Informing Educational Scholarship and Practice through Creative and Transdisciplinary Lenses of Learning

Karen Magro

The University of Winnipeg, Canada

Welcome to our 2021 volume. Our volume 2021 features a diverse range of research and theoretical articles that extend our insights into talent development and creative learning. Many of the articles extend our understanding of creative teaching; there is an attempt to go beyond disciplinarity toward a deeper level understanding of the psychology of teaching and learning. While there are distinctive practices specific to particular subjects, there are also cross-disciplinary dimensions in the scholarship of teaching (SoTL) that can enrich our conceptions of professional identity, effective teaching, and encouraging diverse academic communities (Kreber, 2013; Shulman, 1987). Dr. Caroline Kreber (2013) highlights the importance of teaching toward growth and authenticity in higher education. Building on the work of learning theorists like John Entwistle, Parker Palmer, Jack Mezirow, Patricia Cranton, and Stephen Brookfield, Kreber writes:

> Promoting the authenticity of students implies helping students realize the importance of learning for themselves and grasping a subject in their own way. For this to happen, the subject needs to be perceived as meaningful and relevant so that students are able to make connections between what they are learning and their personal lives. However, authenticity also has more profound connotations. Students who grow into their authenticity do not only know more, but they come to know differently than before. (Kreber, 2013, p.8).

A transformative learning climate engenders self-agency, critical thinking, self-authorship and relational maturity. These skills, notes Kreber (2013), have implications for creating greater social justice in the world. "Fostering authenticity means helping students understand themselves as members of the wider social community towards which they feel a responsibility"(p.9). Along these lines, Walker (2006) suggests that higher education learning contexts should encourage capabilities that include *practical reasoning, educational resilience, knowledge and disposition, learning dispositions, social relations and integrity, respect, dignity, and recognition, and educational integrity* (p.127). Every course or program could integrate the specialized pedagogical content knowledge with these far-ranging skills. Further research is needed into what our students learn and how they choose to interact with local and global communities in inclusive, equitable, and sustainable ways that would continue to advance the scholarship of teaching and learning. Maxine Green (1997) writes about the importance of teachers ever evolving and becoming. Greene emphasizes the value of experience, reflection, creative expression, and social imagination which can lead to the development of new texts, new ideas, and new social orders that are more equitable and hopeful. Teachers might symbolize their practice and understand their colleagues or students' perspectives in imaginative ways through art, role play, song, poetry, and storytelling, for example. Greene speaks to the importance of creativity, imagination, and innovation in

teaching and learning as precursors to dynamic and transformative social change. In 2021, these ideas resonate deeply. Relationship building is also central to re-visioning new learning pathways that work to solve pressing problems that include the climate crisis, refugee resettlement, and the search for greater equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Morwenna Griffiths (2014) writes about the important role that creativity, imagination, and innovation play in re-vitalizing education today. While creativity is "imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are original and of value" (NACCCE, 1999: 2), innovation is "the implementation of new ideas to create something of value, proven through its uptake in the marketplace" (Craft, 2005, p.20, cited in Griffiths, 2014, p.8) Griffiths asserts that nurturing a creative mindset in teachers is "key to a continuing reassessment of beliefs, values, perceptions, and personal commitment….Boden's three possibilities for the generation of new ideas: a subjective inner life symbolized through imagination, and creative social action" (pp.13-14). Creativity in teaching involves risk taking, dilemmas, and tensions but the "rewards" are multi-faceted. Encouraging greater creativity in the teaching profession would lead to a learning climate that nurtures creativity among diverse learners. A shift away from the "managerial, assessment driven approach which requires clear pre-defined outcomes would open a window to enriching learning experiences. Citing the work of Hannah Arendt, Griffith writes:

In the continuing creation of a common world each of us has to bring not only who and what we are, but also who and what we are not yet — a continuing becoming of ourselves and our common world. So teachers need to do this work off deep democracy — to participate with each other, the wider community educators, and the rest of society to work out the values we see in education and best to realize them. That sounds very grand, but it begins with teachers' individual and collective reflective practice in their classrooms and schools (p.13).

The contributions in this volume address many of the above themes.

In "Thinking Preferences (TP), Leadership Skills, and Learning Behavior," Dr. Christine Boyko-Head asserts that current post-secondary educational programs are too often still based on rigid, outdated models characterized by large class sizes, top-down passive learning strategies and summative final marks — all of which can inhibit students' success in developing the skills that employers today require: creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking, risk-taking, and iterative solution-building. Using the *FourSight* creative problem solving framework, Dr. Boyko-Head examines the positive relationship between students' awareness of their own thinking preferences (TP) and their ability to communicate, to collaborate and to exercise leadership skills in group learning projects. Unanticipated findings suggest that TP self-awareness may encourage empathic responses as to how fellow members of the group can contribute to the learning tasks. TP self-awareness may also enable the avoidance of potential conflicts within the group.

In "Designing an Educational Environment in Six Steps: Teaching for Understanding and the Motivation for Understanding," Dr. Yoram Harpaz provides both a theoretical and practical lens to navigate the psychology of teaching and learning within broader socio-cultural, political, historical, and philosophical applications. His article points to the complexity of teaching; Harpaz synthesizes the works of well-known educational psychologists and learning theorists as he explores individual and collective learning, the role of the educator, learner engagement and motivation, meta-narratives linked to the purposes of

education, teaching and learning strategies that are aligned to the 'mission' of an educational institution, and approaches to assessment. How can we build upon and apply Dr. Harpaz's intriguing model as we consider new narratives and stories of historically under-served and minoritized communities? We need to move beyond instrumental and subject-based learning. Learning and education can be viewed as ever-evolving; there are realms for new possibilities and opportunities. More focus can be placed upon the way current and existing social, historical, and environmental factors impact ecosystems of education.

The idea of educational platforms as opportunities for continuing personal and social growth holds great promise for innovations in learning.

Recognizing and working to reduce and remove overcoming significant barriers to learning are essential in creating a learning climate that encourages greater equity, and diversity. In their article "Academically talented students with financial need succeed," Drs. Laurel Brandon, Reis, and McCoach explore the importance of financial support as a way of reducing situational barriers for academically talented students. Brandon, Reis, and McCoach assert that academically talented students who experience financial need are currently underserved in their pursuit of a university education. The problem is particularly acute for Black and Latino children and youth, many of whom do not graduate from high school, let alone enroll in post-secondary programs. Those who do not enroll may have to leave before completing their degree. The authors examine the outcomes for 1,364 students who were able to benefit, according to need, from a variety of support programs awarded by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation (JKCF). This support included full or partial financial aid to cover college planning, tuition, living expenses, and ongoing advice related to career selection and post-graduate studies. Results indicated that these students were exceptionally successful in completing their degrees and in aspiring to advanced degrees. The authors stress that thousands of academically talented students who graduate from high school each year in the United States would be capable of completing at least a 4-year degree, were it not for significant financial burdens. Educators could assist such students by spreading the word concerning available scholarships and by giving advice and help in applying for university.

In this volume, we feature a number of articles that draw upon psychology, personality, and cultural studies. In his theoretical article, "On Psychoses, Conspiracies, Creative Flow and the Absent-mindedness of Genius: An Evolutionary Function-dysfunction Taxonomy of the Multiple Subjective Realities of the Human Mind," Dr. Roland Persson elaborates on an evolutionary-function-dysfunction taxonomy of the multiple subjective realities of the human mind. His theoretical analysis provides a cross-disciplinary synthesis of academic disciplines' understanding of "illusion and reality." The human mind is "adaptive in an evolutionary sense" and that "illusion" as a positive force in human behavior has been neglected in favour of an over-emphasis and focus on "dysfunctions" of the human mind. Dr. Persson's perspectives challenge scholars and practitioners to reflect on important dimensions of personality theory, well-being, creativity, social psychology, and cognitive processes. Dr. Persson's transdisciplinary bridges psychology, giftedness, sociology, psychiatry, history, science, and cultural studies.

In "An Analysis of a Conflict between the Theories of Creationism and Science in the Experience of a Pre-service Physics Teacher," Dr. Michael P. Lukie applies elements of Jungian Psychology to significant student teaching experience that he reflected upon. His ideas provide a valuable lens to explore the way socio-cultural and psychological frames impact the dynamics of teaching and learning. When Dr. Lukie, as a pre-service science

teacher, introduced his high-school students to the scientific evidence for the Earth's climate as it existed hundreds of thousands years ago, he had not anticipated how this topic would be received by his supervising teacher, who reacted with disbelief and condemnation. He reminded Dr. Lukie that the school adhered to the Bible-based evidence which proved that the Earth originated only 6000 years ago. Dr. Lukie's dismay and trauma over this conflict led him to embark upon a detailed application of Jungian analytic psychology, which enabled him to understand and to resolve the conflict to his satisfaction. In this article he shares his experience with educators who may face similar conflicts while teaching in schools that have differing world-views.

In "Supporting Mindfulness for the Next Generation," Dr. Dorothy Sisk summarizes the research on mindfulness programs developed, over the last forty years, mostly for adults and for "emerging adults" in high school and university; the latter have shown "...increasingly high rates of depression, anxiety and loneliness", often coupled with self-chosen "remedial" practices such as video-gaming and online browsing that may exacerbate rather than alleviate their problems. Mindfulness practices encourage members of this group to reduce their overdependence on technology and to "...reconnect with real experiences." More recently, Dr. Sisk emphasizes that mindfulness programs developed for grade-school, and even preschool children, have included age-appropriate educational components such as yoga, guided imagery, breath exercises, music, art, storytelling and cooperative games. Research results have revealed a reduction in stress levels, anxiety, mood disturbances, aggressive behavior and impulsiveness, along with improvements in pro-social behavior, emotional control and academic achievement.

In "Global Principles for Professional Learning in Gifted Education and Italian Primary Teachers," Professor Martina Brazzolotto and Dr. Connie Phelps explore gifted education programs in Italy. Until 2019, Italy's educational system required teachers to modify their programs to accommodate children with intellectual and other disability conditions which slowed their learning progress. These requirements excluded gifted students whose fast-paced learning achievements were met with unappealing busy work, leading some gifted students to misbehave, to reject school-based learning or to quit school prematurely. In response to the law passed in 2019 by the Italian Ministry of Education, Dr. Brazzolotto collaborated with elementary school teachers in developing enrichment activities in Geography, Science, Math, Italian and History. Due to time constraints, only the Geography, Math and Italian components could be implemented. Most teachers responded with interest and enthusiasm. Those who were hesitant to make the proposed changes were nevertheless willing to accept additional training.

In "Two Centres for the Gifted, One Moon-The Program," Drs. Bengio, Margaliot, Saar-Hyman and Benakovic describe an international learning program carried out during the 2019-2020 pandemic with students from two centers for gifted children: the "Hofim" Center in Israel and the "Wind at your Back" Center in Croatia. Students from each Center were included in one of four groups studying the Moon. The Science group researched how to reach the moon and settle there using existing resources. The Acting and Theater group built a shadow theater and filmed a role play about lunar politics. The Creative Writing group wrote a shared story based on cultural myths about the moon. The Emotion and Behavior group designed a questionnaire, sent via Google to 40 participants, querying the influence of the full moon on human sleep quality. Each group was guided in Zoom sessions by appropriately qualified adult mediators. Of particular value in this study is the inclusion of students' written responses to their learning projects.

Profiles and Interviews

The interviews and profiles of creativity in this publication feature the work of exceptional scholars like Dr. Lynn Newton (Durham University, England), Dr. Don Ambrose (Rider University, New Jersey), and Dr. Dean Keith Simonton (California). Their professional accomplishments and on-going research into creativity, giftedness, and talent development provide a strong foundation to consider the promise and possibility of education from a multi-disciplinary stance.

References

Brookfield, S. (2005). *The skillful teacher*. Jossey-Bass.

Cranton, P. A. (2011). A transformative perspective on the scholarship of teaching and learning. *Higher Education Research and Development, 30*(1), 75-86.

Entwistle, J. (2009). *Teaching for understanding at university: Deep approaches and distinctive ways of thinking*. Palgrave MacMillan.

Greene, M. (1997). Teaching as possibility: A light in dark times, *The Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, & Practice, 1(*1), pp. 1-11.

Griffiths, M. (2014). Encouraging imagination and creativity in the teaching profession, *European Educational Research Journal, (13*), no. 1, pp. 117-129.

Kreber, C. (2007). What is it really all about? The scholarship of teaching and learning as an authentic practice, *European Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,* Vol.1: /No.1. Article 3, pp. 1-17.

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.

National Advisory Committee on Creativity and Cultural Education in England (1999). Retrieved from: https://www.creativitycultureeducation.org/publication/all-our-futures-creativity-culture-and-education.

Palmer, P. (1998). *The courage to teach.* Jossey-Bass.

Walker, M. (2010). A human development and capabilities 'prospective analysis' of global higher education policy. Journal of Education Policy, *25*(4), 485-501.