

Conceiving the whole: the attributes of creative arts education today

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The number one book on the *New York Times* bestseller list this month (December 2011) is a self-titled biography of the late Steve Jobs, a man who is remembered as an icon of creativity and inventiveness. One of the dominant themes of the biography is captured in a quote from Jobs himself in the opening pages. “I always thought of myself as a humanities person as a kid, but I liked electronics”, he said. “Then I read something that one of my heroes, Edwin Land of Polaroid, said about the importance of people who could stand at the intersection of humanities and sciences, and I decided that’s what I wanted to do” (Isaacson 2011, p. xvii).

This ability to position oneself and one’s work at the intersection of the humanities and sciences is a theme that intrigued Jobs’ biographer, the former chairman of CNN and a previous editor of *Time* magazine, Walter Isaacson. “The creativity that can occur when a feel for both the humanities and science combine in one strong personality was the topic that most interested me in my biographies of Franklin and Einstein”, writes Isaacson (2011, p. xvii), adding “I believe it will be a key to creating innovative economies in the twenty-first century”.

Taking a stance at the intersection of the humanities and sciences is also the theme of another *New York Times* bestseller that inspired this special issue of *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development (SLEID)*. Daniel Pink’s (2006) book *A Whole New Mind* uses the two hemispheres of the human brain as a metaphor for a shift that he believes is occurring in Western society. Pink argues that society is moving from an Information Age, characterised predominantly by logical, linear, L-Directed (left-brain) Thinking, to a Conceptual Age that will place equal importance on inventive, empathic, R-Directed (right-brain) Thinking. This shift, he argues, is part of a general movement that accepts that creativity and innovation are the prime sources of business value and competitive advantage in the new economy. This thesis prompted a symposium hosted by CQUniversity’s School of Creative and Performing Arts and held at the university’s Mackay campus in November 2010, which asked participants to reflect upon Pink’s ideas and use them as a springboard for consideration. This special issue of *SLEID* grew out of the presentations and deliberations of that event.

While this issue of *SLEID* did not set out to focus on a detailed analysis or critique of Pink’s work *per se*, it did seek responses stimulated by the ways he conceives creativity and its development. In particular, the editors were interested in exploring, in common with the discussion of graduate attributes that is currently animating Australian and other national education systems, how certain skill sets can be harnessed to advantage. For Pink, there are six attributes that are crucial to success in the new economy: design, story, symphony, empathy, play and meaning. Might these form the foundations for creative arts education? The contributors to

this issue of *SLEID* investigate the importance, relevance or otherwise, of Pink's six attributes in various fields of the creative arts and creative arts education.

Steven Pace's article closely follows Daniel Pink's scheme of the six essential aptitudes necessary in the 'conceptual age'. Applying them to the field of human-computer interaction, Pace argues that these attributes are transforming our relationship with technology. He suggests that they might form a paradigm for developments in other fields of tertiary education. The link between a broadly conceived notion of creativity and the idea of systemic thinking is developed by Carlos Montana-Hoyos and Fanny Lemaitre, through a case study of a student transport design project. The multidisciplinary component of systemic thinking outlined by Montana-Hoyos and Lemaitre and the human-computer interface examined by Pace are given a somewhat sinister twist in Clive Graham's dystopic analysis of Mode-2 transdisciplinary convergence. Here, driven by commercial interests in the performing arts sector, new creative solutions exploit genetics, robotics, information technology and nanotechnology in a synergistic activity that has the potential to transform homosapiens into a transhuman species.

In a case study that examines the application of creativity to a specific vocational context, Ashley Holmes discusses reciprocal knowledge transfer through student-developed, interactive, multimedia workplace manuals in a sector of the mining industry. Ian Gaskell examines discourse on the art of acting as a form of metaphor, drawing upon metaphor's ability to serve as a form of constitutive rhetoric creating a discourse community of shared language and beliefs. In Gaskell's article, this community is a 'rhetorical audience' constructed by language and called into being by being addressed. Storytelling, drawing and metaphor constitute an inherently creative way to engage in self-reflective analysis and the development of teaching practice. Using a 'sonata-style' narrative to explore the highly personal and challenging experience of an early childhood educator, Alison Black shows how arts-based representations can lead to self-understanding and growth.

In a similar fashion, Judith Brown uses an autoethnographic approach to describe and analyse the creative experience of being a piano accompanist. The creative state is explored through Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow' and is married to the idea of 'mindfulness', a psychological state of focused attention that allows a person to become totally aware "in the moment". The concluding paper by Donna Lee Brien takes the broad concept of creativity and applies it to the field of tertiary education, showing how it has become increasingly valued not just in relation to specific disciplines but also as a generic attribute that is perceived as desirable to potential employers. She extends her discussion from the student experience to that of the creative arts educator.

Together, we believe, these contributions provides a range of interesting and valuable insight into, and reflections upon, arts education today. This includes on art educators, and where these individuals (as instructors, mentors and leaders in their fields) position themselves in terms of both enhancing creativity and that productive space that exists at the point where the humanities and science meet.

References

Pink, D.H. (2006). *A whole new mind: Why right-brainers will rule the future*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Isaacson, W. (2011). *Steve Jobs*. London: Little Brown.