Art & Spirit: Creativity & Reflective Practices in Teacher Education

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Abstract

This workshop builds on a joint pilot study held at Macquarie University, Sydney and Justus Liebig University Giessen in 2017. Where four reflective experiential workshops were conducted at a Sydney-based University during 2016- 2017 and were compared with two similar workshops at a German-based University in 2017. These workshops formed a community of practice model (Wenger, 2000) investigating creativity and reflective practices in higher education and building on the authors doctoral research studies.

The initial findings from these workshops indicate certain elements such as 'time and space,' 'boundary breaking', 'risk taking', 'resilience' and 'resistance of premature closure' are essential to fostering creativity and reflexivity practices in learners.

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ART & SPIRIT: CREATIVITY & REFLECTIVE PRACTICES
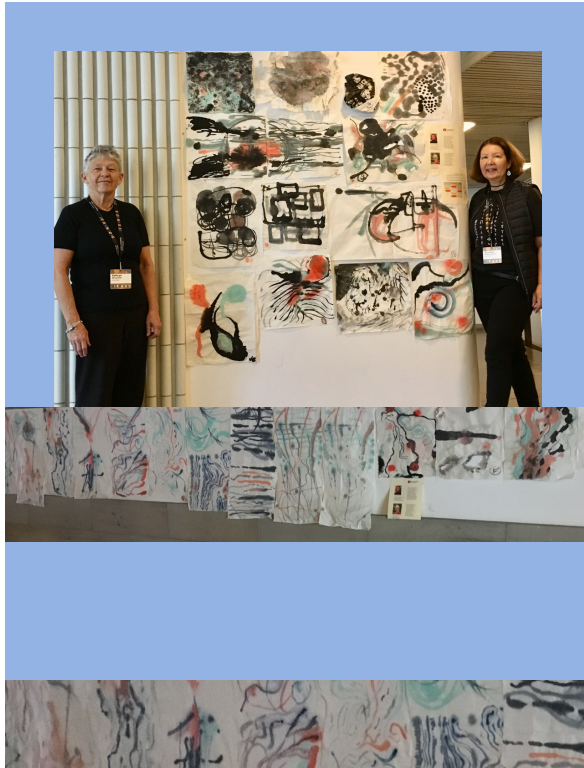## IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Dr Bronwen Wade-Leeuwen and
Dr Kath J McLachlan
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Aalto University, Helsinki, June 18-21, 2018.

PRESENTATION OUTLINE

Topic: Artistic and scientific collaborations
Points for Discussion

- Abstract
- Introduction
- International contexts
- Theoretical framework
- Methodology
- Discussions
- Findings
- Conclusion
- **Keywords:** Creativity, Reflexivity,
- Intercultural, Inclusivity, Community of Practice.

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ABSTRACT

International context

This workshop builds on a joint pilot study held at Macquarie University, Sydney and Justus Liebig University Giessen in 2017. Where four reflective experiential workshops were conducted at a Sydney-based University during 2016- 2017 and were compared with two similar workshops at a German-based University in 2017. These workshops formed a community of practice model (Wenger, 2000) investigating creativity and reflective practices in higher education and building on the authors doctoral research studies.

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FOSTERING A 'SPIRIT OF PLAY'

TEACHER'S CRITICAL & CREATIVE SKILLS

21st Century societies are increasingly seeing the need for creative, flexible, adaptive and innovative educational programs that are able to disrupt and shift learners from conformity to innovation as a means of dealing with the rate and complexity of change.

Drawing on recommendations from UNESCO's World Conference on Arts Education (UNESCO, 2006), this research explores the development of teacher's critical and creative thinking through reflective theory and experiential practices in active learning environments. Experiential programs such the Professional and Community Engagement Program (PACE) at Macquarie University, recognise the need to scaffold this form of experiential learning.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROGRAMS

Professional & Community Engagement (PACE)

The Professional and Community Engagement program at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, is a Work Integrated Learning program embedded in all undergraduate degree courses PACE units have common elements: community engagement and a rigorous academic framework that frames reflection, inclusivity and creativity.

In teacher education, PACE units are practicum units where students apply theory learnt in the classroom in practice-based or experiential learning contexts. A key criteria for all PACE units is the notion of reciprocity, whereby students make an active contribution to host supervisors, while also enhancing their own personal and professional development.

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Choosing Chinese brushes in Taiwan

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

HOW CAN CREATIVITY AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE BE FOSTERED IN TEACHER EDUCATION?

'Art & Spirit' Workshop investigates collaborative artistic practices using 'hands on' approaches and a 'spirit of play'.

In this workshop, the authors draw on their professional knowledge and experiences to explore teachers sense of art and spirit.

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'ART & SPIRIT' THROUGH PLAY APPROACH

Wade-Leeuwen (2016 a & b), encourages the use of intercultural experiences such as classical Eastern aesthetics. In this workshop, the participants explored how to use the Chinese brush in a variety of ways, learning how to apply Chinese natural ink colours (black, red and green) on different sized Chinese Xuan paper .

The experiential practice with participants begins with ritual breathing to music while painting using the ancient Chinese calligraphic strokes. This embodied state, creates a sense of calmness and reflexivity.

PARTICIPANTS

Comments after the workshop experience

"At the beginning, I had to concentrate on how I held the brush, it's a silly thing, but I don't have very long arms and the people had their hands in different places and I thought, I am going to have to slide my hand further down here.
I enjoyed that because it was rhythmic and I was listening to the music and putting the brush to paper. I had a good partner who was linking to my work and I didn't want it to end! It was really nice and a good group of people to work with as well.

The colours were interesting, as I didn't use the red because for me, that colour shouts. I got the sense, when you're in the 'Zone', you're out of it and there is no [sense of] time and that's why I am still sitting here. I should be somewhere else but I'm in the 'Zone' still and that's what art is!

I scumbled the paper to begin with, when you said to 'break boundaries', I changed the surface I'm working on, I did cheat a little bit because I poured some colours on and used the brush and the holes in the middle are where the paper was getting quite thin so I was 'breaking boundaries' (Corrie, 19 June 2018).

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REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Connecting practice to theory

How many people picked up the diversity in interpretation of what was going on here?"
Author two.

Reflective practice is essential to experiential learning (Coulson & Harvey, 2016), and is actively fostered in teacher education, as a means to achieving deeper levels of consciousness about pedagogical practice. The creative and critical thinking skills required for critical reflection provide a mechanism for raising awareness of the assumptions, beliefs, feelings and attitudes that influence our thinking (McLachlan, 2014) and how that, in turn, influences practice. This process causes cognitive dissonance creating a state where reflection and thinking begin (Dewey 1938). Emphasising the importance of context (Schön 1983), the authors note the inherent tensions and complexity in this lens of inquiry into our personal and professional selves (Nugent et al 2011). Reflective practice assists the development of personal integrity and a sense of confidence in framing 'how' to be an effective practitioner when confronted with complex, constrained and conflicted situations in the classroom or workplace.

Processes for teaching reflection, according to Coulson & Harvey (2013, p. 404) call for , "the need for scaffolding reflection for learning through experience as a process of layered learning interventions designed to encourage students to build their understanding, confidence, skill, and agency as they move into, through, and out of learning experiences that are set outside the formal academic setting".
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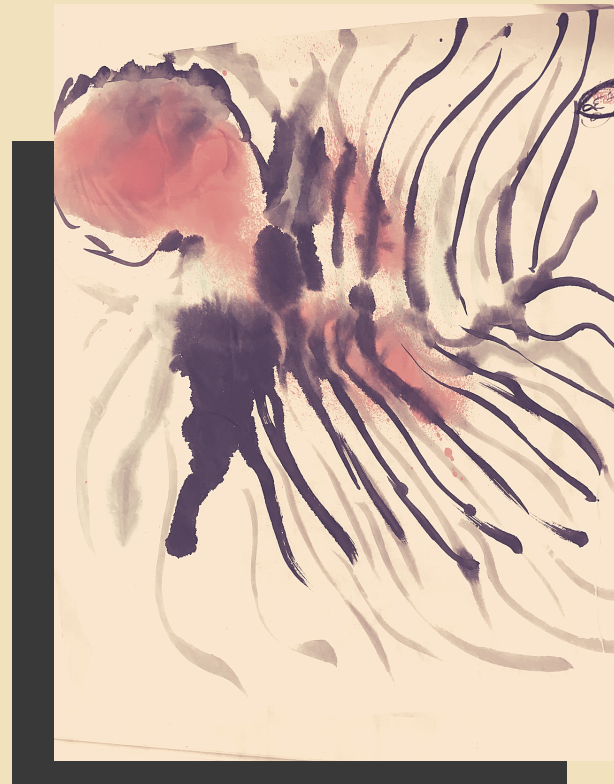
Working with Five levels of creativity

1. **Expressive play** *(spontaneous freedom)*
2. **Productive skills** *(techniques, exhibiting)*
3. **Inventive** *(known into the unknown)*

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ACHIEVING CREATIVITY LEVELS

INVENTING NEW WAYS OF BEING

Connecting to the creativity theory (Wade-Leeuwen, 2015, 2016a & b), the workshop focused on developing three level of creativity. Level one, using self-expression to draw out participants ideas, then in Level two, elaborating on those ideas with more time and mindfulness on the developing of new technical skills, which were demonstrated by author one at the beginning of the workshop.

Finally, level three achieving creativity by shifting participants mind-set from into unknown ways of being and new experiential practices.
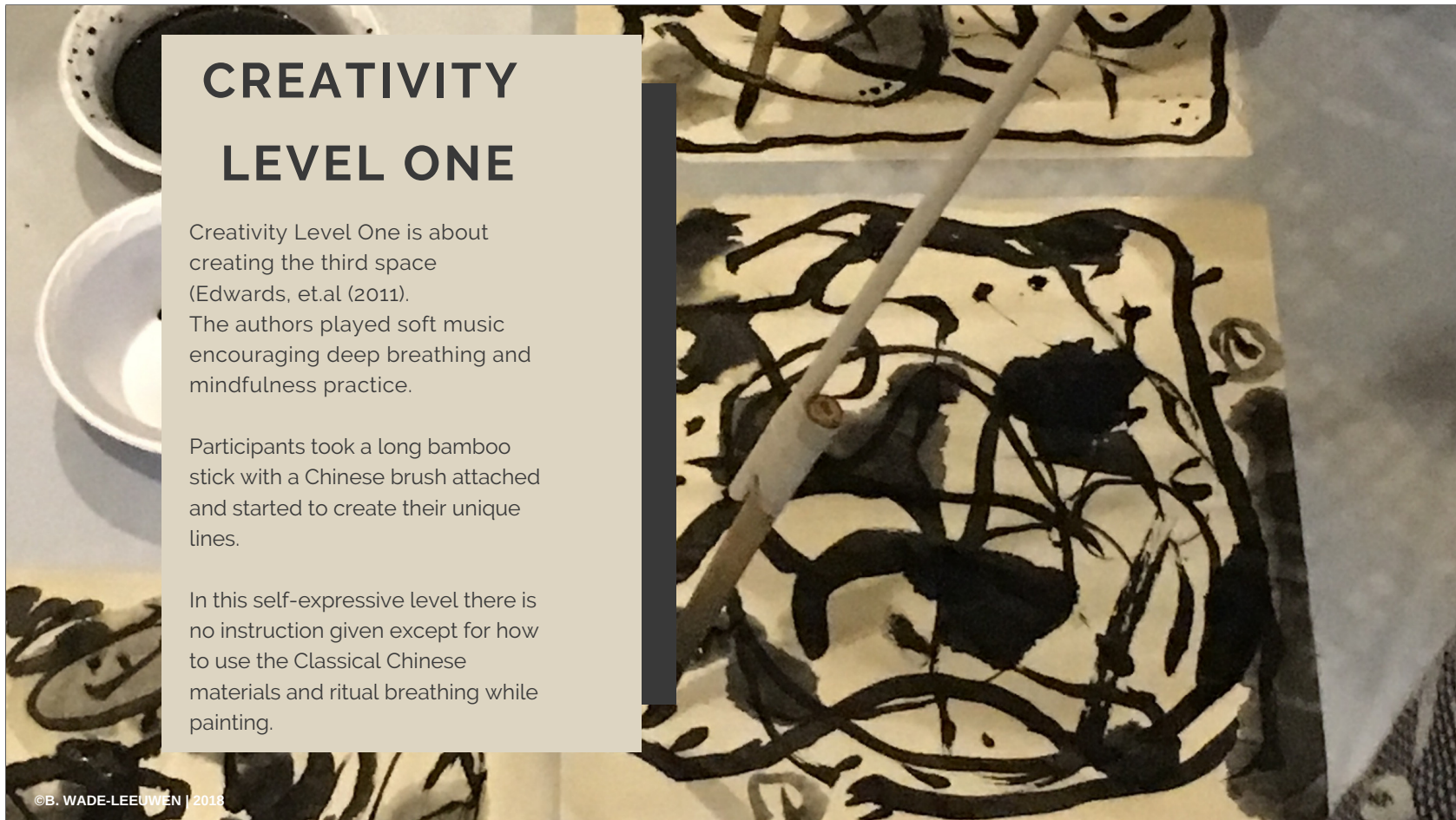
CREATIVITY LEVEL ONE

Creativity Level One is about creating the third space (Edwards, et.al (2011). The authors played soft music encouraging deep breathing and mindfulness practice.

Participants took a long bamboo stick with a Chinese brush attached and started to create their unique lines.

In this self-expressive level there is no instruction given except for how to use the Classical Chinese materials and ritual breathing while painting.

SELF-EXPRESSION

1. Being in the 'Flow' &
 learning through a 'Spirit of Play'

Free expressive creativity is the fundamental level of creativity. This fundamental level communicates through spontaneity, freedom and self-expression. For example, developing an individual's personal mark-making which are the marks made usually with various types of drawing materials towards their basic skill-sets in artistic expression.

At this level, the focus is on the creative process and not on the end production and the characteristics being developed are learning through a "spirit of play." During the first reflective activity learners are encouraged to develop creative free-flow of ideas through initial warm-up exercises and exploring ideas using their imagination. The goal of this activity is to open up the creative process thereby engaging both sides of the brain towards a creative response.

CREATIVITY LEVEL TWO

2. Mindfulness activity- Technical Skills Buildinger

Shifting towards creativity Level two (Wade-Leeuwen, 2016) involves developing new productive techniques. This was done by using the Eastern aesthetics of Chinese brush painting in this reflectve activity. Participants were asked to draw using mirroring images while holding the Chinese brush in its traditional way. The learners were encouraged to use their imagination to do mark-making, starting by focusing on their breath while the mindfully drew each stroke in the direction towards their partner.

This Creativity Level two is about developing new relationships where creativity can reach new levels of accomplishment by shifting their state of being from a known area to an unknown area. According to research conducted by Wade-Leeuwen (2016b) building on other research by Kampylis et.al.(2010), most artists and teachers remain in these more limited levels of creativity.

CREATIVITY LEVEL THREE

INNOVATIVE CREATIVITY

This innovative Level three creativity shows transformations and flexibility in perceiving new and abstract ways of thinking. The artworks are shifting from a space of unknown to another unknown.

Often new insights are experienced through the processes of divergent and convergent thinking which is discussed in-depth in Wade-Leeuwen (2016b).

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CREATIVITY & REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

In the 'zone' of the Creative process

Artists proceed from the expressive free-expression level to the technical level of creativity. The technical level (two) is where learning new ideas approaches and actions are explored to develop the participants technical and productive skills. In this second level of creativity, learners reflect in and on the experience (Schon, 1983) while applying these new skills. Thinking about what is working or not working during the creative process. Learning how to use their imagination (Greene, 2005), risk-take, breaking boundaries and avoid premature closure in their artistic practice.

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"Where as a few of you didn't change what you were doing. You were quite clear on what you wanted to bring forward from your initial visualisations, in this way, you were elaborating on what you started on then you reflected on the action and interpretation of what you were doing" (Author one)

ARTISITIC & REFLECTIVE EXPERIENCE

Reflecting on what happened:

"We began with experiencing. Settling in to a sense of connection with the music, the brush, ourselves. We reflected on that first experience, considering our actions, sharing our thoughts and generalising it. Then you applied what you had thought about and reflected on those thoughts in the next exercise, while experiencing what that related to. Again, we kept on building on that experience through further reflection , generalising and dialogue. At the very end - which was really interesting for me to observe - was that many of you then - when it came to the last exercise, and you had to add colours, you were reflecting in-action, because a number of you changed what you were doing" (Author two).

ART & SPIRIT

Conclusion

This Arts-based inquiry research shows how well facilitated artistic practices can develop aesthetic and reflective practices in teachers. Thereby, fostering learners' dispositions of 'risk-taking', 'boundary breaking' and 'resistance of premature closure'.

The experiential practice began with ritual breathing to music while painting using ancient Chinese calligraphic strokes. This embodied state, created a sense of calmness and reflexivity in the individual and the community of practice (CoP) group.

This workshop experience demonstrates how intercultural higher educational programs such as Macquarie University's PACE program, can achieve different creativity levels through a 'spirit of play' and reflexivity practices that focus on processes for change.

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