



Creativity as threshold: Learning and teaching in a liminal space

Never Stand Still

Learning & Teaching Unit / School of Education

Belinda Allen
belinda@unsw.edu.au

Impostor phenomenon

“These subjects had obtained earned degrees, high scores on standardized tests, or professional recognition from colleagues or organizations, yet they did not experience an internal sense of success.

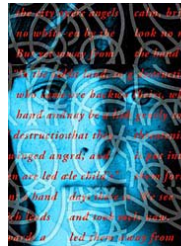


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They were afraid they were "impostors" who did not belong "here with all these bright, competent, people." They were very frightened that others would discover that they were not as competent as they appeared to be, and dreaded such discovery. They attributed their successes to hard work, luck, knowing the right people, being in the right place at the right time, or to their interpersonal assets such as charm and the ability to relate well, rather than to ability or competence.”

Pauline Rose Clance & Maureen Ann O’ Toole (1987): *The Imposter Phenomenon, Women & Therapy*, 6:3, 51-64

Particularly prevalent in grad students ...



What am I doing here?

- PhD candidate wondering who actually let me be here.
- Educational designer and academic developer.
- Background in visual art.
- My PhD topic?
Creativity in higher education: learning and teaching as creative practice

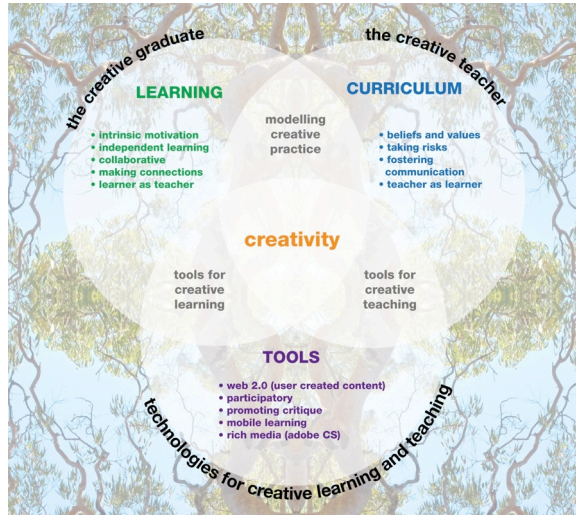


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Personal philosophy

Creativity

- Is intrinsic to human life, experience, communication
- Can contribute to social good
- Is a way of being, seeing and doing
- Is not divorced from skills which are context specific

Everyone is able to be creative

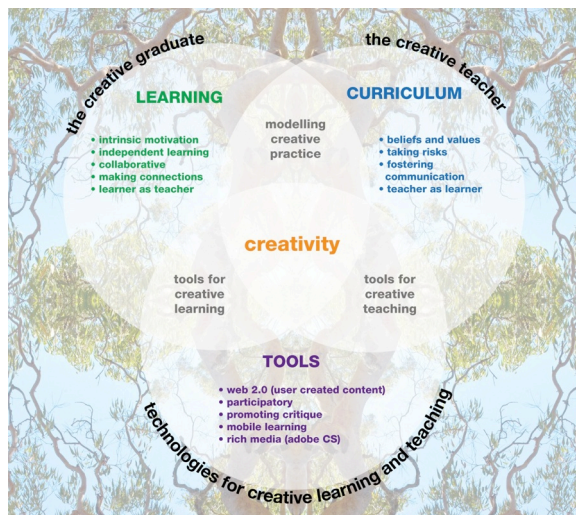
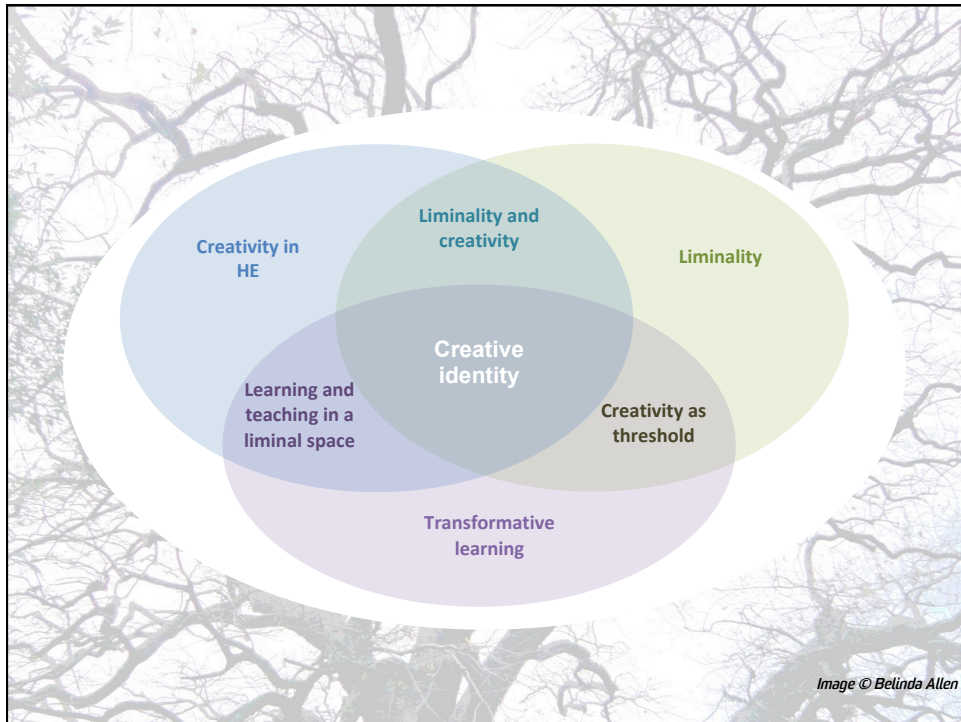


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Creativity – a graduate capability?

- Creativity as generic capacity.
- Important dimension of 21st Century professional practice (Florida, 2002; Pink, 2005)
Identified by industry and government studies as key capability.
- Democratic rather than the domain of a creative elite, social/cultural context, collaborative, cultivate-able (McWilliam & Dawson, 2007).
Promoted as a graduate attribute in higher education (McWilliam & Dawson, 2008).
- For social good, and personal happiness (Robinson, 2000)
(see Ken Robinson on TED Talks)
- Whose creativity, for whom?



Ken Robinson says schools kill creativity - http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html

Creativity as disposition

- Goes beyond personality, aptitude, capability or skill - it is the inclination and determination to behave in a certain way, that is enacted in a context.
- Creation of analogies and mental models, crossing disciplinary boundaries, exploration of alternatives (Perkins, 1981)
“cognitive playfulness” (McWilliam et al, 2010)
- “being-for-uncertainty” , which focuses on the kind of dispositions essential for a creative response to future unpredictable challenges. (Barnett, 2004)
- Creativity as systemic (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999)
- Cultural production embedded in culture and ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1983)



How puzzling all these changes are! I'm never sure what I'm going to be, from one minute to another! However, I've got back to my right size: the next thing is, to get into that beautiful garden—how IS that to be done, I wonder?'

(‘Alice’s adventures in wonderland’ illustrations and text: Carroll, 1974).



Creativity as threshold

- transformative, probably irreversible, integrative, possibly bounded, potentially troublesome (Meyer & Land, 2003)
- Creativity as threshold concept (Osmond et al, 2009; Kiley et al 2010)
- Learning disposition as threshold (Perkins, 2008)
- Threshold disposition – implies a perspective shift that changes world-view.
- Shift: from learner and consumer of knowledge to creator and active agent; from seeking problem solutions externally, to internal generation of not only solutions, but problems themselves.
- “Before one can move to a new level of understanding the confidence and ability to make a leap of faith into a new zone of learning needs to be achieved.” (Flood 2011).

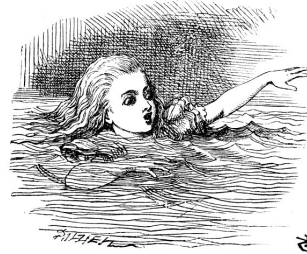


In another moment down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again.



Liminality

- Learners enter a liminal cognitive space of unknowing in order to pass through the threshold of 'knowing' (Meyer & Land, 2003)
- Derives from anthropological theories of ritual. Three stages are identified: separation, the liminal period and reassimilation (Gennep, 1909; Turner, 1967)
- "Liminality exists between all cultures and between all people within cultures, and arguably, within each of us." (Lang, 2012)
- Seen by anthropologists and educators as a dangerous and difficult place
- Mimicry - making the liminal state 'safe' without achieving the mastery required to emerge (Meyer & Land, 2003)

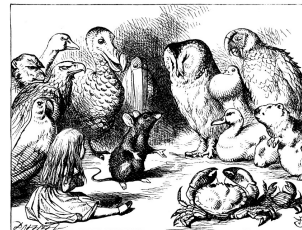


She soon made out that she was in the pool of tears which she had wept when she was nine feet high... 'I wish I hadn't cried so much!' said Alice, as she swam about, trying to find her way out. 'I shall be punished for it now, I suppose, by being drowned in my own tears! That WILL be a queer thing, to be sure! However, everything is queer to-day.



Liminality and creativity

- Liminal space - characteristic of creative thinking and creative activity, reflects the creative process.
- Disequilibrium and uncertainty of the liminal space is an essential element of creative activity and transformation (Reid & Solomonides, 2007)
- The stuck place - combination of uncertainty, possibility and constraint that characterises creative practice.
- Aporia— state of perplexity – is the space where praxis can reinvent itself (Lather, 1998)
- Emergence into ongoing liminality.



First it marked out a race-course, in a sort of circle, ('the exact shape doesn't matter,' it said,) and then all the party were placed along the course, here and there. There was no 'One, two, three, and away,' but they began running when they liked, and left off when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over.



Liminality and transformative learning

- Resonances between the liminal space of threshold concepts, and the transformative learning process (Land, Meyer and Baillie, 2010)
- Transformative learning: a disorienting dilemma followed by self-examination initiates a learning process involving critical reflection, action, perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991; 1997)
- Phases of transformative learning reflect the uncertainty of liminal learning space (Cranton, 2002, p66)



'It was much pleasanter at home,' thought poor Alice, 'when one wasn't always growing larger and smaller, and being ordered about by mice and rabbits. I almost wish I hadn't gone down that rabbit-hole—and yet—and yet—it's rather curious, you know, this sort of life! I do wonder what CAN have happened to me!!'



Liminality and transformative learning

- Reflected in the creative process itself, where the risk of embarking on an original idea, design or action is likely to provoke discomfort and insecurity during the transformation of existing ideas, understandings and products into new representations.
- "creativity in learning and teaching is experienced as an engagement in a process that is transformative either in itself, or is undertaken with the intention (implicit or explicit) of being transformative." (Kleiman, 2008, p214).
- see Allen, 2011
http://www.aare.edu.au/11pap/papers_pdf/aarefinal00303.pdf



Liminality and identity formation

- Postmodern conceptions of 'self' :
 - aesthetic self - life as a work of art (Foucault, 1992)
 - technologies of self (Foucault, 1988)
 - the reflexive self (Giddens, 1991)
 - identity in practice - the 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1983)
 - self as desire and difference (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994)
- self as an endless becoming, 'being' as both creative and liminal: creative disposition as 'becoming'
- life involves traversing, contesting and re-defining thresholds
- definition of creativity could be the ability to be imaginative and productive in this dynamic state.



'Who are YOU?' said the Caterpillar.
This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation.
Alice replied, rather shyly, 'I—I hardly know, sir; just at present—at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.'



Creativity and identity formation

- 'aesthetic self' - "arts of existence" as "those reflective and voluntary practices by which men ... seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make of their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria" (Foucault, 1992, p. 10-11).
- "art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?" (Foucault, 1991, p. 350)



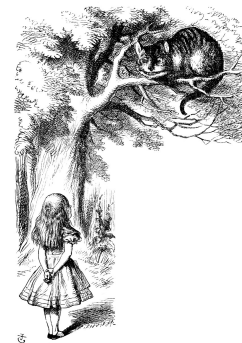
Creativity and identity formation

- belief in one's own creative identity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Flood, 2011)
- creativity as a threshold disposition requires a perspective change in the learner in order to reconstruct their own persona as 'creative'
- thresholds of identity are the points at which decisions are made: influenced by 'creative system' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999) or the 'power/knowledge structure' (Foucault, 1992) that a person inhabits.
- learner engaging with the concept of creativity in their context and with their own developing creative identity may be the first troublesome step into the liminal space of creative transformation.



Learning and teaching in liminal space

- Unexpected outcomes - that emerge from engagement, interaction and risk-taking in learning - promote individual and collective growth.
- Collaboration, critical creativity enabling scepticism and imagination, could provide the dynamic and the structure required for the ritual to become self-guided.
- Education as ritual: novice, induction, guidance, separation, identity, transformation and liberation.
- Oppressive aspects of enacting pre-ordained educational ritual - unthinking compliance and external imposition of boundaries, hurdles and processes that may alienate and disarm. (Bourdieu, 1990; McLaren, 1999; Senge, 2000)



'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?'
'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said the Cat.
'I don't much care where—' said Alice.
'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat.
'—so long as I get SOMEWHERE,' Alice added as an explanation.
'Oh, you're sure to do that,' said the Cat, 'if you only walk long enough.'



Learning and teaching in liminal space

- Teachers as transformative learners - “unlearn pedagogy” and become a “meddler in the middle” (McWilliam, 2005)
- “knowing the world is a matter of producing epistemological gaps” . Barnett (2004) - emergence from transformative ritual into perpetual transformation.
- Transformative teaching: “this challenge must be combined with safety, support, and a sense of learner empowerment, it is, at the center, a challenge of our beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives that leads us to question ourselves.” Cranton (2002, p.66)



Transformation for teachers

- Teacher as transformative learner models this approach for learners.
- For academics, creativity is a disposition that can be brought to bear on the uncertainties and ambiguities of the academic role and workplace.
- Transformative learning framework for teachers’ professional development could promote the development of creative capacities in teachers.
- eg. artwork and reflection through metaphor to "provide a space where lecturers themselves can hold, examine and develop tolerance for uncertainty" (Loads, 2010, p409).



Transformation for teachers

- “I think it is this environment of challenge that underlies teaching for transformation. Although this challenge must be combined with safety, support, and a sense of learner empowerment, it is, at the center, a challenge of our beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives that leads us to question ourselves.” Cranton (2002, p66)
- “most significant to the role of the educator seems to be not the various techniques and strategies that they employ, instead it is becoming a transformative learner themselves. This means as educators they 'must be adult learners continually striving to update, develop, expand and deepen their perspectives both on subject area and on their own goals and roles as educators' (Cranton, 1994, p228)” . Taylor (1998, p57)



Researching in liminal space

- **Teaching as praxis** (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), **curriculum as praxis** (Grundy, 1987): integrates research into practice, emancipatory aim.
- **Praxis**: practice and critical reflection on practice are integrated to drive development of practice, and inform theory in an action-research cycle resembling the transformative learning process
- **Creative praxis**: a creative approach to praxis (emphasis on imaginative and exploratory techniques) and a focus on creativity enacted in practice (for university teachers).
- **Participants** in praxis: engaging with, critiquing, developing and transforming their perspectives on, beliefs about, and practice of creativity.



'I wish you wouldn't squeeze so.' said the Dormouse, who was sitting next to her. *'I can hardly breathe.'*
'I can't help it,' said Alice very meekly: *'I'm growing.'*
'You've no right to grow here,' said the Dormouse.
'Don't talk nonsense,' said Alice more boldly: *'you know you're growing too.'*
'Yes, but I grow at a reasonable pace,' said the Dormouse: *'not in that ridiculous fashion.'*



The future

- “One of the real challenges is to **innovate fundamentally** in education. Innovation is hard because it means doing something that people don't find very easy for the most part. It means challenging what we take for granted, things that we think are obvious.” (Robinson, 2010)
- The institution itself may be in need of some transformative learning - need to reimagine the university as a **learning organisation** (Senge, 1990)
- Awareness of the complex social, economic and environmental challenges presented in the current global situation requires a **radical critique of the form and function of education**, which must urgently engender new creative visions based upon a cosmological framework (O'Sullivan, 1999; 2003; O'Sullivan, Morrell & O' Connor, 2002).



Next steps - creative praxis

Learning, teaching and research take place in a liminal space of becoming – in a praxis of critiquing assumptions, opening possibilities and imagining futures.

Maintaining an emancipatory focus for praxis may enable the subversive potential of creativity, reinvigorating idealistic notions of university as a critical and creative organisation.

“So she sat on, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland, though she knew she had but to open them again, and all would change to dull reality.”

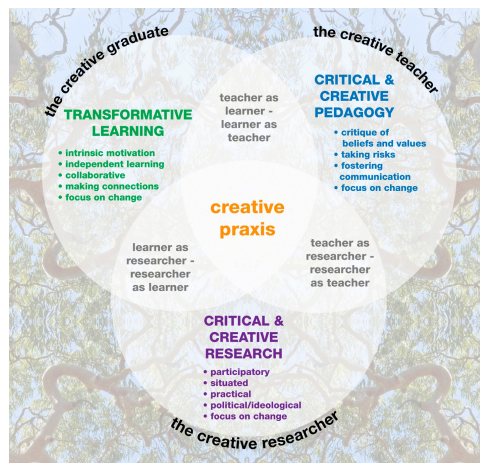


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Thanks!



Belinda Allen
University of
New South Wales
belinda@unsw.edu.au

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