

How to De-programme a University Student

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Authors	Thompson, David W.
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Introduction

- ❖ This paper has been inspired by a new module I began teaching for Education Studies students and is based upon (1) comments from students throughout the module, (2) a focus group at the end of the module, and (3) reflective diaries of my own thoughts.
- ❖ The title is deliberately chosen to be provocative and to appeal to colleagues' inquisitive nature and curiosity. This is very much the start of a process for me and I do not claim to have expert knowledge on de-programming (whatever that may mean), or for that matter even if we should even attempt this!
- ❖ The module *"Interpretations of Education in Film, Art and Literature"* is a slightly different and arguably more creative take on my academic discipline.
- ❖ When I say "creative" this is inherent in the subject matter of course, but I've also tried to encourage students to develop an element of creativity and interpretative skills to the module. Furthermore, I attempted to build in an element of assessing students' creative approaches by adapting the grading criteria with specific reference to, for example; originality, creativity, the use of metaphors and symbolism as well as innovative interpretive stances.

- This was combined with familiar sociological lenses such as race, class, gender, power that students would be more aware of (and more familiar with)
- ❖ I do not presume or suggest that creativity is in any way a specialism of mine, nor that I am trying to be especially creative in, for example, the assessments or the style of teaching in any radical way. I would imagine I am no more or no less creative in my approach than anyone else at this conference.
- ❖ However, it is a theme that I have begun to critically reflect on much more since the start of this module and the first accumulation of feedback data.
- ❖ Initially my curiosity was piqued when in discussions with students in Week 3, they admitted that they had never had the opportunity (meaning at school/college) to study in this way before. In other words, they had not had the freedom to offer their own opinions (I'd rather use the word "interpretations"), think for themselves, or be creative in their studies to any great extent.

"At school... I just thought... it wasn't very creative. It was just knowledge. Knowledge and facts thrown at you Then you come to an exam and sit there and think 'I don't know any of this'" (MS).

- ❖ This, I felt, was a sad indictment of the education system.
- ❖ Decided to reflect on my experience as a practitioner, the data I have collected and my initial reading (especially Jackson).....

Jackson, N. (2014) Develops students' creativity through higher education. International symposium.
Jackson & Shaw (2006)

Jackson, Betts, Willis (2011). Learning for a complex world.
Robinson, K (Various)

Context

- ❖ Indictment of a marketised education system predicated on regular testing regimes, teaching-to-the-test, and league tables; all within a paradigm that increasingly seems to value only skills, the sciences and STEM subjects at the expense of creativity and the arts. A discussion about to what extent the arts and creativity is either valued or side-lined has been played out amongst politicians, policy-makers, teachers and academics over recent years.
- ❖ As Ken Robinson observes “there is a hierarchy of subjects, based on a 19th century need for industrialists.

Notes from the Jackson article....

- ❖ Further reflections (as an “employability champion”) made me consider what it is that employers want from graduates today and how might we help our graduates stand out?

“The top intellectual skill is no longer critical thinking, but rather **creative thinking**. Companies need students... able to think and initiate creativity for themselves—people who are not going to coast on current trends or accept common thinking, but will develop new, original ideas.”

- It is all very good and well developing knowledge and skills. But what will employers or society look for this time next year, or in five years’ time?! These are unknown

challenges occurring over a lifetime that our students will need to adapt to. Our students face “Unpredictability” (Ken Robinson) – even more so now! (Post Brexit)

- Learning certain skills’ sets for their first job after university will not really help students prepare for and respond to an increasingly complex world where they will probably take on a range of different jobs in their working life. Jobs we cannot predict easily.
- Developing their imagination, creativity and capabilities will help “convert their thoughts” into new ideas *and hopefully make them more valued. “Creativity as important as literacy” (Ken Robinson).*
- Too often creativity is subsumed within “analytical ways of thinking that dominate the academic intellectual territory”
 - *Something I’ve had problems breaking out of the shackles with.*
- “The highest levels of performance involve the most creative acts of all” (*Bloom’s Taxonomy*) and creativity is integral to who we are – we need to be concerned with students’ creative as well as academic intelligence. This includes a creative approach within each discipline. Getting students to appreciate what creativity means in their discipline
 - *something I did not spend enough time on and need to look at carefully in order to help (scaffold) students in future.*
- It is helping students recognise and understand their own creativity and help them express it that is key to facilitating students’ creative self-development...

○ 5ED012? – *It gradually dawned upon me that I need to attend to this much more, to support and scaffold students, and spend much more time increasing their confidence and capabilities [see below] in this area. To develop their approach, their curiosity and imagination.*

• Students also fed back, suggesting that

○ *a “Refresher” on, for example, English language skills would have helped them apply concepts more freely, such as metaphors, symbolism. Furthermore “It is a massive task to ask someone to do that... over 3 months. There is a skill that you develop through life”(R*

○ *“I used to like teachers getting you to think in a more creative way, rather than just do things and expect you to remember...” (MS).*

“Society thinks only in one certain way. I think deprogramming is really good because in education we are growing up to think one thing... But what about people like me that think in creative ways... where do we fit in...?” (MS).

As Ken Robinson suggests “We get educated out of creativity”

*I feel, I have encouraged students to discuss their own interpretations based upon “personally meaningful events” (Jackson) and tried to respect and build upon that. I have also, in groups, encouraged students to interpret and then “construct personal knowledge”, **getting students to compare with their own experience of schooling and teaching** (but perhaps in too superficial way – probably because I remain wedded to conservative approaches to pedagogy and assessment). This does involve respect,*

recognition and encouragement of student input. But for me Jackson misses an important point, and that is confidence. Students who have not been given the opportunity to become involved in this way of thinking and learning lack confidence in expressing their thoughts and ideas (this could be for a number of reasons). This takes time to develop and I need to consider more carefully and more in-depth a process that will help develop this.

Pedagogy

Pedagogy Matters

- Teachers pedagogic stance can be either (p.16): sage-on-the-stage (knowledge transmitter), guide-on-the-side (facilitator), meddler-in-the-middle (co-learner and co-producer) ... Creativity best served by teacher meddlers (*In my own practice on 5ED012 I realise that I had to be all 3, but tried in a very ad hoc way to be a co-learner and co-producer.*
- Meddlers:
 - They do not “command-and-control”. But do provide a high level of support.
 - “Meddlers anticipate that they have a responsibility to induct their students into communities of creative practice” (*During the course of 5ED012 it dawned upon me that I needed to do more of this, but in future to put time to one side to do this. So far it has only been in a very superficial way).*
 - Involve less time on transmission, more on working through problems
 - “Passive lectures do not allow curiosity to be engaged”.

- *Flipping? Problem-based learning?*
 - Less time minimising risks, more on experimentation and risk-taking
 - “Children not frightened of being wrong – but the education system stigmatises mistakes” (Ken Robinson)
 - Less time on testing memorisation, more on designing alternative forms of assessment
 - More time on “collaborative criticality”
 - *(In 5ED012 maybe this worked best with some of the art work)*
 - The teachers’ role is one of encouraging and facilitating the process of reflection and articulation of what creativity means.
- Requires pedagogic stance... facilitative, enabling, responsive, open to possibilities, collaborative, co-creative, values processes as well as outcomes (p.17).
- What does it mean to be a creative teacher^? Some generic characteristics of creativity...
 - Be imaginative... generate new ideas, look beyond the obvious
 - Be original... recreate, reconstruct, recontextualise, redefine, adapt
 - Be curious... Have an enquiring disposition, take risks, discover
 - Represent and communicate ideas... tell stories, pitch, sell ideas, negotiate, persuade, empathise (Jackson and Shaw, 2006).
 - All facilitated by “Meddler-in-the-middle” teaching practice

Curriculum

10 propositions* for an imaginative curriculum (Jackson, Betts & Willis, 2011) including...

1. Give learners the freedom and empowerment to make choices
2. Adventure in uncertain and unfamiliar situations, accepting risks
3. Enable learners to appreciate themselves as narrator, enquirer, creator,
4. Enable learners to develop relationships and facilitate collaboration (*5ED012 Ass 1*)

*Of these 10 I would say that I might, in a fairly rudimentary way, touch on a few. However, I have only touched the surface in terms of these approaches and much more on each one is needed if one truly claims to deliver an “imaginative curriculum”.

My feeling is I that I need to do much more in terms of providing an induction that is going to really help students approach the module in creative ways. That more needs to be done in order to help bond groups and promote discussion. I need to scaffold students’ understanding of grade criteria and how to meet it.

^ I feel that I utilise much of the above, but only in a very superficial way.

^^I feel I have provided something original in terms of what the module brings to the course. That whilst I try to encourage and help students make use of their imagination, this is hard going. More needs to be done in order to help student overcome their pre-programming. More work needs to be done on communication and improving students’ confidence in order to tell stories and develop their own ideas.

Conclusion

Introducing my own ten ways to help you de-programme your students....

1. Encourage them to reflect on the programming they receive in formal schooling...
their lack of opportunity to be creative in their thinking and in their engagement with the curriculum
2. Ask them for their opinion! Value it, but scaffold their learning and scaffold their views and creativity.
3. Build in opportunities to think creatively and to express creative and innovative thinking, even if it is a bit left-field!
4. Build creativity into the grading criteria and learning outcomes (e.g. don't just refer to "critical analysis" but also applying innovative and creative thinking, alternative views, curiosity, imaginative stances).
5. Even if the content is wholly academic and seen by some as obscure, show exactly how it can be applied... E.g. how developing a creative mind can help with writing applications and especially making a difference at interviews.
6. Get them to express the above within their presentations and their writing
7. Consider, how you might you change your lecturing style and content if there were no summative assessment
8. Give them time to assimilate, process or articulate their learning (E.g. Use stills)
9. (Maybe) give them the option to design their own learning or assessment

10. Encourage a variety of ways of looking at subject matter – let them explore their own ideas.

11. Ignore 1-10 and start again!