Creative Academy: Reflective Stories

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Abstract

The Creative Academy centres around Clements and Ingleson's notion of creativity centred learning. Involving single structure learning platforms (tiered engagement, 'sliding scale' benchmarks and achievements) with peer/inter-relational, (community/project driven) experienced based learning. It allows enterprise-structured frameworks for self-directed learning, opening access to common knowledge and encouraging inter-institutional collaborations. Creating opportunities for extra-curricular, informal learning cohorts, with the capacity of building in schools and cross-disciplinary creative education.

The Creative Academy is the general heading for a range of initiatives that all conspire to support a more inclusive and encouraging educational environment in the UK's North West region, one where creativity can provide access to learning and a resource for the community. An aim of The Creative Academy is to extend the impact of the university and outreach to both established enterprise in the Creative Content sector and to new practitioners and participants.

This paper will outline aspirations for the School of Art and Design's Community Engagement Team, through the exploration of three separate case studies that demonstrate the Creative Academy's principles of collaboration and intervention through non-formal and extended learning platforms.

Background

- Salford is an area of social, economic and infrastructure regeneration that needs to impact positively on the local population and include the traditions and heritage of the City as strength.
- The University has the potential to deliver greater synergies with the various organisations operating within Salford and the various community groups and people within it's boundaries.

- There is an enormous opportunity to utilise the knowledge and awareness of a wide range of individuals and organisations within the City (these include 3rd Sector organisations, primary and secondary schools, individuals and cultural organisations)

- The University is a key asset and resource within the framework of the local and regional heritage economy and has the capabilities of creating new opportunities for broad and inclusive engagement.

- There is potential for learning partnerships to be developed with cultural organisations, museums, voluntary sector organisations, Schools and Colleges.

- There is a significant risk that valuable knowledge and experiences are being lost from the Salford area, potentially undermining the unique character of the City and there is a need to capture and retain such wisdom and resource to enhance the cultural regeneration of Salford.

As the rate of change increases in the region's urban metropolis in response to the MediaCityUK development, there is an increasing anxiety amongst local communities about the potential cultural displacement of established neighbourhoods and the eradication or marginalisation of local identity and cultural memory. Much as new wealth and the injection of fresh economic drivers is a welcome boost for the wider region, the epicentre of this modern industrial revolution is still recovering from the social trauma and legacy of the last process of industrialisation. Across Salford and beyond, there is a growing sense that authentic memories of Salford as a 'Place' with discrete social identities, character and cultural values can easily be overlooked or misrepresented as the priorities of the new 'City' are freshly configured around separate goals.

Figure 1. Manchester Docks, Salford

Figure 2. Artist impression of Media City

Our aim for the Creative Academy is to deliver a method of creating community engagement through the arts, seeking to release the potential for collective enterprise with young people, enabling ownership and shared responsibility for their community, and fostering fresh creativity and a diversity of approach in the exploration of social issues arising from economic disadvantage.

The research areas of creative technology, Contemporary Fine Art and Heritage design and Innovation within the school of art and design are already embedded within: communities, neighbourhoods and public partnerships via a range of practice and innovation initiatives relevant to the discipline fields. Activities in theses areas tend to be experience rich and engage participatory audiences, civic partners and community based collaborators as an essential characteristic of most research and knowledge transfer in these fields. As such, the research community in art and design offers cross-disciplinary research communicant strategies and an embedded habit of engagement and an inclusive design approach. The major focus of the three specialist areas of expertise in the School is practice and kinaesthetic enquiry.

Embedded within these broader activities are two programmes that have significantly informed the notion and development of the Creative Academy: 'Vocational Mentoring/Pyramids of Outreach' and the 'Regional Progression network in Art and Design', North West.

Vocational Mentoring/Pyramids of Outreach programme

Working with local schools, FE colleges and Undergraduates from the school of Art and Design, the programme focuses on delivering art experiences to young people via undergraduate and post-graduate student mentors. The aims of the programme include using arts based activities to support student progression; raise the aspirations of young people to progress into post 16 education; to provide semi-professional experiences for undergraduates and post-graduates considering a career in arts education practice.

The programme includes opportunities for university students to work as artists in residence in schools, mentor school students on 'live' projects in cultural organisations (galleries, theatres, museums etc) and provides the opportunity for school students to work in the School of Art and design's art studios for a sustained amount of time on self-directed mentored projects.

An outcome from The Vocational Mentoring and Pyramids of Outreach programmes for the authors has been an increased knowledge of a number of common concerns for secondary school art and design departments: lack of specialist support for pupils wishing to further their career in art and design; lack of opportunities for secondary school staff to engage

with FE and University art and design departments; lack of role models and aspirations for pupils with an interest in art and design; lack of discussion between providers about progression and links between the different levels of providers curriculums.

More positively the project highlighted school staffs enthusiasm for participatory events; engagement with University departments; increased access to and a recognition of the importance of primary art sources for teaching and learning; opportunities to share good practice in art and design.

The Regional Progression Network in Art and Design

The School of Art and Design at Salford initially established the network in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University, Local Further Education colleges and the Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance.

The RPN 's key aim is to promote and extend opportunities for individuals from the North West region as they progress through all levels of education in art and design. This includes progression from school to FE, FE to HE, from undergraduate to postgraduate studies and across all aspects of the creative and cultural industries through the provision of relevant continuing professional and extra-curricular opportunities. The concern is to facilitate regional progression opportunities through the establishment of points of

connection. One way of achieving this has been the creation of direct progression arrangements from level to level and, of more relevance to this paper, through the organisation of regular events to share experience, provide networking possibilities, and the development of curriculum projects of benefit to all levels of provision.

Through this experience led and therefore pro-active engagement the network encourages active investment from cohorts and informal learners that adds to the potential for self-sustaining behaviour. The network also provides the opportunity for celebratory events as illustrated in case study one described in this paper.

See Appendix 1. Figure 3. Diagram of Regional Progression Model

Regional Collaboration and the Creative Curriculum

'Successful knowledge based businesses invariably have their feet firmly rooted in a local cluster that provides them with access to their knowledge base. To succeed a cluster needs momentum and mass to get going. But as it develops it also needs a diversity of ideas and people to provide new sources of growth. Initially a cluster is likely to grow faster around a clear base of knowledge and a distinct market opportunity.' [1] Charles Leadbeater

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[1]   Surfing the Long Wave, Knowledge

Universities are in a strong position to create situations whereby school pupils, FE students, local residents, undergraduates, postgraduates and older learners can work on collaborative projects in an aspirational environment with the potential to highlight talent and encourage an entrepreneurial approach. Salford University is situated geographically directly at the heart of the community, unusual in that Salford has no clearly defined city centre the University has the potential to act as a hub for local communities and as a conduit for innovation on a local level. This ambition however can only work with the support and enthusiasms of local communities and only through close collaborations with local businesses, schools and organisations to achieve mutually beneficial aims and objectives.

It makes sense then to develop our own network clusters to facilitate and share knowledge, to contribute to regional expansion in educational art practice, creating opportunities for extra-curricular, informal learning cohorts, with the capacity of building in schools and cross-disciplinary creative education.

As the current technology driven economic climate shifts towards a recognition of the importance of entrepreneurial innovation and social enterprise it is recognized that schools, colleges and Universities must shift their approach to creative learning to keep up with advancing changes. Our work has focused on the development of projects and

initiatives that seek to work in tandem with beneficiaries, whether they are schools, young offenders, education providers or businesses.

As an example the primary creative curriculum and the New Secondary Curriculum, recently introduced into schools in the UK, have gone to some lengths to try and address some of the problems created by a system that in recent years has become exam and test focused to the detriment of the arts. The recent *Rose report* states: *'...a well-planned vibrant curriculum recognises that primary children relish learning independently and cooperatively; they love to be challenged and engaged in practical activities; they delight in the wealth of opportunities for understanding more about the world.'* Sir Jim Rose. [2]

Teresa Cremin, an expert on creativity in primary schools and professor of education at the Open University, has stated that a large proportion of teachers still mis-understand the meaning and role of creativity in schools.

This might mean a day off the curriculum to do "the arts" after pupils have sat tests. It's a myth to call this creative learning, she says. Creativity must be embedded into everyday teaching and learning. *'Many schools haven't got a handle on the language of creativity and are reticent about teaching more creatively,'* she says. *'They are worried they won't achieve*

Entrepreneurship in Britain. Charles Leadbeater and Kate Oakley. Demos 2001

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[2]   Rose   Report   2009 http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/primarycurriculumreview/

standards in other things.'[3] She agrees with much of Ken Robinson's argument. *'If you have a school system which rewards conformity and avoids risk-taking, then youngsters will be unable to cope with the world unfolding before them.'[4]*

Our response to this has been to work with current networks to examine how we can work with schools to develop projects that incorporate a range of activities that work alongside the new curriculum, provide support for young people with ambitions in the arts, provide opportunities for teaching staff's professional development and develop relationships with local communities. The diagram *Creative Curriculum - Open Access, Common Knowledge Resource,* illustrates our approach to developing projects that respond to a creative curriculum.

See Appendix 2. Figure 4. Diagram Creative Curriculum - Open Access, Common Knowledge Resource

Open Learning Events for Art, design and Creative Media.

Case Study 1. 'Reflective Stories' Exhibition and Archive

Figure 5. Examples of sketchbooks from Reflective Stories

Our notion of a creative curriculum includes an approach to teaching and learning which is emphatic, based on knowledge transfer and exchange, is interactive and experience led.

At an early Regional Progressive Network event it became clear that Art and Design staff from the region would welcome opportunities to share examples of student work and their developmental processes. It was recognised that the use of the sketchbook or journal was something that was used in all levels of education and was also an important aspect of professional practice in art and design. The role of the sketchbooks and journals in the processes of critical reflection in creative-cultural practices is also something that has been of particular interest to staff at the University of Salford and the Manchester Metropolitan University.

The project looked at 'Reflective Stories' captured in sketchbooks, journals and learning logs and asked

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[3] Jessica Shepherd. The Guardian, Tuesday 10 February 2009

[4] The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything by Ken Robinson with Lou Aronica, published by Penguin 2009

participants to identify critical or 'messy' moments where tacit knowledge or intuition have a specific influence over the learning process. The project responded to recent practice in primary schools in the North West where sketchbooks have been used to support learners in all areas of the curriculum. A double page from each sketchbook submitted was photographed and digitised and now forms the basis of a significant archive that is used by teachers throughout the region to encourage a more imaginative and individual use of reflective methods of learning.

Examples of sketchbook and journal practices originate from a wide range of subject areas that include the visual arts, most areas of design and applied arts, creative writing, science, archaeology and music.

The 'Reflective Stories' exhibition was attended by schools, FE colleges and HE institutions who undertook structured educational workshops and informal learning sessions. The exhibition was also used for teachers' professional development training and for initial teacher training students.

'Reflective Stories' is therefore an innovative attempt to use the RPN archive to explore the ways in which all creative-cultural practitioners (as students and as professionals) generate *still moments of reflection* within the dynamic of their creative processes. Ultimately it is this sense of an underlying interconnectedness between art and design education and creative-cultural professional

practices that 'Reflective Stories' seeks to reveal and then to celebrate.

Regional Open Learning Events, such as this one, are structured for tiered engagements and can bring together experienced and new learners at any level; Further Education Colleges, 6th Form Centres, Higher Education departments, Doctoral students, Secondary Schools and Primary Schools; such themed events can attract participation from any age range or level of experience. The aim is to run a series of events that focus on transversal values within the broad subject fields of Art, Design and Creative media and that will help build an archive as an open learning resource.

Peer/inter-relational (community/ project driven) experienced based learning.

Case study 2. 70 Windows

Figure 6. Virtual Impression of how the final project might look.

The Knowledge Transfer team in the School of Art and Design has initiated a working partnership with

a local High School and a group of Year 10 pupils to set up a pupil led enterprise to run an inter-generational project that will grow and manage Heritage Media Assets of local significance. New invention from postgraduate students working in 'Second Life' environments is helping the young pupils involved to visualise and share their project and promote its future potential to their audience and funders.

This project focuses on the production of billboard scale images/text to surround the Old Police Station at Salford Crescent. The project starts with a series of workshops with Albion High School pupils, led by recent graduates and supported by University staff, to develop and gather images and texts based on Salford family heritage and personal histories. The completed installation will record an intergenerational event that celebrates memory and opportunity in the changing economic and social landscape of Salford.

Background

Figure 7. The Old Police Station

The Old Police Station is owned by Salford City Council and the windows are currently boarded with plywood. The building has been subject to break in and arson since it was left empty. With the future of the building undecided, it is clear that dilapidation and decay will become more of an issue as time lapses. This proposal seeks to maintain the facade of the building as a positive space in the urban landscape and a venue for inclusive, participatory work with communities of Salford going forward

The project proposes that Local History engagements with young people are the most suitable conduit for contacting and engaging with the older community; guardians, extended family and friends; by adding a layer of inter-generational project work the project proposes to secure engagement with the adult community. For example, in its early stages, the project seeks to source and collect archive material from relatives and neighbours of participating young people in Schools, thereby providing a starting point and developing a data base of contacts from contributors. In terms of capture the proposal is to work across a range of platforms and narrative media; film, graphics, photography, story-telling etc.

In addition the project will work with the National Probation Service, Greater Manchester Trust. As part of their initial funded programme, the Intensive Alternative to Custody, this project provides a learning mentor programme invested in Creative Education and Practice. The project will construct a model of practice, tested via this case study, that draws experienced learners from

creative subject fields into a project collaboration with inexperienced and excluded individuals on IAC orders. This pilot would form part of the offer for Specified Activity Requirements, one of the developmental aspects of the IAC scheme. In terms of research benefits it provides a test environment that develops ongoing interests and research into models of learner and creative enterprise led educational engagements for the promotion of social inclusion and knowledge sharing with disadvantaged or marginalised communities and individuals.

http://salford-in-pictures.edinteractive.co.uk/pages/about.php

Community focused projects

Case Study 3. WearPeace

Fig 8. WearPeace Accessory Design

Research and knowledge transfer staff are currently engaged with partnership work with charities, Schools and Greater Manchester Police in South Manchester, generating and disseminating creative enterprise models with young people as part of a campaign culture that has grown in the area in the fight against gun related crimes. WearPeace is a community and youth led initiative that employs researchers and students from; Art, Graphics, Fashion, Design Technology and Material science to devise new products from recycled gun metal as a means of raising awareness, social partnerships and gift income to benefit a wider social cohesion and peace campaign.

The WearPeace project stems from an existing relationship between the School of Art and Design, CARISMA (Community Alliance for Renewal Inner South Manchester Area) and the police's Xcalibre task force looking at ways to change people's perceptions and attitudes towards guns. The School of Art and Design obtained the metal from a ground down gun and recast this metal into a peace coin; the coins were auctioned off during peace week. A limited edition range of saltshakers (a reference to CARISMA venue at the time – the Saltshaker community centre) was also produced again using smelted gunmetal.

The WearPeace project will create a range of clothing and accessories under the WearPeace label that can be sold locally, nationally and internationally to promote the 'save a life not take a life' message. It is envisaged that all the clothes and accessories will contain a small quantity of decommissioned gun metal or metal from an unused bullet – as designer tags or fashion details, to reinforce the message that every garment purchased will help to take

another gun out of circulation. University of Salford BA graphics students worked with young people to design the WearPeace logo that will be used to brand the WearPeace label.

We are currently in the first year of the 3 yr project and have created a WearPeace brand name, cast from gun-metal. We are now working again with young people from the high schools and community groups to see how this brand can be promoted via guerrilla advertising amongst their peer groups.

http://wearpeace10.wordpress.com

Creative Academy Leading To Practice In Creative Research

The following proposals, currently under development, all contribute to our overall aim of the creation of a cross-disciplinary research network. The concept is aimed at developing cultural growth models where the impact might be felt in; enlarged cultural economies, improved social capital, growth in aspiration and participation, market demand stimulation, increased social and political mobility and knowledge growth.

Creative Education

Through 2008 and 2009, the University of Salford developed a postgraduate programme, delivered through work based learning, in Creative Education. The programme is specifically designed to meet the needs of; working teachers (primary, secondary and tertiary), those in relevant educational support and development roles and those working within educational contexts such as galleries, museums and youth development. The primary focus is on learning in the work place and building from experience and the programme relates best to those with a background in or responsibility for, delivering; creative skills, disciplines and media. The team have made use of a range of delivery methods, blended to provide; a diversity of experiences for the learner, an opportunity for individual tailoring of the syllabus, optimum reflective time within the curriculum and access to learning technologies.

Currently we have submitted a proposal for a Creative Education Research Network seeks to encourage the dissemination of; creative techniques, practices and concepts within education delivery. At all levels of education there has been a sustained period of radical and rapid change, driven by the public economy, shifting demographics and a steady transfer of ideology towards a student led educational paradigm. At the same time, school based education, up to level 3 of the National Qualifications Framework, is moving towards a deeper professionalisation through qualification. The proposal for a Creative Education Research Network is aimed at developing collaboration on and impact from new methods of teaching and learning delivery in a cross-disciplinary environment.

Creative Hubs

This proposal is focussed on a retail space, or spaces, in a commercial environment that operates as a project hub for current students on Arts and Creative Media programmes in Further or Higher Education. The initiative comes from the very formidable Graphic Design programme at Salford University and will seek to engage with the growing Creative Content sector in the region through interactive projects with industry partners.

This project aims to bring about a closer relationship between the arts and the local community, by using creative arts practice as a vehicle for potential social and economic relief during a period of downturn and recession. The proposal is to create an innovation hub and gallery (or more than one), utilising disused retail space in the heart of the City, left empty as a result of the economic downturn. The project aims to support economic activity and creative presence in City centre spaces and will further create links between the University, its local community and the creative industries that surround it. The project is cross-disciplinary, between subject fields in; Art, Design, Music, Media, Performance, Computing Science and Interactive Technologies. The project will facilitate the incubation and showcasing of ideas and creative outputs through a series of curated (managed) shows and events. The project will seek partnerships with active agents in the Creative Content industries, such as; BBC21CC, Lets go Global, Soup Collective and Islington Mill to further secure cultural and industry links within the community.

Creative Factory

The 'Creative Factory' provides a platform for invention at doctoral level practice the aim of which is to generate sufficient knowledge of the limited editions, art publishing and art multiples markets so as to generate training capacity for young professionals and extend the reach of the project to engage with European partners. The project is connected to research projects within the School that are looking at the culture of artist multiples and the effect that technologies have on original production for low volume edition.

The goal of the Creative Factory is to encourage the community of artists to exchange creative ideas and concepts via shared projects or manufacturing initiatives. Our proposition is that artists and creative designers are inventors and manufacturers, working on a very small scale. The Creative Factory is seeking ways of supporting the innovation and original energy generated by fresh creative talent so that it can be produced affordably and disseminated effectively for the general cultural benefit of the region.

Creative Extra

Aimed at Extra-Curricular and Informal Cohorts, this is a proposal for a network of informal learning activities based on creativity and the arts. It represents a one-stop shop for advice and direction on groups and practices from; social groups, special interest classes, skill swap networks, collective learning groups and community based resources. Salford is home to; contemporary knitting groups, heritage clubs, contemporary Fine Art societies and studio academies, life drawing classes and a semi-professional artist print studio. The aim of 'Creative Extra' would be to encourage informal groups and provide a level of resource to facilitate this type of engagement and the public exposure, through exhibition, of creative enterprise in the City and region. Most groups or societies have a minimum requirement for space and some would benefit from simple resources and shared promotional budgets. 'Creative Extra' would seek to offer advice and guidance to those who would want to formalise their future learning and wish to progress to qualifications.

Summary

The concept of a Creative academy as outlined is one that adapts to the demands of an innovation-driven knowledge-based economy. Although in it's infancy as a concept it is gaining strength amongst local communities and partner organizations through live projects and robust collaborations. Additional bids are in development to expand the range of activities and to establish the Academy as an instigator of change through creative projects.

Following on from 'Reflective Stories' and witnessing the success of the archives as a tool for teaching we are developing a bid that extends the notion of the development of archives specifically aimed as tools for teaching. The bid includes the proposal to work with the archives of multiple, regional and national, cultural organisations to conduct research into the possible ways in which the re-appropriation and creative manipulation of collections, specifically media communication design can provide tools and facilitation for experience based learning.

The idea is to create models of practice that are transferable within networks – schools, museums, artists, educators – that concentrate on the re-appropriation and subversion of collections, confront hidden resources and question the curatorial philosophies that underpin the intellectual structures within cultural organisations.

The knowledge transfer process is targeting skills in terms of multi-agency project working, creative research methods, action learning

and empowerment and applied social arts practices.

The summary output from the research will be a toolkit and training pack for disseminating methods of inclusive and collaborative arts practice that lead to social enterprise. Finalising and testing new methods of creative and community engagement through action research provides the evidence to support the transfer of principles and practices in the deployment of the arts for social and environmental benefits to professionals and volunteers in public and third sector bodies.

The case studies provide direct evidence of the role and function of arts and creative media in multi-strand learning and participation projects. As educational policy and practice with the 14+ age range moves more towards action based learning and transferable life skills the projects described provide outward facing models emphatic of team or collaborative process and individual responsibility and creativity. As community capacity building is increasingly measured in terms of sustainability indicators it is important that the arts and its practitioners can evidence their work and impact through new and innovative models of practice. Combined, those two scenarios evidence a growing role for the arts as a catalyst for engagement participation.