges. At Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) we organise a number of informal events, which aim to bring staff from across the University together as part of a collective learning experience centred on play.

One of these activities is Creative Spaces, which is run approximately every six months at MMU. The basic premise of this event is for researchers from across the University to showcase any public engagement or outreach activities that they have been working on, with colleagues participating in these engaging, informal and playful activities. This playtime is then used as springboard for the later part of these sessions, in which barriers to inter-disciplinarity are discussed. Facilitating in a creative manner like this emphasizes collective work and collaborative learning through the interaction of the participants[2]. These events have been used to produce ideas and collaborations that have since been used to form the basis of successful impact case studies and grant applications.

Left Example activity at one of the Creative Space events

Why so serious?

Play has been shown to be beneficial in terms of cognitive, language and social development[3] but it is also important to remember that it is also just fun to. Sometimes it is this sense of fun that allows people to relax which encourages more natural and conducive and productive conversations between erstwhile-estranged colleagues.

People who work at universities are normally extremely busy, and so for them to give up a couple of hours of their time to partake in such playful activities means that they need to feel as though their attendance was worthwhile. With Creative Spaces, we have worked hard to ensure that we now work towards generating a set of action points that can collectively be taken forward in the time between events. The facilitated discussions that prompt the creation of these action points certainly benefit from the play that came before it. We have found that the opportunity to bond over an activity that simply involves playing, without any expectations other than that the participants enjoy themselves can be a very liberating experience, and one that puts people in a far more amenable and creative frame of mind for any post-workshop discussions.

Right The Poe-Tree at one of the Creative Spaces events. Participants were encouraged to write short poems and then hang them on the tree.

Lasting Influence

By engaging in playful activities that ultimately result in beneficial and palpable actions, it is hoped that any educators are encouraged to adopt a similar approach to play with their students. As stated by Ayling[4]

"Once the potential value of play for students' learning is accepted, this is more likely to lead to the development of a creative learning environment."

We hope that events like Creative Spaces help educators to see this potential for play, by experiencing it for themselves, and that as well as being a useful tool for their own professional development it will act as inspiration for their own teaching practices.

It is also important to keep the momentum going in between reasonably large events like Creative Spaces, and this has been done at MMU by linking it to the Greenhouse, a community for creative practitioners. Greenhouse members meet once a month across the University, and use their time together to share innovative ideas linked to learning and teaching. Past sessions have included cookery, story telling and collective making, all of which have helped to explore themes of innovation, creativity and interdisciplinarity through play. Like Creative Spaces, these events serve as extremely useful opportunities for the fertilisation of ideas in an informal, multi-disciplinary and fun environment.

Recommendations

Based on our experience of running Creative Spaces here are five things to consider when hosting similar events.

1.   Make sure that there are enough activities for participants to get involved with, but not so many that some may become neglected.

2.   Give an opportunity for discussion, in which a set of tangible action points can be developed.

3.   Explain the concept to people well in advance, i.e. that this is an interdisciplinary networking opportunity centred on fun.

4.   Where possible, try and run the event at a time that coincides with minimum teaching commitments across the university (e.g. in the summer term or on a Wednesday afternoon).

5.   Keep a record of any collaborations or projects that arise as a result of the event, either directly or indirectly.

Above all though, remember to have fun! Even if the event does not produce a set of actions, it will have given colleagues the opportunity to bond in a non-threatening and enjoyable environment, and will undoubtedly have set the ball rolling on a number of creative thoughts and potential partnerships.

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'COUNTING OURSELVES INTO THE EQUATION': SUPPORTING TEACHER PLAY IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Shelley Tracey
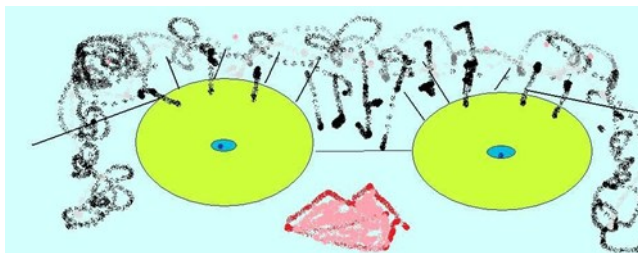
In the first part of the title, a primary school teacher reflects on her participation in Creativity in Practice for Educators, a Master's module on a professional development programme. Caoimhe was one of the 38 participants in five iterations of this module between 2006 and 2010. She comments:

'Ultimately, I believe that this module has enabled me to comprehend the importance of exploring my own creativity in individual terms, as a member of a collaborative group and also as an Early Years Educator. It seems apt to comment on Whitmore's belief[1 p.215] that in order to become better educators we need to count ourselves into the equation. We need to bring 'the child out', to permit him to express and to act, to experiment, to make mistakes - and to give the same gift to our selves'. By reconfirming our own autonomy in learning, taking time to 'play' and experiment with our creativity, we are therefore better equipped to share this gift with our pupils.'

The capacity to play can be inhibited by a number of psychological and external factors [2,3] . For many teachers, the demands of practice detract from their opportunities to play, wonder, visualise and foster their own creativity; a further inhibiting factor is lack of confidence in their own creativity. Most of the teachers whom I met in my role as teacher educator were aware of the importance of creativity in learning, but they did not identify themselves as creative, and they found creativity difficult to define. The last point is not surprising, given the lack of agreement about the nature of creativity in the literature [4,5,6]

The impetus for the Creativity in Practice for Educators module was the inclusion of creativity in the Northern Ireland curriculum[7] as a core skill, with "being playful" as one of the descriptors for creativity.

Shelley Tracey Bioku

Creativity
Finding ways to light the spark.
  Learners on fire.

Teacher educator
The art of adult literacy
  Holistic reflection.

Everyone can write
Poet, poetry therapist,
  Playing with words.

Applying research.
  Arts in the community.
  Making connections.

However, neither "being playful" nor creativity itself was clarified, and there was no detail on implementing the descriptors. Creativity in Practice for Educators was designed to give teachers opportunities to develop their understanding of creativity and of their creative identities[8].

At the start of their participation in the module, most of the teachers located creativity in the talents and expertise of arts practitioners. Arts-based methods, such as visual art, music, storytelling and film-making were incorporated in the module to challenge this notion and to foster teacher awareness of the multi-modal processes of creativity and learning. *'[M]aking art lends itself to evolving, recursive learning. Artmaking [sic] promotes imaginative play with concepts and whimsical projections of abstractions onto new contexts'[9].*

While arts-based methods facilitate engagement with play and creativity, the outcomes of these processes are unpredictable[10]. A framework for participation in the module was therefore designed to support teachers to manage the uncertainties which might ensue. 'Creative Reflection' [8,11] was based on Wallas's classic model of creativity[12], which proposed that creativity manifests through a sequence of four processes: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. 'Creative Reflection' consisted of four interwoven and recursive phases: Preparation, Play, Exploration and Synthesis. The Preparation stage focused on

participants' recognition of their own creative practices and capabilities, so that they felt confident about immersing themselves in the process of play.

Play, the second phase of Creative Reflection, drew on ideas about play as

- purposeful[13] as well as open-ended[14]
- fundamental to the cultivation of well-being, flexibility and creativity[15]
- instrumental in the development of social, physical and cognitive skills [3,16,17, 18]
- both individual and collective processes[29]
- a cultural construct in which members of a community interact and develop implicit rules of engagement[20]
- the figurative notion of a state of freedom or non-seriousness or playfulness, in which artists/learners are free to develop their own ideas
- creative thinking processes, such as possibility thinking[21], lateral thinking[22] and divergent thinking in order to generate a wide range of ideas [23,24].

These ideas about play were synthesised into a range of activities on the module. The play activities were conducted quickly; their purpose was to generate energy, collaboration enjoyment of the group process, spontaneous responses and a range of new ideas. The activities were also intended to invoke the state of 'flow'[25], the optimal state of inner experience in which individuals are fully focused on and immersed in their work or creative activity and they lose a sense of time and of self-consciousness.
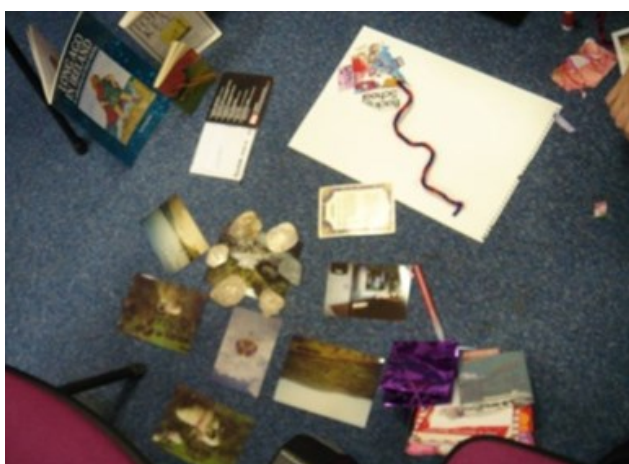
The processes included mind mapping, creative thinking, and developing group pieces by collating images and objects (above).

A paired drawing activity, conducted in silence, required participants to respond to each other's marks on the page in pastel (above).

This activity invoked intuition and creative collaboration. The elements of play for pleasure, for creative expression and for the collaborative development of skills and learning came together in story telling activities and the creation of short films, using the accessible software, Windows MovieMaker.

On the second iteration of the module, participants improvised with percussion instruments in an activity led by one of the group members. As Phillips [26] pointed out in relation to music, participation in improvisation requires a sense of belonging to the learning community, the ability to draw and build on past knowledge and experience, and the freedom to make new meanings. The play activities in the Creativity in Practice for Educators module appeared to enable teachers to access these aspects of improvisation and participation.

Participants responded positively to the play activities, developing a sense of mutual trust and collaboration. The play sessions were characterised by laughter, humour, joy and playfulness. Teachers delighted in the processes and in their outcomes, whether these were

ideas, artefacts or a sense of well-being. This sense of delight and the freeing effects of play were confirmed by the fifteen teachers who took part in interviews six months after the end of the module. They included Early Years, primary school, alternative education, secondary school and adult education practitioners. They also commented on how the opportunities for embodied and intellectual play had impacted on their ability to take risks and improvise in their teaching; they had also identified new ideas for addressing the descriptor for creativity in the curriculum.

While this paper describes the incorporation of play in a specific professional development context, there are implications for educators in other HE programmes. Building on the potential of play for the generation of ideas, collaboration and engagement in learning requires opportunities for play and optimal conditions for nurturing it.

Divergent thinking activities at the start of learning sessions might encourage involvement; open-ended group activities might enhance a sense of belonging to the learning community; the use of images and other non-verbal activities might stimulate ideas and discussion. The learning space should be flexible, with opportunities for participants to manipulate the furniture and learning materials[27]. An atmosphere of trust and the freedom to play with ideas requires a sense of autonomy and agency and acceptance of ideas[28]. Davies and colleagues [29p.16] identifying recommendations for supportive pedagogical factors in learning environments, proposed that the classroom should have a 'playful' ethos, and that learners should be supported '*to take risks with the right balance between structure and freedom.*'

This paper began with Caoimhe's words, and ends with those of some of her peers, recorded from their reflections on creating a collaborative assignment:

> "*As we discovered through the process, fun and play was paramount because ultimately with it being linked to the curriculum of course we wanted for all learners to be able to relate to it, because' would want to join in and so for us for us play and fun had to be part of the process for us as well, not just for the children.*"

The teachers' experiences helped them to empathise with children's experience of play and creativity, to identify the learning potential in play, and to discover their own capacity for play and creativity.

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James Condon

WHY PLAY SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED IN HIGHER EDUCATION?
James Condon

James teaches in the Faculty of Art & Design at Manchester Metropolitan University in the field of Animation where he has been teaching for four years. He is also a post-graduate student on the MA Design programme. Outside of the university he is a freelance Moving Image Artist and Illustrator.

I have been working in Higher Education for four years now and it is clear to me that the method of 'Play' within Art & Design forms a valuable part of the curriculum and is the foundation of a students self discovery as a visual practitioner.

As Art & Design progresses further into a digital age, play becomes more important and is now more accessible than it has ever been. Digital technology can allow an array of possibilities to a design process with multiple outcomes informing a finalized design as a possibility, possibilities that may not have been thought of during the initial planning and response.

In my teaching methods I adapt to the students needs and uses their strengths as pathways to engage in moments of play. Within the field of animation, experimentally, play is the only way to go. Play has led to the innovations in the field that we take for granted today, such as rotoscoping, stop-motion and reverse photography. The most validating part of my job is the look of realisation within a student when they have the authority to uses a technique of process that they feel maybe a less relevant.

For example in the technique of rotoscoping the movement of an element in a piece of film is copied and traced. Various systems for this have been developed since its introduction in 1915 and it is fascinating to see how the use of this device informs the understanding of movement through the production of only a few seconds worth of animation. Without the ability to look into the past for inspiration and to 'play' with techniques at their core level the room for self-discovery could not be possible.

As the art of animation is a hands on practice the theory behind the processes and techniques can never be enough to inform a cohort to fully understand its workings. The co-ordination of workshops becomes important as they present opportunities for the student to engage with the method they are being introduced to and fully embrace a form of play that adds immeasurable value to their learning and understanding.

The balance between a knowledgeable understanding and the chance of bending and changing a practice are almost on an equilibrium with each other. In order to discover new advancements the compulsion to use a playful view point to get there is slightly elevated. This small elevation of play over knowledge is the spur of creativity that leads to new systems and methodologies being discovered.

PLAY
Simon Thomson

Simon is a "flipped academic". He is Head of E-Learning at Leeds Beckett University working in the Centre for Learning & Teaching. His current work includes the development of a conversational framework for technology use, with a focus on it's ability to enable, enhance, enrich and empower learning & teaching. He has led on a number of funded Learning & Teaching projects including a JISC/HEA funded Open Education project. He is an HEA National Teaching Fellow and is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, SEDA accredited in Embedding Learning Technologies and an Apple Distinguished Educator.

What is it about "play" that we seem to leave behind when we move into adulthood? Both the verb and the noun reference childhood in it's definition and in both, the focus is on "enjoyment" and "recreation".

Why don't we see "play" as a serious activity that can benefit us professionally and developmentally? In my experience working in the area of technology enhanced learning, e-learning, digital learning etc many people would benefit from play in order to build confidence and capability in digital tools.

> **verb**
> engage in activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose.
> *"the children were playing by a pool"*
>
> **noun**
> activity engaged in for enjoyment and recreation, especially by children.
> *"a child at play may use a stick as an aeroplane"*

If you have ever observed a child with a piece of "technology" such as an iPad there is no sense of fear. They translate their natural ability of play across to the device.

Studies have indicated that "play is really the most important way that children learn about the world around them". Through this play children learn their own physical and mental capabilities and boundaries and through play often comes failure, but failure that feels safe and developmental.

Why then can't we apply this approach to the development of academic staff with regards to their use of digital tools/technology in learning & teaching? I think we can, and should, encourage playing with technology,

failing (safely) with it and learning through those experiences. I work in a large higher education institution and in 2010 I led a funded project whereby we deployed over 300 (Nexus) tablet devices to staff & students, asking them to explore the use of the devices in learning & teaching. The emphasis of this project was that of "learning through play", and the sharing of those experiences.

Initially staff (and to some extent students) were nervous about the open nature of being asked to play. Some wanted clear activities to undertake and directions to follow and a couple of academic staff even stated that they wanted to be told what to do with the devices. We had already identified through a previous pilot that when staff (and students) were given ownership of the device and that they could keep it after the project they were more likely to commit time and effort in playing with it. Three main types of play came out of the feedback.

Firstly structured play, whereby the sessions were designed with a particular activity in mind (e.g. using the devices for accessing lecture slides and note-taking in class).

Secondly there was semi-structured play. Semi-structured play largely consisted of formal scheduled sessions, but with less of a theme or specific activity but a general sharing of experiences. Interestingly it was in these sessions where students often sup-ported staff in overcoming problems they were having.

The third and final type of play was informal playing.
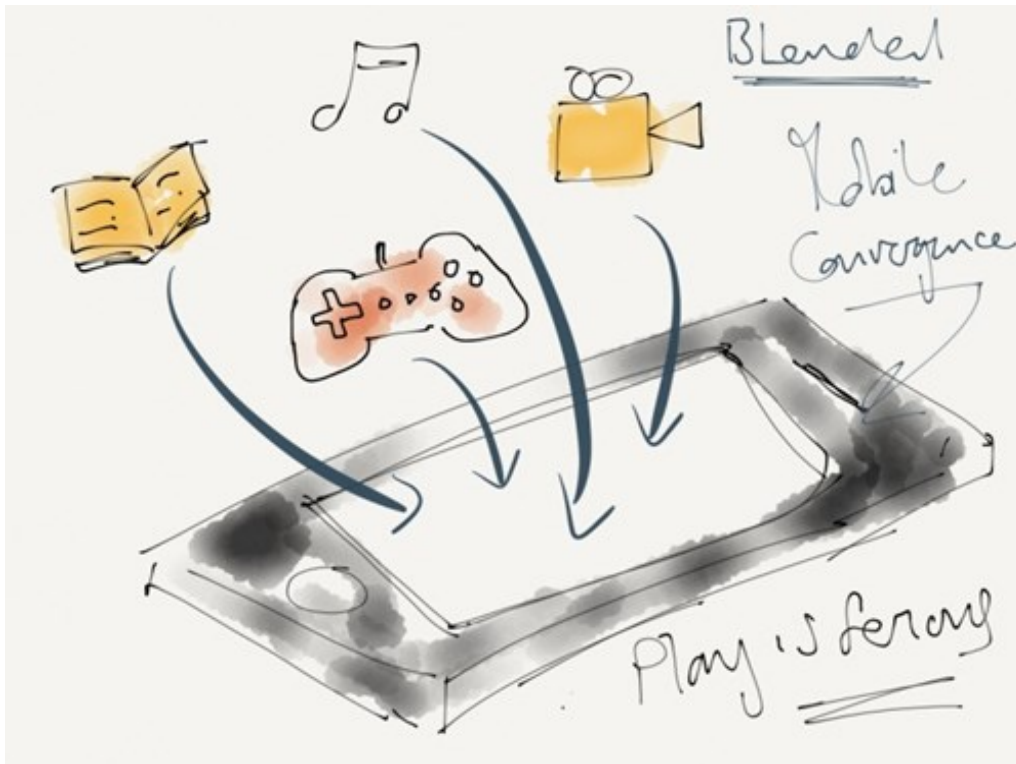
This mainly took play in short bursts and more likely in personal time than in formal learning or professional time. This form of play became the most developmental, and fed into the other types of play. It would often take place at times when people had a few minutes, e.g. waiting for a bus, on a train or perhaps laid in bed.

The richest experiences were perhaps where the staff and students had learnt to play together, sharing their use of the devices for learning, communicating, sharing and collaborating. The most successful course teams set aside time for play with their students and it was clear that it provided an opportunity for experimentation, failure and learning. These experiences demonstrated that there was a willingness (perhaps a desire) to be given the opportunity to "play" with technology.

This "digital play" was strengthened by support from a central service. The Centre for Learning & Teaching was able to provide guidance and support as well as capture and disseminate the experiences. Framing the experience around play appeared to encourage experimentation and innovation, it certainly shifted the project mindset from one of constraint to one of freedom. It also meant that learning was informal and "sneaky", with staff and students learning through play often without actually realising it.

This experience has encouraged us to approach our digital learning strategy through play, providing opportunities to "try" technology, play with the technology and to learn through failure in order that they can build confidence and capability so that when it really matters their technology use is a success.

We must provide environments and experiences where our staff (and students) can learn through play, fail in the process and see it as part of the journey to success. *Illustrations by the author*

"On the Love of Teaching"

"We certainly want people, both faculty and students, to be engaged in activity that's satisfying, enjoyable, challenging, exciting — and I don't really think that's hard. Even young children are creative, inquisitive, they want to know things, they want to understand things, and unless that's beaten out of your head it stays with you the rest of your life. If you have opportunities to pursue those commitments and concerns, it's one of the most satisfying things in life."
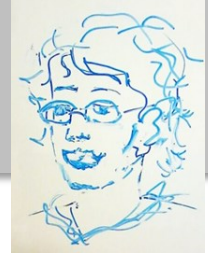
The Death of American Universities
By Noam Chomsky, Jacobin
30 March 15, online, available at http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/277-75/29348-the-death-of-american-universities

USING PLAY IN HIGHER EDUCATION
A Critical Thinking Murder Mystery

Susan Cobb

Susan is a Student Experience Tutor at Manchester Metropolitan University's Cheshire Campus working closely with academic staff to offer academic writing and study skills support, both one-to-one and group workshops. She is currently studying a Masters in Academic Practice at MMU.

While working with undergraduate and post-graduate students, it has become clear that many do not understand how to use critical thinking in their academic work, often being descriptive, instead of analysing and questioning information and arguing a case. When trying to teach these concepts and skills to students, the resulting sessions have previously been rather dull and boring.

Taking part in the Masters Unit, Creativity for Learning in HE, has really inspired me to 'think outside the box', to look for ways to introduce creativity into the classroom and engage students with interesting and fun activities. James and Brookfield[1p9] suggested that 'nothing wakes up attention to learning more than being asked to do something unfamiliar', which confirmed my feeling that a more creative approach was likely to be more a successful way to teach critical thinking. One of the sessions I attended, relating to storytelling, introduced the idea of using images to encourage imaginative storytelling. I was interested in applying this idea to teaching the concepts and skills required for critical thinking, as a way of involving the students in an interesting way, allowing them to have fun while learning, asking students to think creatively, develop ideas and use their critical thinking skills to judge these ideas[2]. Trying to think of a subject I could base the stories on was quite a struggle, until I thought about all those detective shows on television, where the detective brings together seemingly random clues, analyses evidence and questions witnesses to build a case. From there, I developed the idea of a murder mystery scenario.

I was apprehensive about running a pilot session (with Masters Business Students), particularly about the reaction of the students. Would they think it was silly? Would they engage in the activity? Thinking back to some of the Creativity for Learning in Higher Education sessions, where we had made Lego models and written stories, these concepts were quite daunting at first. During the introduction to the session, the faces of the students showed little emotion or interest, even a little scepticism, which was rather worrying. Following the introduction, which explained the purpose of the session, the students were asked to form pairs or small teams. The victim and characters were briefly introduced, with minimum back-story, the murder weapons and other clues were presented. The teams selected a character, to be the murderer, and a weapon. They then built a case against this character, critically evaluating the story from all angles. They developed a detailed story about the events leading up to the murder, the murder itself and the reasons for the guilt of the character, backing this up with evidence (they could also make up evidence, such as fingerprints, purchase details and incriminating emails). Finally, the story, or case, was presented to the rest of the group in a professional manner, using critical academic language. The rest of the group critically analysed the case and acted as defence lawyers, questioning the evidence. The team addressed these questions, using evidence to back up their answers. The teams used the specific skills and language outlined in the introduction. There was a summary at the end, where a comparison was made between the critical thinking skills they had used in their detective work and those used in academic writing.

Despite the rather polite disinterest at the start, as soon as the students stood up and started to take part in the activity, their attitudes changed; they became animated, chatting excitedly about their stories and the evidence they would use. There was even quite a lot of laughing! By the end of the session, the teams had all produced quite elaborate stories and had presented them to the rest of the group; they had all thoroughly engaged in the activity and taken it seriously. I really enjoyed the session and it provided a great opportunity to talk to the students about the skills they were using in an informal way.

This session showed me that play can be used as an effective tool in the classroom – adding interest and activity to a rather dull subject, engaging the students and encouraging active learning. I now feel inspired to integrate play into more of my sessions.

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TRIVIAL PURSUITS IN PLAYDOH? PERHAPS NOT!

Rachael Stead

Rachael is a Student Learning Advisor at the University of Surrey

Playing with Playdoh seems such an unlikely research activity to have embarked upon in Higher Education that I still find myself feeling slightly apologetic, embarrassed even, when trying to explain what I'm doing. I think this is due, in part, to being met with derision and dismissal by more than one of my contemporaries (but not by any of my colleagues I'm pleased and relieved to say). After all, I'm an education professional in my forties being paid to help students learn. However, there is an increasing body of recent literature emerging surrounding the decline in play[1] and its effects on brain development and socialisation[2], and on the importance of play for both children and adults[3]. According to the Times Higher Education (THE)[4], "play is a banquet for the brain, a smorgasbord for the senses, providing nourishment for body and spirit: sad then that as a society we seem to be starving ourselves of it." It has become increasingly apparent through running workshops using playdoh as a medium for expression that we are creating the right environment for students to learn, enabling them to create their own knowledge. The self-directed nature of play and, therefore, the intrinsic motivation it imbues is what gives it its educative power[2].

Why did I decide to start using playdoh in my work as a learning developer?

There have been two key drivers for my current fascination with Playdoh: personal and professional. Observing my twin daughters playing with Playdoh since before they could construct coherent sentences is the first. Witnessing their whole-hearted engagement and focus, the chattering and commentary (and negotiation) that goes alongside the building process, and the laughter. Sometimes it's a solo activity and sometimes a cooperative one but it's always imaginative. They improvise and compromise on colour, shape and positioning of their creations. They may start building one thing but then it morphs into another completely and it is always so much fun. This to me is play in its purest form or what has been termed by a number of experts in various disciplines, "play for play's sake"[5].

In addition to watching, there is a great deal of enjoyment to be had from getting stuck in myself; from the smell of the Playdoh and the experiential memories it invokes from my own childhood, to the malleability of the Playdoh and the feeling of it in one's hands. Literature abounds concerning the relationship between the hands and cognitive and emotional processes. There are too many to mention here, however, one such author, neurologist Frank Wilson[6], argues that the hand figures critically in human development; cognitive, emotional and physical. It plays a central role in language and communication, expressing emotion, art, music, design, construction and countless other human endeavours. From a purely scientific standpoint, Carlson[7] says this is because a very large proportion of the primary cortex in the brain is dedicated to the hands, fingers and thumbs. According to Trivium cited in James[8], this amounts to between 70 and 80% of our brain cells. So when the hands are actively engaged in building and manipulating materials, millions of neural pathways are being stimulated simultaneously and the unconscious (or motor) memory is involved and, therefore, potential for a richer learning experience presents itself. The more types of stimuli, for example auditory, fine motor and visual, the richer the learning that can potentially occur[7].
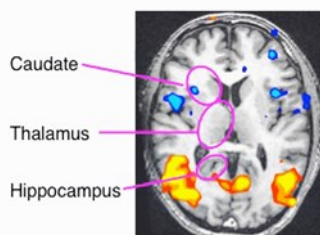
In the words of Stuart Brown[3], play is more than just having fun,

> "Nothing lights up the brain like play. Three-dimensional play fires up the cerebellum, puts a lot of impulses into the frontal lobe – the executive portion – helps contextual memory be developed...".
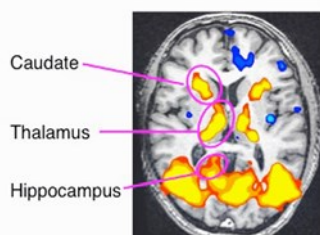
Interactive play   Passive exposure

The other driver behind my current work is professional. It has been my objectives to push myself out of my comfort zone. I was someone who sat firmly in the, 'I'm not artistic or very creative' camp. I was becoming increasingly frustrated, for want of a better word, with using traditional modes of teaching, with a heavy reliance on PowerPoint and the linear, didactic approach to sharing knowledge. However much I tried to make my sessions interactive and discursive, I still found myself spending hours preparing information to 'transmit' to my students.

The aim of this new approach is to allow the students to build the knowledge for themselves, adhering very much to Papert's Constructionist school of thought and theories surrounding the idea of making to learn. Physically building or creating something helps to engage students in their learning and it also serves to improve memory. Much like my daughters and their Playdoh endeavours, it is very common not to know what to build, paint, draw, or make from the beginning of any creative endeavour as Papert cited in Ackermann[9] would attest. This is comparable to the problems associated with writer's block: not knowing what to write at the start of an essay or paper. As a learning developer one might suggest free-writing as a way of kick-starting the thinking process, to unlock ideas and see them written on the page so that students can reflect on them and start to see connections between them. Constructionist theory on making to learn would say that once an individual begins to manipulate and work with the building materials, eventually the imagination takes over and inner unconscious thoughts can be brought to the surface through creative activity and play [10,11]. A neuroscientist friend and colleague at the University of Surrey recently suggested the term, 'somatosensory brainstorming'. In other words, 'don't think, just do and see where it takes you'.

The act of building is just one key element of the process however. From personal experience of engaging in creative activities in a social context both

in conference settings, team building days and with friends in 'Knit and natter' type scenarios, the conversations that are brought about by the creativity can be just as stimulating as the creative endeavours themselves. Both Papert cited in Ackermann[9] and, more recently, Gauntlett[11] concern themselves with the way in which the makers of creative artefacts engage in conversations about what they have made which leads to reflection, and ultimately, the construction of new knowledge. This is a crucial part of the learning process that we have been documenting and observing in our modelling workshops at Surrey.

> it is very common not to know what to build, paint, draw, or make from the beginning of any creative endeavour

TWO CASE STUDIES

Metaphorical concept modelling with student nurses

The first time I ran a Playdoh modelling workshop was for my final project on the Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching at University of Surrey. Specific themes and data from the workshops are intended for an upcoming publication, so will not be discussed in detail here. However, in brief, student nurses who volunteered to take part were tasked with modelling a concept or concepts from their essay or dissertation with which they were grappling. According to James and Brookfield[12] incorporating playful activities into the classroom can "open learners up to multiple, complex interpretations, and help them think more critically" and ultimately aid understanding of difficult concepts. Participants were encouraged only to think about colour, size, and perspective and to be imaginative and non-literal in their build. However, there were very few rules in these workshops, because rules can stifle motivation and creativity, and little in the way of coaching or advising was offered during the sessions. The students were given freedom to play and
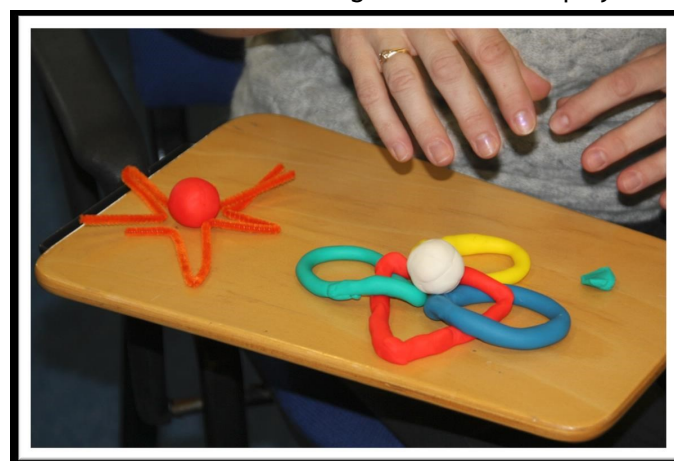
express their ideas using the Playdoh provided and later to share, as far as they felt comfortable to do so, not only their creations but also the process by which they arrived at their creations and how they felt they related to them, all of which provided rich opportunities for reflection and discussion.

The rationale behind designing the session with so few rules and offering minimal help during the session can be linked closely to Paul Tosey's[12] interpretation of Morrison's complexity theory. Of particular resonance here are the following: that much learning is 'emergent or constructed'; that we cannot control or determine learning; and that if learning is viewed as a product we may limit what is learnt and how. Instead it is our role as teachers or learning facilitators to create the right conditions for learning. Based on Morrison's theory[13] Tosey endorses an acceptance that we are not in control of learning or student behaviour and encourages three key things: simplicity in the design of learning systems, creativity amongst both students and staff as agents in the learning system, and valuing emergent learning. Can what happened here really be classed as play? Well, if we take Peter Gray's definition of play in THE[4] as self-chosen, self-directed, imaginative activity in which the process is more important than the end product and the rules are not dictated to the players, then I would say most definitely yes.

Concept building in teams with Surrey STARS

Another area in which the approach has been used was in a team-based, role play activity with Surrey's STARS (Surrey's Top Achievers Recognised and Supported) programme, in which teams of students assigned to the roles of Project Managers, Architects, Draughtspersons and Builders were tasked with creating a structure. Traditionally, there has been a specific end product to this activity, one which demands accuracy and attention to detail, emulating exactly the designs of

the 'Client'. However, a break with tradition in March this year saw some incredibly imaginative designs from the teams when instead the students were asked to model their collective interpretations of STARS as a concept, using a choice of building materials which included Playdoh, but also LEGO, and a selection of recyclables and craft materials. These are our top undergraduate students, being asked to play games with what some might call childish toys. Feedback on what the students really enjoyed about this activity included: 'making something', 'creativity', 'sense of achievement', 'designing an amazing structure' and feedback about what they didn't enjoy came primarily from those who were not involved in the actual build and reflected the frustrations of just that, i.e. 'not being physically involved in building', and 'would have preferred to have been building'. I would suggest perhaps that some of the reasons behind these particular students' enjoyment of such a free, playful task include the lack of expectation of a specific end product. Students now have such very specific criteria imposed upon everything academic that they are expected to produce at university (and indeed at school). Learning outcomes and marking criteria are so specific and prescriptive, that there is very little room for creativity and risk taking, despite these being the very conditions under which learning and innovation will take place, a view shared by McIntosh cited in Warren and McIntosh[14]. The process driven nature of this activity situated into a whole day of games, role plays and playful activities (too many to mention here) where the means are more valued than the ends and what is learnt comes from cooperation, feedback and self-reflection, makes it stand-out to students as different, freeing and invigorating.

My conclusions about the importance of play and playful learning activities in HE?

Playing is serious business. It aids imagination, creativity, problem solving and risk-taking [9,16], a set of key transferable attributes and skills sought out in modern graduates in an age when reliance on knowing information is no longer enough. But these are almost impossible to measure in the way that current learning is measured. Some would say though that it is almost impossible to truly measure any outcomes in learning[16] certainly in the short term, and most learning outcomes can only measure a surface approach to learning, that of memorization and reproduction. We know that the three-dimensional sensory nature of modelling makes it memorable as an activity and evidence would strongly suggest

intrinsic motivation and enjoyment are key factors leading to learning, and therefore the value of this type of playful learning should not be underestimated. Instead, far more emphasis should be placed on learning good techniques for learning, what Biggs cited in Jackson[17] terms meta-learning, and educating for capability instead of competence, in other words process-oriented learning focused on cognitive development as opposed to the acquisition of knowledge[18].

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DO MOST ATTEMPTS TO TEACH FOR CREATIVITTY INVOLVE SOME FORM OF PLAY?

Norman Jackson

Norman has a long standing interest in creativity in higher education teaching and learning and is Co-Founder of Creative Academic .

My Teaching & Learning Context

I was invited to facilitate the Scholarly Innovation and Creativity module, on the University of Limerick's, Specialist Diploma in Teaching, Learning and Scholarship programme. 'Creativity' is one of six graduate attributes that all programmes at the university are intended to promote.

My session lasts a day and half and it's something I enjoy doing. My approach is to try to build and facilitate an ecology in which we can all share our perspectives and understandings of creativity and our experiences of encouraging students to use and develop their own creativity. As a teacher, I know that the ecology I create, with the 20 faculty and research students, is my most important playground.

But I have to admit that the first half of my process is not very playful: except for a few activities involving imagining and drawing, mostly I am trying to communicate my understandings of what creativity means and encourage participants to share their own beliefs. I try to make up for this in the more practical half of the course when I encourage participants through a collaborative design thinking exercise to use their imaginations to play with ideas to create novel curriculum designs and experiences. The final challenge is for them to come up with their own innovative design and animate their designs through a poster and filmed presentation to the whole group.

I have discovered that this combination of activities under the pressure of a fairly tight time frame really does lead to lots of imaginative ideas. I use the post-course assignment to encourage participants to consolidate and refine their ideas and the feedback I receive suggests that quite a few participants do try to implement their ideas.

The ecology I create for exploring ideas about creativity and encouraging people to use their own creativity to invent new curriculum designs, is also an ecology to encourage people to play with, connect and combine ideas in novel ways that they believe have value and can be implemented.

Teaching for Creativity : Examples of play and playfulness

The pre-course assignment invited participants to share an example of either, their own teaching aimed at encouraging learners to be creative or an experience they have had of being taught by a teacher who was trying to facilitate their creativity. Although the word PLAY was not mentioned at all in the assignment brief, in reading the assignments, I was struck by how often the idea of play featured in the experiences that were described: over half the submissions included examples of playful activity. Here are some examples of classroom experiences within which play and playfulness are embedded

' Our first task was to write down three pieces of personal information on a page. The pages were scattered on the ground and we had to select one, find its owner and then make an informal presentation about our "new friend". Next, in order to become more at ease with each other, we stood in a circle and each had to say a sentence in turn that was somehow linked to the previous sentence. This encouraged our creativity, as we got to send the "story" in any direction with an imaginative sentence. We also brainstormed in groups about what aspects of public speaking we find difficult. Rather than just reading the list aloud, we wrote each challenge on an individual "Post-It" and made a diagram on the wall with them.' *(participant A)*

'the aim of the tutorial was to understand the fundamental concepts and applications of descriptive statistics. The tutor began the lesson by breaking up the class into groups of four and sending each group off to a different part of the room. We were then given several simple tasks; calculate the mean age and standard deviation of our groups and then gather the ages of each student from all of the other groups and calculate the mean age and standard deviation of the class. The teacher then asked - is the group mean a good representation of the class? Does the class mean $^+\!\_$ SD represent your age? Although these questions seemed straight forward initially it turned out that not all groups or individuals gave the same answer. We were then asked to form two larger groups and find the mean and SD of the newly formed group. The question was once again asked; Is the group mean a good representation of the class? The next step was to try to understand why this was the case. In our groups we discussed the results and came to our own conclusions'. *(participant B)*

'While sitting in on an Applied Sport and Exercise Psychology MSc. class the teacher presented us with a new challenge: how to take what we had learned in previous lectures and classes and apply it through role play. To add extra pressure, we would be "acting" individually, in front of the class and being filmed. .....The task [seemed] daunting.... However, being presented with a real-to-life case, to solve within a few short minutes really gets the creative juices flowing. You have to be flexible with your thought process and realise that not everything is in your control, and by that I mean the individual you are helping. ....By creating a real-to-life consulting scenario, the teacher was able to help the student use their knowledge in a creative way. Although it was a novel approach for the classroom, this scenario was conducted in a safe environment, providing a source of feedback not common to all classrooms. It took you out of your comfort zone and challenged you in a new way.' *(participant C)*

'while attending a summer school (part of a primary degree in Community Studies).. I took part in a theatrical performance as a commentary on social class discrimination. The performance was filmed and later reviewed in a debriefing session so that each participant could review and evaluate their depiction and that of their fellow participants. The teacher encouraged participants to set aside preconceptions relating to the medium through which the project was funnelled. Participants, including myself, were encouraged to engage in a novel co- operative learning environment which promoted individuality but not at the expense of the collective. This permitted participants to grapple with,

interrogate and reflect on serious social issue in a relaxed and open environment which encouraged and achieved equal input from all participants.' *(participant D)*

'I wished to consider the ways in which literary genre carry forward ideas that were invested in their beginnings. In this example, conduct books for women inspired domestic fiction that reflected, shaped and passed on a particular ideal of feminine gender, the 'angel in the house'. In order to demonstrate this trope and to encourage students to critically consider both the evolution of a genre and gender as a social construction, I devised a quiz. I brought up quotes on the projector from 19th century conduct books and from 21st century how to guides and I asked the students to guess which quote came from which century – raising their hands for 19th or 21st. E.G.: "Of all [a wife's] social, domestic, and personal obligations, her husband is the centre" (19th); "The first step to being a good wife is to appreciate your husband" (21st)....Their curiosity was sparked at the outset. The exercise surprised students because it undermined their expectations and they found this humorous, which gave rise to a relaxed atmosphere. Following the quiz, students were able to draw on their own experiences and came forward with examples based on social interactions. They were expressing their ideas freely and thinking about social interaction in an analytic way, which is what I had hoped to achieve. Overall, the ideas I was presenting made more sense at the end of the activity.' *(participant E)*

'I taught …"Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Planning" (EIP)... Each class consisted of three consecutive hours, one class per week. The main purpose of the module was for students to come up with a business idea and write a Business Plan in relation to their idea...On meeting the group for the first time I introduced myself and …did an icebreaking exercise and some brain teasers..

At the break I was not feeling very confident [that] the next part of the class would go well; i.e. brain storming possible business ideas; as the class seemed shy talking to each other and appeared reluctant to speak out in the class. I remembered reading somewhere that when people wear masks they often become less inhibited and are more inclined to step outside their comfort zone. I had never used this technique but thought it was worth a shot, so I went to a stationary shop across the road and bought some very basic supplies to make masks. After the break I explained the idea behind brainstorming and tried to get a class discussion going but it was not really working. I then decided to give the mask idea a go; I gave the class 15 minutes to make a mask for themselves, I also made one, and once completed we all wore the mask we had made and I started the brainstorming exercise again. I requested that all students wear their masks for 20 minutes and after that time they could take them off if they wanted. It took a few students to get in to the process and once they did most of the class followed and we ended up with a list of some weird and wonderful ideas. After that the rest of the class went very well and so too did the module.

The process of actually making the masks themselves lent itself to creativity, an outcome I had not thought about. Once students got in to it, many of them seemed to really enjoy it and they were talking to each other and offering solutions and ideas on how to make the masks better and/or more fun. Due to the fact we only had very limited supplies, the students had to think outside the box in relation to creating their mask and many were very imaginative. The class not only interacted with each other while making the masks, they were much more in-volved in the class and the exercise once their masks were on. It was an interesting, unintentional experiment that worked. *(participant F)*

Changing the context & reframing the challenge

These examples serve to remind us of the infinite number of ways in which teachers can use their creativity to promote student engagement and learning. What comes across in these accounts is the idea that when teachers push themselves to do things that they do not normally do they change the context, and reframe the problem, challenge or opportunity in ways that make it more engaging and more likely to elicit a creative response.

Creating a safe/enabling/playful environment

Through the stories that participants told about their experiences of trying to encourage their students' creativity or having their own creativity facilitated by a teacher, a set of principles were developed that codified the ways faculty encourage students' creativity. One of these principles suggested that students' creativity is encouraged when teachers 'create safe, 'judgement free', environments where students can take risks, experiment [play] and 'fail' in order to learn'.

Making learning more enjoyable

Quite simply though, one of the most important reasons for teachers to use their creativity in these ways is to make learning more enjoyable which was articulated so well by participant F.

> 'What I learned from this experience is that sometimes both facilitators of learning and students can get so caught up in giving, receiving and learning information; so as to pass assessments and progress to the next level; it can all become boring, mundane and not enjoyable. While it is important to cover the syllabus and give students the information and knowledge they need for the "outside" world, I think it is also important that they have fun, where possible, getting there'.

Image credits

http://tj-prod-media.s3.amazonaws.com/2012/02/807-500x412.jpg

http://www.dltk-kids.com/animals/image/s/plate-parrot.jpg

http://sd.keepcalm-o-matic.co.uk/i/keep-calm-and-have-fun-teaching.png

IN CONCLUSION: SOME PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

Alison James

We started with a waterfall of questions but as our understanding has grown as we produced this Magazine many ideas have proliferated, crystallised and bounced about in our minds. We conclude this issue of the magazine with a few of those thoughts, offered as a set of *principles for play*, to consider, review and refine as we plan our activities for play in higher education.

We realise that PLAY

- Is exploratory
- Galvanizes imagination
- Frees thinking of constraint
- Reduces Inhibitions
- Bonds people
- Creates alternatives
- Simulates reality safely
- Enters the unknown
- Throws everything into question

- **Choose play thoughtfully.** Play takes many forms and players may argue for particular aspects of play over others – free and open ended or rule-bound and trophy-directed, competitive and crowded,or serene and solitary , made by hand or made by mind or just spontaneous play for the sheer fun of it (Shelley Tracey offers a neat synthesis of different kinds of play in her paper). Because of diverse and sometimes contradictory conceptions of play we need to define what play means to us and how we are planning to play**.** Do we have particular boundaries or separations between what we think play is, compared to say creativity, or imagination, or reflection? Why do these exist? Where do the overlaps and fuzzy edges occur? Are they all integrated to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the individual? Are our conceptions of what we can do with play limited by what we - or others -think it is?

- **Bring back play for play's sake.** Learning for learning's sake is still an important aspiration but one which is gradually sliding off the horizon, to be replaced in institutions by a highly directive employability and end-goal agenda. We are told that there is no such thing as a free lunch - and yet the time to play without boundaries is essential for our enrichment and energy - and if that sounds too soft, will ultimately feed into our effectiveness. Lorraine Stefani, Debra Adams, and Chrissi all pick up on the benefits of open-ended play; this is a valuable luxury in HE, but sometimes the value is missed and it is seen as a super-fluous or irrelevant extra. It is often relegated due to time and resource constraints, or the perception that its value is secondary to 'real work'. We need to have times when we can travel freely and allow the play mood to take over; not only that we need to foster a culture where time to play is the norm, and playfulness a recognised element of learning institutions. Experimenting and exploring the what ifs with no real end in mind results in unexpected and wonderful discoveries. This is why the next one matters.

- **Materials are everything** – by which we mean, what you choose to play with and how the players feel about it. For some it is enough to play just with your imagination and thin air, but the extent to which players will travel with you will depend on their willingness to engage with the materials and spaces on offer. We should ask ourselves about the materials we don't use, or overlook, or underestimate. Not all materials are universally popular – Playdoh, for example, can be rejected by some as smacking of kinder-garten and worshipped nostalgically by others for its associations, smell and squidginess. (Rachel Stead and Emma Jenkins present excellent examples of how to overcome the prejudice and use it effectively).
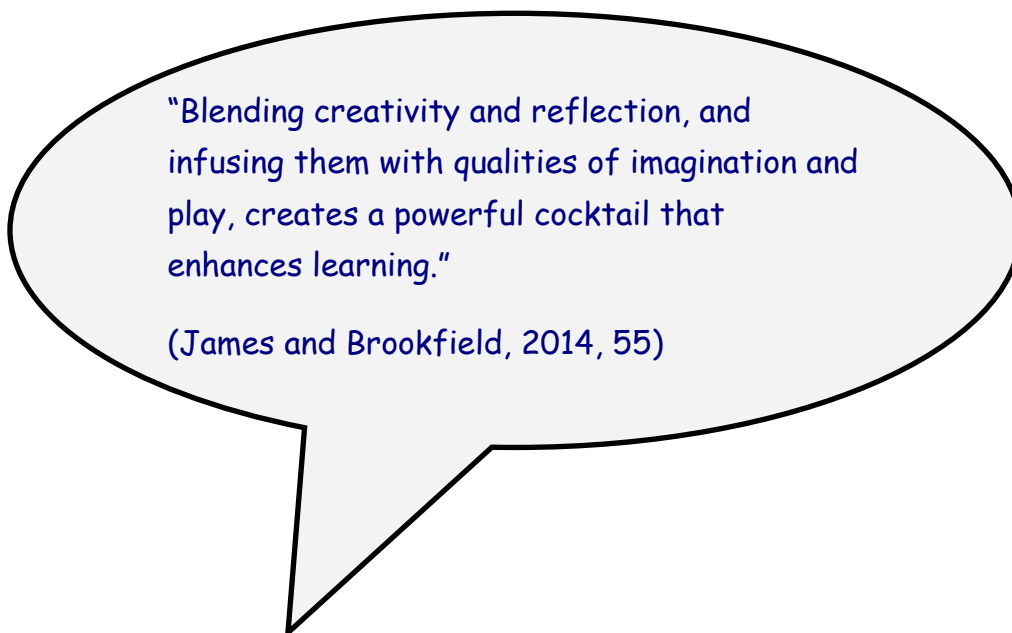
- **Take risks, be wrong.** As Susan Jeffers wrote «Feel the fear and do it anyway (and Mike Wride did, with his creative student presentations). Complement your curriculum, as our scientists and gamers have done in this issue. You may be playing without knowing it if you have taken a playful, unorthodox, or alternative approach to pedagogy. Consider where open-endedness and risktaking are truly respected and rewarded in staff and student learning. How do we celebrate and learn from failure ? Where can/do we build failure into the learning equation to maximise what we take from it? For a powerful story about risk taking, and listening to the materials (our students?) watch Elora Hardy on the building of extraordinary bamboo houses on TED talks…

- **Find, recognise and protect your play spaces.** Awaydays, play days, making room to play in the curriculum, digital spaces, trips out, informal spaces, the outdoors, that renew your thinking and renergise the spirit. Places where letting go can have restorative and generative consequences. Sam Illingworth argues for play spaces and playtime,while the IATL team at the University of Warwick have gone a stage further with their experimental Dark Would Experience. To enter the Dark Would be ready to crawl on your hands and knees into a dark, magical and candelit space full of surprises, prompts and challenges…

- **Work out the turn ons and turn offs.** This is easier said than done, as it may not be possible for a whole group all of the time, or something that is detested or read one way in one situation will work a treat in another. Nicola Whitton warns against gamifiying which reduces learning to superficial engagement, while (in another life) Alison found chocolate rewards for undergraduates mastering French verb constructions a positive aid in more complex sentence creation. Think about what you might need to manage and why. The competitive team game that motivates A is the dark night of the soul for B. The chance to draw a picture of experience for C feels like instant ineptitude for D. The exhortation to be creative, innovative, or let rip may liberate E and traumatise F. How will you handle this?

- **Get out of control.** An institutional desire for measurability may be part of the reason why play seems like a dubious investment. We cannot control what we discover through play and in free, non-judgemental play there is an open end to our endeavours, unlike the indicative learning outcomes of our formal curricula. Anything is possible. And that is how we break new ground. Artists, makers, scientists, explorers, archeologists all know this. We may be literally (and gently) breaking ground as the latter, tentatively brushing away the layers of dirt to see what is underneath, but we cannot guarantee what we will find.

- **Allow for a little theatre.** Teaching is performative and we learn by doing. Dance and movement are increasingly being combined with other disciplines to bring new perspectives, as we see in Pia Kiviaho-Kallio's piece, and in the dialogue between Matt Connell and Lisa CLughen. Role play and improvisation may be anathema to some, but the little gestures, and flourishes that can be brought to the experience, which surprise, bring the subject alive and don't make anyone feel awkard are to be relished. This is just as true in virtual domains, as David Gauntlett observes in his eight principles for encouraging digital creativity.
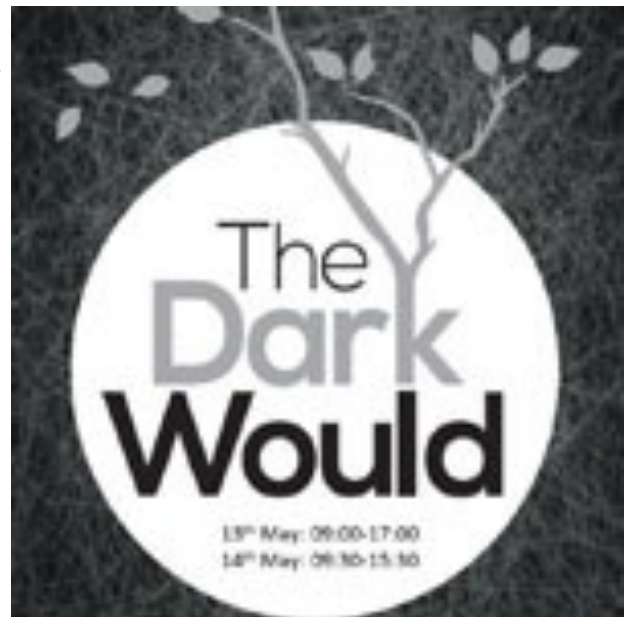
- **Participation, not observation?** By playing, participants are trusting the process, their part in it and you as the facilitator. If they just want to watch others do it, you have to decide whether this breaks that trust and contract to engage, or whether it is ok for them to sit it out. Will their inaction prevent others from taking part too, or make them self conscious, or guarded about how they act? Is there the risk of a Foucauldian sense of surveillance or is the group oblivous to the inaction of others ?

- **Coax, don't coerce.** At primary school Alison remembers being forced to eat a school meal every day, which was largely cold, grey and unpleasant. Failure to eat meant being made to stand on a chair and humiliated into consumption. If you did not comply, you were likely to be sent to the headmaster or beaten with a shoe. All this taught the children was a lifelong hatred of cabbage and memories of shame, not of learning. The worst kind of behaviourist punishment that this conjures can apply to participants being forced to play when they don't want to. Encourage, elicit, reassure and relax – just don't turn play into cabbage.

- **Choose where to draw the line**. Whatever the perceived benefits or joys of play, all kinds are not for everyone. Participants who are enduring play will just be relieved when it is over, or thankful it was not as bad as they feared. If the heart has sunk irretrievably in your participant, don't make it sink any lower. Allow for a dignified retreat or offer options to engage in ways that are less threatening to the individual for whatever reason. Equally, if you have a participant whose actions *really are* derailing the experience for everyone else, draw that line sooner rather than later – manage them proactively (even if this involves leaving) and let everyone else enjoy it.

Image credit:

http://aspenjournalism.org/2013/07/04/renewed-digging-davos-of-climate-ideas-identified-for-snowmastodon/

"Blending creativity and reflection, and infusing them with qualities of imagination and play, creates a powerful cocktail that enhances learning."

(James and Brookfield, 2014, 55)

James, A. and Brookfield, S. D. (2014) Engaging Imagination. Helping students become creative and reflective thinkers, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

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CREATIVITY IN DEVELOPMENT: PERSONAL NARRATIVES E-BOOK

CHAPTER 1

IS LEARNING TO DANCE IN THE RAIN THE SAME AS LEARNING TO DANCE IN THE DESERT?

Lorraine Stefani

This chapter offers an exploration of my evolving philosophy of creativity as applied to the practice of academic development and the cultural transferability of that practice based on reflections on my experience of working at Princess Nora University (PNU), Saudi Arabia. The idea of 'development' was at the heart of my project. My role was to help develop the university's capacity to develop its faculty. My primary concern was to understand what the development needs of faculty were and to encourage a culture of collaboration and sharing that would support development after my consultancy finished. My personal goal was develop myself in order to fulfil the brief I had been given. I needed my creativity to adapt and cope with a cultural world that was different to anything I had known and experienced previously: the challenge was to apply my creativity in this different cultural setting. None of the work I describe was easy to carry out and I had to work sensitively and respectfully within the traditions and culture of the institution, whilst performing a role that inevitably was going to disrupt the status quo. Before I went to Saudi Arabia I visualised being an academic developer as about 'learning to dance in the rain, to do the unusual and achieve remarkable outcomes'. After spending six months in Saudi Arabia I have come to appreciate that to be an effective developer in another culture, we must also learn to dance in the desert. The chapter reveals my changing understandings of creativity gained through my experience.

http://www.creativityindevelopment.co.uk/e-books.html

CREATIVE ACADEMIC ISSUE 3

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EXPLORING CREATIVITY IN DEVELOPMENT

We are devoting the third issue of the Magazine to exploring how creativity emerges in the process of development. Development is the process that enables everyone to change themselves and to bring about significant changes in the world around them. Our developmental projects provide the host for much of our individual and collective creativity and we are using narratives of personally meaningful develop-mental processes to try and gain deeper insights to the way creativity emerges. If you would like to contribute an article please contact the Commissioning Editor Professor Norman Jackson lifewider1@btinternet.com or visit the project website.

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SURVEY LINK https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NKQSXM8

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