

Exploring Creativity in Higher Education: Personal Narrative

Norman Jackson



Norman Jackson is Emeritus Professor of the University of Surrey and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. His career in higher education led him from geology teacher/researcher to senior positions in several UK national bodies including the Learning and Teaching Support Network, Higher Education Academy, Quality Assurance Agency and Higher Education Quality Council. An important focus of his work over the last 15 years has been concerned with higher education's involvement in developing students' creativity. His evolving views on creativity in

higher education are documented in four books: 'Developing Creativity in Higher Education: an imaginative curriculum', 'Learning for a Complex World: a lifewide concept of learning, education and personal development' 'The Wicked Challenge of Changing a University, and most recently 'Exploring Learning Ecologies'. In 2011 he founded 'Lifewide Education and in 2015 co-founded Creative Academic - they are both enterprises for social learning.

Abstract

There are two elements to my talk. The first is a brief description of the way I try to engage higher education in exploring the nature and meanings of creativity and how teachers encourage students to use and develop their creativity. The second part describes the concept of learning ecologies I am currently exploring and developing that I believe is relevant across the contexts of applied creativity research.

Networks for Social Learning

In 2001 while working for a national body called the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) I established a maillist-based network of people interested in creativity in higher education. We called it the imaginative curriculum network and over 4 years the network grew from 30 to over 300 people. As a network we organised numerous workshops and conferences, commissioned several research studies, undertook numerous surveys and prepared many working papers. The work was synthesized in a book (Jackson 2011) and the experience demonstrated to me the power of large scale adventures in social learning.

10 years later, and convinced of the value of establishing and animating networks of professional interest as a way of engaging and involving higher education professionals in developing knowledge for practice, I co-founded Creative Academic - a resources hub and networking agent. The network has a global reach of almost 400 people. Our approach is to explore a topic, develop conceptual knowledge, attract researchers to share their work and teachers to share their practices, evaluate ideas and consolidate and share what we discover through our Creative Academic Magazine, which is published under a creative commons license <http://www.creativeacademic.uk/magazine.html>

Creative insight

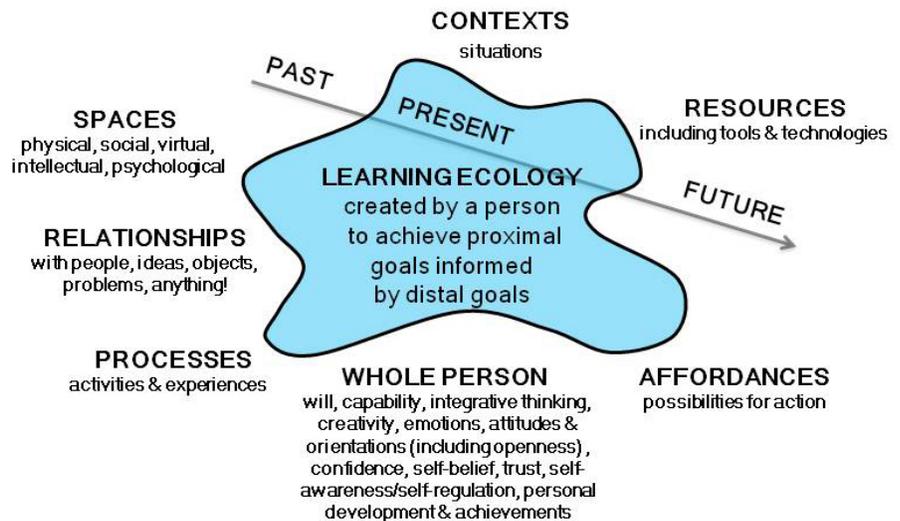
Between 2008-11 while Director of the Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education (SCEPTRE) at the University of Surrey, we developed and applied the concept of lifewide

learning through a Lifewide Learning Award. Through the narratives that students told we became aware of the many ways in which their personal creativity was used and developed in different parts of their lives. I became interested in learning and creativity as relational ecological phenomenon, and have over the last two years developed the concept of learning ecologies.

In nature an ecosystem comprises the complex set of relationships and interactions among the resources, habitats, and residents of an area for the purpose of living. A similar conceptualisation can be applied to human ecological systems or ecosocial systems - the set of relationships and interactions among the people, resources, habitats, and other residents of an area for the purpose of living. While all ecosystems are complex adaptive systems that learn to live with, and when necessary adapt to, their environment, the making of meanings and sharing of understandings (learning) are a primary interest and purpose of human ecosocial systems together with their continuous development and improvement.

To help explore, apply and evaluate the idea of a learning ecology I developed a model to explain the elements it contains.

Figure 1 Components of an individual's learning ecology (Jackson 2016)



Exploring Learning Ecologies <https://www.lulu.com/>

I am now extending the idea to examine how creativity emerges from our ecologies for learning, developing and achieving: an idea that relates well to Rogers' (1961) ecological description of

personal creativity *'the emergence in action of a novel relational product growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life'*.

We want to understand whether there is educational merit in seeing teacher and students bound together in a deep and meaningful relationship sharing the same physical, intellectual and emotional spaces in a single ecology for learning, development and achievement, including their creative achievement?

The on-line conversation will begin on October 30th. To join the conversation please visit and register on the #creative community website <https://plus.google.com/communities/110898703741307769041> I have prepared a background paper containing ideas for discussion on the forum which can be downloaded from <http://www.creativeacademic.uk/creativehe.html>

References

- Jackson, N. J. (ed) (2011) , 'Learning for a Complex World: a lifewide concept of learning, education and personal development' Authorhouse
 Jackson, N.J. (2016) Exploring Learning Ecologies Lulu
 Rogers, C.R., (1961) On becoming a person. Boston: Houghton Mifflin