

Interpreting my pedagogic practices through the lens of creative learning ecologies

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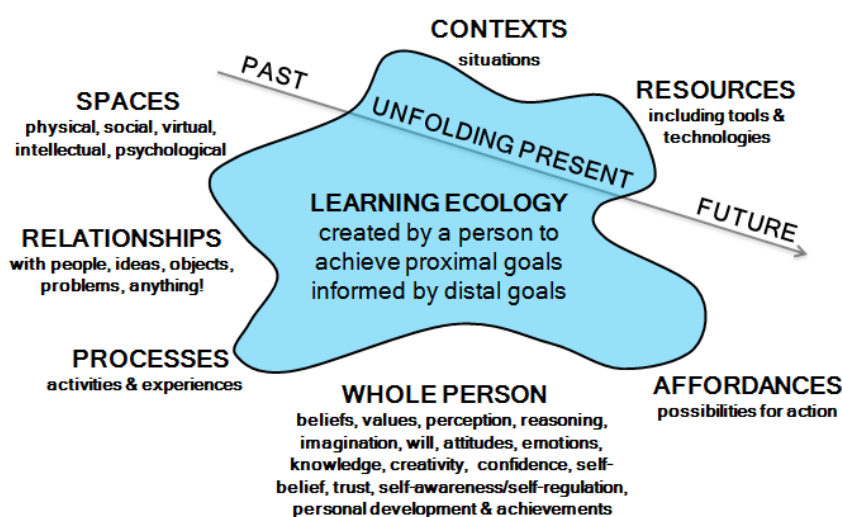


Ellie creates multimedia learning and teaching resources for academic staff development at Manchester Metropolitan University. She co-ordinates the [Good Practice Exchange](#), a project to collect and disseminate good practice in learning and teaching within MMU and is leading the development of SOTL! - an educational game for teaching research design. She is an active member of the Creative Academic community and has contributed to a number of #creativeHE conversations. She also leads the [101 Creative Ideas](#) project: part of Creative Academic's Creativity in Higher Education programme of work.

Background

I participated in the November 2016 #creativeHE conversation which explored the idea of creative pedagogies for creative learning ecologies. One of the invitations within this conversation was to reflect on a situation we had facilitated where we had tried to encourage participants to use their creativity and use the idea of a learning ecology to interpret the dynamics of the situation. The November issue of CAM7 describes this process¹ and the model of a learning ecology I am using is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1 Model of a leaning ecology¹



I was intrigued by the idea and wanted to explore the concept of a learning ecology in my own *context* of providing opportunities for professional development at MMU.

I selected an academic staff development workshop that I had organised and facilitated as part of the MMU 'Festival of Learning and

Teaching' 2016. The Festival was an internal, distributed conference for all staff at MMU to come together to share their experiences and know how in order to help their colleagues learn and develop their practices. Events, workshops, and presentations took place throughout the month of June.

My session was called 'How to use video with your students'. The two hour workshop aimed to introduce colleagues to a variety of ways of using video in their teaching. The situation

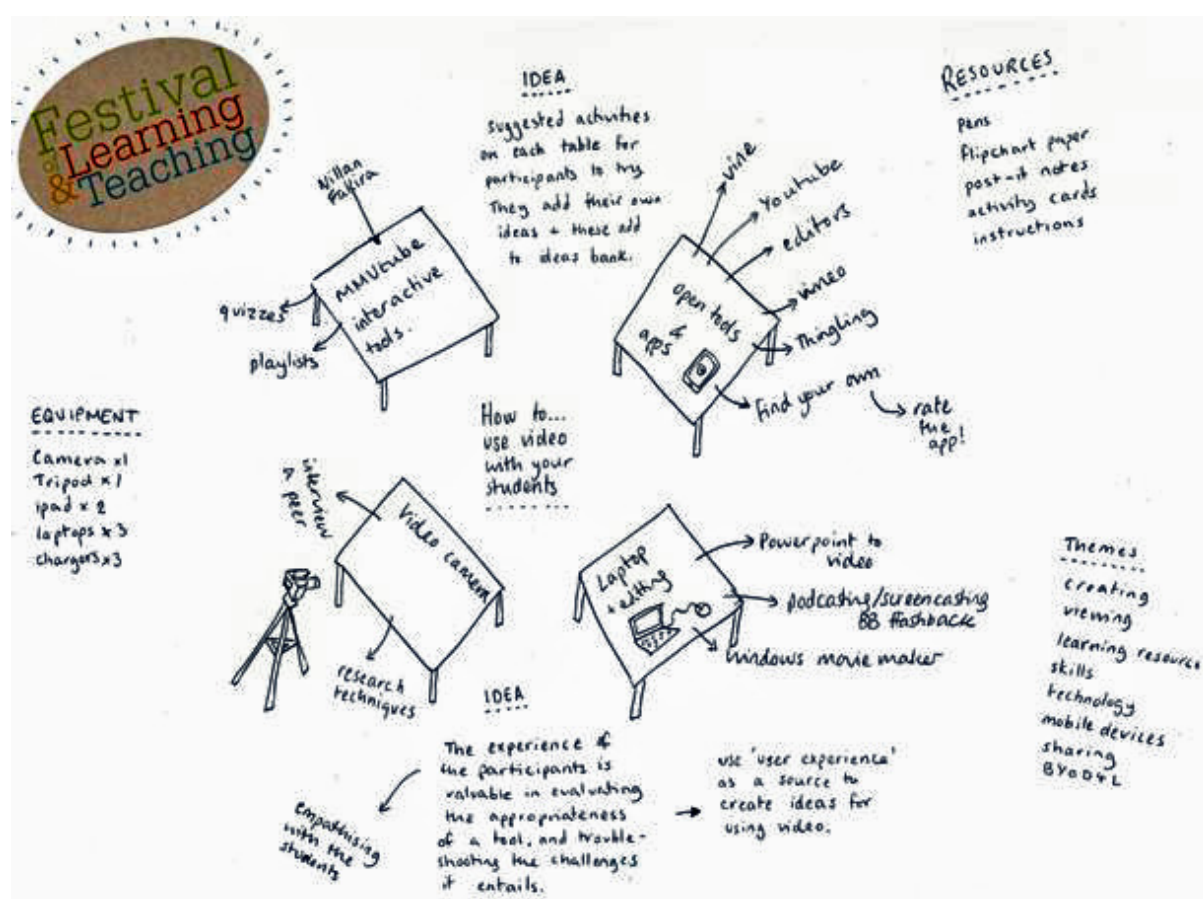
provided much **affordance** for participants to be introduced to new ideas, technologies and practices.

Building an ecology for interaction

For the CreativeHE conversation, I tried to interpret what I did through the ecological framework we were exploring (Figure 1). This model suggests that as the facilitator of the session, I brought all my **knowledge** and **skills**, as well as the **beliefs** and **values** I held to help create the conditions for learning that I wanted participants to achieve. For example, when planning the workshop I had in my mind the question what sorts of things are needed to create a good professional learning experience. I was also conscious that participants themselves would be coming with their own knowledge and skills and their own experiences of using technologies, perhaps even the ones we were using in the workshop.

The **classroom space** I booked for the workshop had moveable furniture so I set about trying to create a space in which participants could move around and interact with different technologies and with each other. I arranged four tables, each with a different approach to video on it (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Sketch of the way I organised the physical **space** of my classroom



In order to enable everyone to experience all of these aspects I gave participants 15 minutes on a table before moving them to another table in a round-robin style. The first table focused on web 2.0 open tools and apps that related to video. The second focused on activities you could do on your computer i.e. video editing software. The third table had sharing tools like

YouTube and Vimeo, and the fourth table focused on video recording, where a camera was set up for participants to use.

An ecology a teacher creates for learning contains **activities** to engage people in ways that certain types of learning are likely to emerge. The activity contain affordance for doing something and creates possibilities for participants' to interact with others, including the teacher, **objects and tools** (the technologies I provided). All the activities were underlain by a purpose - like make something or do something. Learning emerges through the interactions and conversations. Perhaps the activities themselves are micro learning ecologies.

My facilitation was mainly in the form of written guidance, responses to questions and other interactions with participants during the workshop. On each of the tables, I provided a range of cards each containing suggested activities for participants to do that would encourage them to use video in different ways. I gave participants a lot of *choice* so they could select tasks that appealed to them during the 15 minutes they had on each table. For instance, one activity involved an app called Vine (see Figure 3). The activity card explained the app, and suggested creating a short video. To extend the activity, they could post the video online. During and after all the activities, participants were encouraged to note down some ideas for how they could use it in their teaching on the paper in the middle of the table. I included a 'things you'll need' section to help participants decide what was right for them; for example, whether or not they'd need to download something or create an account in order to access the tool.

Figure 3 Example of an activity card - one of the resources I used in the ecology I created for learning.



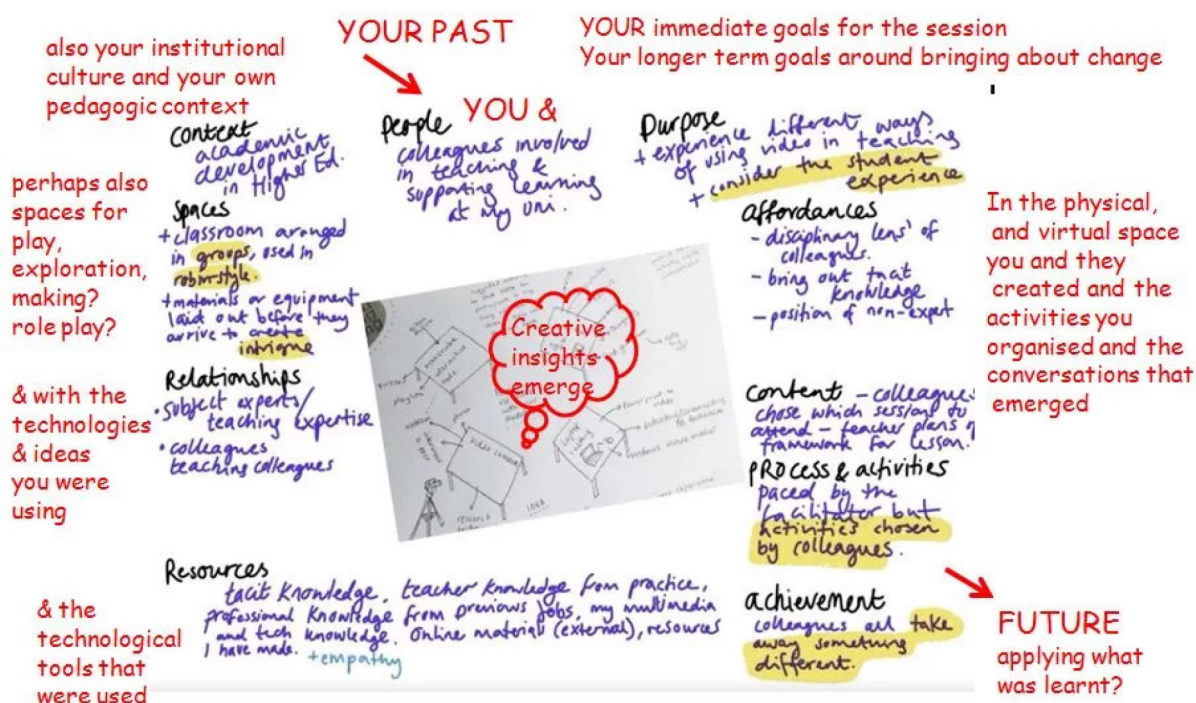
I felt it was important for me to show that I empathised with participants. As teachers we sometimes ask students to do things that we might not even be comfortable with ourselves: like videoing ourselves, sharing unfinished or unpolished work on social media, creating accounts on open tools where we are not sure about the privacy of our work or our data. When using video and other technology, many of these issues arise. To engage with these issues, I wanted participants to experience using the technologies as their students might, and to think about how this might affect their use of those technologies as teachers. For instance, one table was set up with a camera and the instruction to interview a peer about how they would like to use video. This was to get them to consider what they'd like to achieve, but also to give them the experience of putting themselves in front of the camera and see what it felt like.

Reflecting on my ecology for learning and creativity

During the week-long conversation on 'Exploring Creative Pedagogies and Learning Ecologies' that took place in the Google+ CreativeHE community, I examined this workshop I had designed and facilitated through the lens of the learning ecology model¹. I mapped my workshop into this model (see Figure 4) highlighting the areas I felt contributed most to it being a learning environment in which participants' creativity could flourish. I felt that the context, purpose, processes and activities, resources, spaces, the past and the unfolding present through which insights and other achievements emerged, were the key sites where my creative pedagogy was grounded. In sharing my thoughts I was able to interact with other people in the conversation and this enabled me to test and develop my understandings. For example, I posted my sketch (Figure 4) and annotated it with my analysis (in blue) and another participant added further annotations (in red).

Figure 4 My initial reflections (in blue) on the ecology of my workshop. Further annotations in red were suggested by the facilitator

Ellie's ecology for learning and empathising – an ecology with high practical/emotional content



Context and affordance

These were connected. The institutional conference provided a particular context within which people came together to learn. I saw the affordance to do something which I thought would make a useful contribution on behalf of my department so I pushed myself forward to act on the opportunity.

Purpose

My intended purpose of the workshop was creative in the sense that I wanted participants to experience the use of technology and apply their emotional knowledge to their professional teaching contexts. The purpose was also to generate ideas and practical experiences that they could use in their teaching.

Past

In creating my ecology for interaction and learning I drew on my past experiences. Learning ecologies that have influenced me, for example, as a student at the Manchester School of Art; running creative art workshops for school children and community groups; and postgraduate study on the Creativity for Learning unit run by MMU CELT. These creative influences have shaped my beliefs in what I think good learning and teaching should be like. My ecology for learning drew on these beliefs and experiences.

Spaces

In order to create experiences for the participants I utilised the space available to me, both literally and figuratively. Firstly, I put time into making the materials look interesting, and laying them out before participants arrived in order to create an sense of intrigue for participants. The participants also needed to move around during the course of the workshop, making them literally active. Figuratively, I tried to facilitate a space for playful learning. Participants played with new tools and took part in activities that enabled them to use these tools. Further, the activities were triggers for action. There were no constraints on how they were to be used and they could go anywhere within the time limit. I think I was trying to encourage the formation of a psychological space within which people could experience what it felt like to use and perform with these video technologies.

Resources

The equipment and software were the main specialist resources that were included in the learning ecology. However, the knowledge of participants themselves were also utilised as a resource. I included empathy as a natural resource that I knew would emerge in the course of the workshop as participants tried to make use of the resources in the activities I had created for them. When we experience things ourselves, we have responses to them. Highlighting these responses to participants and asking them to use it to inform their teaching approach is a non-traditional approach to using resources, but it is something I counted on being able to access for the workshop to achieve its purpose.

Processes and Activities

I created a lot of potential activities to encourage participants to interact with and use the video-related technologies. The activities, suggested on cards, contained the affordances for learning and the cards explained what these affordance might comprise. Ultimately, participants had to see and claim the affordance for themselves. The element of choice that was brought into the workshop was intended to enable participants to find activities that appealed to them or that they could relate to their own learning and teaching context. Choice in learning contexts is known to increase intrinsic motivation². It also helped create an open learning environment so that no participant would have experienced the workshop in the same way as another. The variation this produced facilitated a flexible and open way of working. Through the practical activities I was trying to encourage a sense of embodiment: the learning I was trying to facilitate involves head, hands and heart.

Achievements - learning & creativity

It was vital that each participant was able to contextualise the technologies to their own teaching and learning contexts, try them out and achieve some useful learning in the process. The achievements of the participants should have been different as they were able to choose how they navigated the activities. Again, this links to it being an open-ended experience. My professional achievement was to design, experience and witness the effects

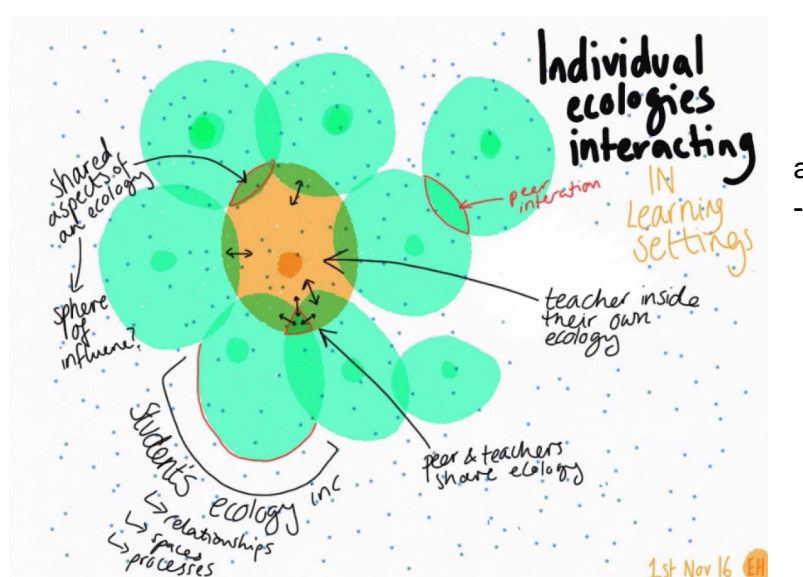
of my workshop on participants and their learning together with the learning I gained through my whole experience and my subsequent reflections on it (including writing this reflective piece).

As for creativity, I hoped that the playful activities and open-ended nature of the workshop would facilitate participants to generate new ideas for their teaching. Some of these ideas and insights might have been created by the process of doing a suggested activity, others through contrasting their experience of the activity with their experience of their own practice i.e. “This wouldn’t work in my class, not if I changed this part it might”. By making sure participants shared a table with other people I hoped too that they would discuss their ideas with each other, achieving some cross fertilisation.

In visualising my workshop through an ecological lens I can appreciate much more how so many things are connected and related.

Figure 5 Coalescing learning ecologies

One final thought, in willingly coming together in staff development workshop participants are connecting their ecologies for learning and developing within the ecology that the facilitator has created in the manner depicted in figure 5. This was another useful insight I gained through the November #creativeHE conversation.



References

- 1 Jackson, N. J. (2016) Exploring Learning Ecologies. Chalk Mountain
- 2 Wang, S. & Han, S. (2001). Six C's of Motivation. In M. Orey (Ed.), Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology. Accessed 15/12/2016, from http://epltt.coe.uga.edu/index.php?title=Six_C%27s_of_motivation