

The Making of Meaningful Conversation : #creativeHE reflections

A conversation has affordance for involving you on a journey. You don't know where it will take you but you have to get involved in order to realise this potential. Conversations happen in a context like #creativeHE and if you don't get involved you miss the opportunity to have that conversation forever. Here is an example from Day 3 #creativeHE.

A conversation has to begin somewhere and this one started when a participant shared an experience and a challenge she was tussling with. She shared her ideas and the tools she had used to create a picture. She talked about fieldwork and maps which was something I could relate to as I have been a geology teacher in the past. In fact I love maps - wherever I go I will buy a map and I love wandering around with a map as I did recently in Barcelona.

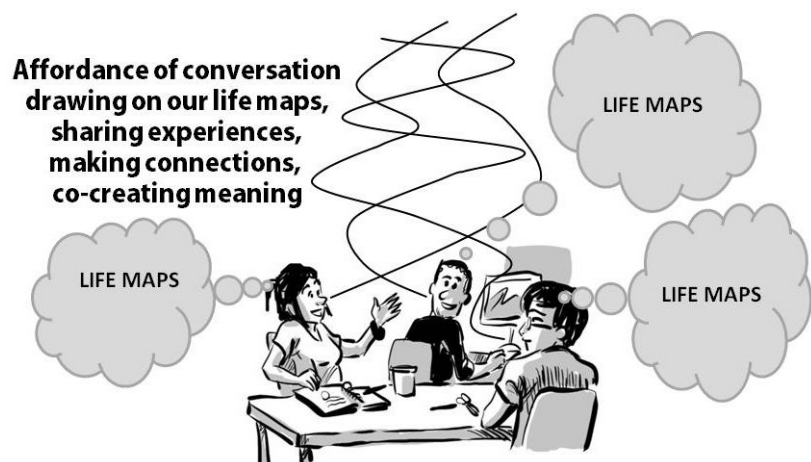
Importantly she invited other people to share their ideas so I did and received an appreciative thank you. I then shared some of my own experiences about using maps and this brought others into the conversation and the idea of maps suddenly took on a life of its own. I wanted to keep the conversation going so made a post about using maps and invited comments responses from another participant really opened up the idea. The important things that emerged for me were:

- reinforced belief that you have to get involved to have a conversation that takes you in the direction you would like to go and opens up directions you had not imagined
- conversational relationships with two different people from which other conversations might flow
- the wisdom that more and better ideas can be generated in relaxed but purposeful conversation and facilitated group conversations
- links to new resources that I could use in future
- new insights about maps and the ways they might be used to help students think and learn
- some interesting contexts and practices that can be used to stimulate students' imaginations and the integrative thinking so necessary for creativity

Through this process I made my own thinking explicit. Regardless of whether we are travelling through a landscape/townscape or a scape of concepts making and using maps is essential to exploring new territory especially when it is COMPLEX. I also realised that my awareness of what I had learnt, my ability to reflect and draw out my learning, had been enhanced by making a map of the conversation as it unfolded (see appendix).

TODAYS ACTIVITY (DAY 4) *Model makers: Watch Prof. David Gauntlett's Food for Thought clip around today's theme at <https://youtu.be/wbBhOSRS7dI> Capture your responses through creating a model out of raw and or cooked pasta shapes and other bits and pieces.*

In the spirit, but not to the letter, I MADE REPRESENTATION of this conversation about maps through a picture - my preferred medium of self expression. I did try making the physical model but the symbolism felt artificial so I returned to making a picture. It shows three people in a conversation in which we each drew on the maps we hold of our experiences and selected from our experiences some that could be connected in the context of the conversation. By sharing and discussing we co-created meanings.



The insight I gained from doing this was through purposeful conversation you end up with a BIGGER/BETTER MAP OF YOUR WORLD that you didn't have before.

If creativity involves changing our understandings, seeing the world differently, then we must recognise that the sort of scenario I have described involves creativity of the mini-c variety (Kaufman and Beghetto, 2009).

Reference

[Kaufman, J.C. and Beghetto, R.A. \(2009\) Beyond Big and Little: The Four C Model of Creativity. *Review of General Psychology* 13, 1, 1-12.](#)

Appendix: MY MAP OF THE CONVERSATION

FIRST POST



Ruth Proctor With thanks to Bitstrips and PicCollage and Jo

Today I was trying to think through how to get the most out of an upcoming trip to a forest school with a group of second year students. Thinking about the jar activity yesterday, one of the things I realised is so important to me for developing creativity, is talking to my friends and colleagues.

Instead of the teabag from my jar, I went for coffee instead, and with Jo we came up with loads of ideas for learning on our trip.

We talked about journeys, and weaving in stories, maps, The Map Woman, photo elicitation, new people to follow on Twitter, [...& new books to read, and places to visit, &, & ...] - it

was a really productive cup of coffee

The free resource I found out about is digimaps - so we can access OS-type maps of the forest school, for the students to personalise, annotate and adapt, - we came up with a few ideas for our students to consider playing with, - but I'd love to hear any other ideas people have for how to use maps in unexpected ways. I learnt so much from one coffee break conversation, - it's definitely something I'm going to keep trying to make time for.

Hope the pictures show my journey through struggling with a puzzle, turning to a friend for help over a coffee. a web search, finding digimaps, exploring them, talking about our trip to the forest, feeling excited about our ideas for the trip, and finally, looking forward to another 'creative coffee break' soon.

Feel like I can do a lot more with this challenge, so it's definitely something that I will revisit, - but in the meantime, I'm really enjoying how OEW is giving me lots of opportunities to think about my practice in new ways

Sue Watling Thanks for these examples of useful free tools +[Ruth Proctor](#) Bitstrips <https://www.bitstrips.com/create/comic/> and Pic-Collage <http://pic-collage.com/> I will be adding these to my online toolbox!

Norman Jackson I really enjoyed your story +[Ruth Proctor](#) it reveals a lot about the way we co-create ideas and meaning - a process that often gets taken for granted. Seems to me that you might create the cafe for your students and pose your question to them or perhaps facilitating the group to pool their collective minds to generate some truly remarkable ways of creating and using maps. On the Creative Academic website you will find a strategy called creative academy that I have successfully used many times <http://www.creativeacademic.uk/resources.html>

PS as a geologist I loved using and making maps and teaching students to make their own. When students made a map of the same area I was always struck by what they chose to include or exclude, and what features they thought were important or not. I've found that the process of making and using a map, regardless of the subject, provides an important learning experience as it draws on observation, imagination and relational ways of thinking that have to be integrated to make sense. Making a map is a process, a journey in which the story unfolds- a bit like life really.

Ruth Proctor Thank you Norman, I really like the cafe idea and will definitely use it - thanks for showing me the way to the creative academy to find out more too! I'm almost wishing the Easter break away so that we can get started on making and using maps right away

Norman Jackson I just added this resource to the Creative Academic site. Its called the 'Ready-Set-Design activity' from Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum of the Smithsonian. I would be interested to know whether you could adapt it to your teaching and learning context.
<http://www.cooperhewitt.org/2011/09/09/ready-set-design/>

SECOND POST



Norman Jackson In a comment to a post Rebecca Jackson talked about creativity as seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary, 'Out of the ordinary comes creativity. How we combine and utilise the ordinary, and the thoughts, instincts and hunches behind how we decide to employ the ordinary, that's where creativity lives'. Then Ruth Proctor posed the question of how we might use maps in interesting ways - a problem formed around how we find interesting ways of seeing and using the ordinary. I became interested so I googled and one of the things I discovered was the work of Cardiff based Ed Fairburn, from Cardiff, has discovered

that he can use maps to create amazing portraits of of people he knows,
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2544783/Shes-got-lovely-features-Artist-turns-maps-portraits.html>

Ruth Proctor Thank you so much, what a great idea! I teach on a unit where students experiment with & explore the construction and recreation of their professional identities through narrative reflection, - one of the starting points was using Carol Ann Duffy's poem The Map Woman, to begin to think about how our lived experience is written in us, on us, through us -these would work so well together

Rebecca Jackson What I see in those maps above that Norman (my namesake) Jackson has posted is that beauty and opportunity come out of structure and conformity. Perhaps with a good balance of both in learning design, we can create learning but with some uniformity...which we might argue is necessary for assessment for quality or things like that. What do people think?

Norman Jackson Hi +[Ruth Proctor](#) it sounds fascinating. I think the idea of mapping concepts is a really important skill when trying to understand any complex problem. I have been exploring the idea of learning a learning life and you cannot begin to make sense of it without first creating a map. Similarly the idea of learning ecologies is only revealed when you start mapping all the components of a complex experience through which learning is gained. I suppose the main point is MAPPING IS ESSENTIAL TO EXPLORING AND DISCOVERING

Norman Jackson Hi +[Rebecca Jackson](#) while I agree that in this instance something original, novel and beautiful has emerged through the artists skill and imagination in using a well structured resource.. so much of our creativity is utilised in working with unstructured, unknown, uncertain and sometimes messy and chaotic contexts. HE is good at providing the organised predictable environments full of abstract problems that have right answers but not so good at putting students into the messy unstructured social situations and contexts full of real challenges and problems that have never read a textbook ie situations like they will encounter in the world of work.. Returning to the map theme again +Ruth Proctor mental mapping in order to comprehend and act is essential in such contexts.

Ruth Proctor I do like the idea of messiness. I'm new to HE and used to be an Early Years teacher - one of the things I'm really interested in is exploring how to enable playful, messy, unstructured learning to take place [#creativeHE](#) is inspiring me to keep trying.

Norman Jackson This is unstructured messy learning Ruth. The loose structure enables people to take an idea or comment, share perspectives and make connections with anything that they think matters.. Out of the conversation flows new insights, meanings, resources, relationships... its an emergent process that no-one controls and everyone can be part of.. And at the end of the day the take aways are what you want to take away and what you get out is proportional to what you put in.

Paul Kleiman Thinking about about maps.....I used to give my first year design students a whole series of 'design problems' to solve. One was to create a map of the journey from their bed to the studio in the morning. That's all the brief said. It didn't take long for students to realise that there are all sorts of maps alongside the classic cartographic map: psychologic maps, sound maps, olfactory maps, etc. etc.. We put on an exhibition of all the solutions to the various problems, and one year, in a cold and bitter winter, we were faced with a large rectangle of black card with a c. 5cm strip of paper running horizontally across it. The paper strip was covered in dozens of thin vertical stripes similar to what appears in a spectrometer. The colours ranged from deep blue through orange to red. It was a beautiful object. The label said 'Claire's Map'.

The three of us (tutors) looked at it....and looked at it..... with not a clue as to what it might be. Eventually we called Claire over and asked her to explain. It turned out that she lived a couple of miles away and her map consisted of the temperature readings she had taken every 5 metres from her bed to the studio. Red = warm, blue =cold. Naturally the strip was red/orange at each end bedroom & studio) , and all blue (outside) in between except for a thin red line about half way along the blue section. It turned out that her 5m had taken her outside the hot air outlet from a bakery!

Chrissi Nerantzi Some familiar faces there in your portfolio Becci ;)

Ruth Proctor <http://stephenwalter.co.uk/> more maps

Norman Jackson I love this idea +[Paul Kleiman](#) and also the connection perhaps to design thinking. If we think like a designer then there is infinite affordance in the idea of making a map. Furthermore, when a group gets involved in the way you describe what emerges becomes a fantastic tool for changing, opening up perceptions of the thing that is being studied.

Paul Kleiman What was interesting and, I suspect, pertinent to this week's activities, was that we set the six design problems at the beginning of the first year, but they were - to all intents and purposes - extra-curricular! They weren't assessed and the rule was that the students could not discuss them with tutors or their peers. We used to refer to that first year as the 'de-schooling' year, and the six design problems were set to move the students to a place where they were not only very much 'on their own' but also where they realised - eventually - they could produce interesting work on their own. Why did they all, without fail, do it if it wasn't assessed? Because of the exhibition at the end, right near Christmas, with the great and good of the institution and beyond invited. That was a key motivation, alongside not being too sure what your peers were doing, and the fact that we clearly valued their work.

Norman Jackson There are so many principles for creating a good learning and achievement environment in this story +[Paul Kleiman](#) One of the things I have learnt is that 'fear of failure in public'

is a major motivational force for me. I go to great lengths to avoid it having suffered it a few times. Connecting with the earlier discussion on failing gloriously I think we have to create contexts like the one you describe where students have the potential to fail in public because this is what happens in the real world. I have used this many times in creative thinking workshops where the brainstorming bit is merely the foreplay to individual/group design and then individual or group performance. There is nothing like having to stand up and present in front of everyone to encourage achievement.