Excursions and incursions: Getting inside the social motives and practices re-shaping creative arts learning

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Abstract

Across art and design schools in Australia, demand for core degrees is declining and adaptation is essential. Opportunities for learners to engage are diversifying in space and time e.g. outreach with schools and community, short courses and intensives, and open, online courses. 'Students' now often constitute a wider public who take part in 'applied dabbling' to meet personal and social goals in preference to developing a specialist art or design practice.

Art and design schools are therefore seeking to expand their permeability, social utility and impact. This is evident in curricula that are open-ended and expressed via thematic or problem-focused frameworks such as 'Design + Change' at Linnaeus University, Sweden, and Design Academy Eindhoven's four 'compass points' around which learning is organised: the lab, atelier, forum and market. Such socially-engaged curricula are frequently characterised by 'excursions', with art and design school as instigator and point of departure.

In parallel, new course models are prompting socially-motivated incursions into the creative academy; recent examples include our online approaches in the arts and dementia care, and social media and photography. In these contexts, learners' social motives are re-defining and un-disciplining curricula e.g. caring for a family member with dementia, curating an online presence, designing a service, or adapting mainstream technologies to a targeted social cause. With the aim of increasing our adaptive capacity, we discuss how these new audiences are beginning to re-shape creative arts learning, and offer nascent strategies for designing creative arts curricula for social innovation.

Keywords: art and design, creative arts, curricula, adaptive capacity, social innovation

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Introduction

Across art and design schools in Australia, demand for core degrees is declining and adaptation is essential. Opportunities for learners to engage are diversifying in space and time through, for example, outreach with schools and community, short courses and intensives, and online courses. 'Students' now often constitute a wider public who take part in 'applied dabbling' to meet personal and social goals in preference to developing a specialist art or design practice. Art and design schools are therefore seeking to expand their permeability, social utility and impact. This is evident in contemporary curricula that are open-ended and expressed via thematic or problem-driven frameworks. Such socially-engaged curricula are frequently characterised by 'excursions', with art and design school as instigator and point of departure. Other disciplines are also awakening to the enriching value of applied, creative practice and seeking to collaborate through various forms of 'incursion' into the creative academy.

In the Tasmanian context, as the state's College of the Arts (spanning art, design, music and theatre), our adaptive efforts are guided by three complementary agendas that are at once pragmatic and aspirational:

1. Grow our student base, which is primarily Tasmanian, and better respond to its social diversity;
2. Adopt and enact place-based, transformative pedagogies through creative countering of the state's low overall educational attainment; and
3. Expand our capacity and impact as a centre of excellence in the creative arts and design, recognised nationally and internationally.

In this light, re-shaping creative arts learning as an adaptive strategy also reflects an overarching social innovation mission, where such innovation stems from the enactment of 'new ideas that meet unmet needs' (Mulgan 2007, 4). This mission is now provoking us to actively exercise our 'social imagination', taking on the challenge posed by social innovation designer-researcher Ezio Manzini (2007).

In this paper we first highlight the opportunities that flow to us from the dismantling and opening up of traditional knowledge gatekeeping, and argue that our creative expertise and practice-based approaches are highly conducive to identifying new audiences, and engaging

with their social motives and practices. Through two recent online course developments, we connect these motives and practices with designing and implementing new learning opportunities for a wider public, aligned with an over-arching social innovation mission. We then sketch three cases of re-shaped creative arts learning – one excursion into a regional community setting with public art outcomes, and two incursions from unfamiliar disciplines (dementia care and genealogy) – and link these to the notion of 'community as curriculum' (Cormier 2008), and to arts-based transformative learning (Mantas and Schwind 2014; Taylor 2009). We close the paper by sharing our nascent strategy and principles for designing creative arts learning for social engagement and innovation, foregrounding the utility of practice theories and the value of thinking about *excursions* and *incursions* in their application.

The un-disciplining of knowledge and the creative arts

The necessity for tertiary art and design schools to develop adaptive capacity – the ability to respond positively to disturbances and shocks underpinning resilience (Walker and Salt 2006) – arises in part as a consequence of networked, contemporary knowledge systems in addition to sector-wide economic imperatives. Increasingly, the academy must pay its own way; its claims to the 'public good' are heeded little in the rationalist, higher education reform debates (see Department of Education 2016). In tandem, the demand-driven higher education system in place in Australia since 2009 rewards institutions that generate the most student demand for courses and respond swiftly to fluid student demand and demographics.

Concurrently, traditional knowledge gatekeeping is being dismantled, exemplified by the flourishing open source movement, Creative Commons licensing, and open, online education. Within the academy, a growing porosity of academic disciplines is evident as disciplines seek greater interchange in order to respond to complexity and global-scale problems (Davies and Devlin 2010). These simultaneous forces of dismantling and opening up present the creative disciplines with opportunities to shape-shift, re-organise and re-invent our own traditional knowledge domains and practices. We argue that by virtue of being creative, the potential of art and design disciplines to develop adaptive capacity through 'un-disciplining' is considerable, and conducive to the pursuit of social innovation.

Nationally and internationally, creative arts disciplinary typologies, media and curricula have moved toward greater permeability and hybridity, and in some cases wholesale dissolution of disciplines. This is evidenced by thematic and problem-driven conceptions of curriculum supplanting specialist 'flavours' of art and design; examples include the new Bachelor degree, Design + Change, at Linnaeus University in south-east Sweden (Linnéuniversitetet 2016), and

the Art + Social Practice MFA program at Portland State University (PSU 2016). Course designers also express values for students 'working at the boundaries' of disciplines, as with the design, business and engineering students collaborating on real world projects in the MA/MSc Multidisciplinary Design Innovation at Northumbria University (Bailey 2010).

In the creative disciplines, there is a palpable tension in maintaining the legibility of focused art and design practice – painting, sculpture, photography, furniture design, for example – while also devising and articulating a desired (and desirable) learning experience; one that is hybridised, both analogue and digital, and ideally unbounded in terms of the knowledge and practice terrains students are equipped to explore through practice.

From disciplinary practice and identities, to new audiences and their practices

Accepting that the painters, sculptors, photographers and furniture designer-makers of the future are diminishing in number in the Tasmanian context (based on our ten year data sets), we are increasingly welcoming a wider public and now offer greatly diversified learning experiences. This public broadly reflects three key audiences: school children and their family networks, senior secondary students, and 'leisure learners' of all ages and prior educational experience. Such public outreach is evident elsewhere, for example, in the extensive menu of Creative Short Courses offered by Queensland College of Art (QCA 2016), which also invites the public to suggest their learning interests via a web form. The accepted wisdom at our institution is that a proportion of short course participation will translate into future student enrolments in substantive courses. Pedagogically, however, this wider engagement is now feeding back into the academy, enriching our 'core business' and the creative practice of our art and design staff and students.

The institutional goal to grow the student base in this manner has been borne out in two instructive cases that involved identifying new audiences and designing curricula responsive to their social motives and practices. The first case was the ground-breaking 2013 massive open online course (MOOC), 'Understanding Dementia' (UTAS 2016e) which is still offered and prompted development of the articulated Diploma, Associate Degree and Bachelor of Dementia Care. The second case comprised the single, foundation level online unit (subject) in late 2014, 'Introduction to Family History', which has spurred the development of the online Diploma of Family History (UTAS 2016d). Both courses have now made incursions into the College of the Arts, intersecting with our expertise, and leading to the co-development and teaching of the foundation units 'The Arts and Dementia Care' (UTAS 2016a) in the former

case, and 'Place, Image, Object' (UTAS 2016c) in the latter. These two units are elaborated in a dedicated section below.

These recent, necessarily collaborative course developments were challenging, and a radical departure from the conventional course renewal typically undertaken *within* academic disciplines. Crucially, the courses respond to an acute social need in the case of dementia care, and to common social motives surrounding the activities of popular genealogy. In order for such courses to be responsive to new audiences, excursions out of the academy are essential to experience, understand, and engage with stakeholders and their practices; such excursions are also central to the nascent design strategies for re-shaping creative arts learning shared below. Taking a social theory perspective on 'social practices', sociologist Andreas Reckwitz defined a practice as:

> [A] routinized way in which bodies move, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood. To say that practices are 'social practices' … is indeed a tautology. A practice is social, as it is a 'type' of behaving and understanding that appears at different locales and at different points of time and is carried out by different body/minds (2002, 250).

Identifying new audiences is therefore contingent on observing and understanding what constitutes evolving practices that we can purposively intersect with our creative practice expertise, through the exercise of Manzini's (2007) 'social imagination'. In the context of art and design, the intersecting social motives of our wider public might, for example, involve a desire to learn to curate an online presence, design a community service, or adapt mainstream technologies for a targeted social cause. The primary object of learning is no longer media-, material-, or form-based, nor is it predominantly motivated by the pursuit of a future occupation or identity. Invoking our aim for social innovation that meets unmet needs, we are seeking to design learning that enables one to 'consider one's own work, one's own time and one's own system of social relationships in a different light, searching for a form of well-being that is less product-intensive and more dependent on common goods' (Manzini 2007, 237).

Three cases: One excursion and two incursions

The cases outlined in this section are recent examples of re-shaped learning opportunities that have been developed to engage our wider public, and interface with core degree pathways. The first exemplifies an excursion into a regional community, while the two fully

online cases resulted from productive incursions from other disciplines with intersecting social innovation goals (and a pragmatic need to grow student enrolments).

Live Site Catalyst (LSC)

Live Site Catalyst (LSC) is a two-year College of the Arts project with linked research and educational streams centred on the former wood-chipping port of Triabunna, funded by the Institute for the Study of Social Change and involving multi-sector partners. The range of project activities is provoked and progressively owned by the community as the project unfolds, with a recent intensive engagement – 'Night Garden' – included as part of the Dark Mofo 2016 winter festival. This engagement targeted one of our key audiences: school children and their family networks. Over a month-long workshop period, Grade 5 and 6 children from Triabunna District School worked with College of the Arts staff and third year Sculpture and Moving Image students to create B-grade 'garden horror' films (using iphones and Super 8), focused on Triabunna townscape gardens and building on preceding school garden projects. Through making films, the children adopted hybrid plant-human identities and explored a range of botanical types and ways of revealing and representing plants inspired by the horror genre.

The public art outcomes involved projecting the children's films onto the township's building facades, along with plant-themed film screenings in the community hall, in a Dark Mofo event titled 'Overgrowth'. The recorded footage of the event was then distilled for a further Dark Mofo underground screening in central Hobart – 'Undergrowth' – which was attended by over 600 people during the festival. The workshop and creative process involving the school children, their families and the wider community can be viewed as a place-based instance of 'community as curriculum', which educational innovator Dave Cormier (2008) originally coined in relation to rhizomatic, online learning. In this dynamic, what is learned is largely driven by the interests and priorities of those taking part, infused and extended in this case by the artist-educators and College of the Arts students.

Based on the feedback of the Triabunna children, this case of imaginative, high profile art making was transformative for some – changing their ways of seeing their own circumstances, their relationships, and what they might aspire to achieve (Butterwick and Lawrence 2009; Mantas and Schwind 2014; Taylor 2009). LSC is distinctive among these cases for its research-led teaching, with the project seeding ongoing research into community engaged and place-based practice, and a new project proposal to evidence the impact of similar community engagements.

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The Arts and Dementia Care

This positive incursion into the College of the Arts by, and with, members of the Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre – 'The Arts and Dementia Care' – is a 10-12 week fully online, foundation level unit. It was designed both as a standalone 'chunk' of learning for a broad public, and as an elective for students in the Dementia Care courses, therefore involving more mixed audiences than LSC. The course structure and logic drew heavily on the model already established for the Bachelor of Dementia Care, but it was developed and taught by College of the Arts staff and practitioners in music, theatre/drama and visual arts. Students work through three modules in which music, applied theatre, drama and visual arts interventions (including local, national and international examples), are explored and evaluated. The learning activities seek to balance academic skill development (including introduction to evidence-based approaches), with reflection and personal application in recognition of students' motives for participating (see Figure 1). The range of prior educational experience is wide. Some students are degree-qualified, while others are making their first foray into higher education; such diversity is opportune for designing peer-to-peer learning activities and feedback. Practical considerations were also raised such as art materials safety, given that students may choose to apply some of the approaches in individual care scenarios that benefit both carers and people living with dementia.
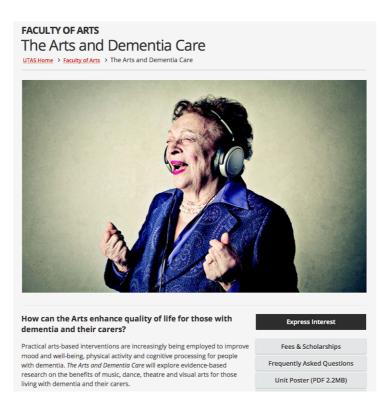

Figure 1: Promotional web page for the online unit 'The Arts and Dementia Care' (UTAS 2016f).

Place, Image, Object (Diploma of Family History)

The initial offering of 'Place, Image, Object'in mid-2016 comprised an intensive 6 week fully online, foundation level unit, structured in line with the Family History suite of units listed in Figure 2. It offers a primarily 'leisure learner' audience a way to engage with family history through material and visual culture, centred on personally relevant artefacts and creative work. In contrast to 'The Arts and Dementia Care', which emphasises learning *about* arts-based approaches, 'Place, Image, Object' engages students *through* more generative learning activities and assessment tasks. The unit also has a strong conceptual emphasis in relation to place, symbolism and the senses, as well as introducing contextual analysis with objects and identity. The learning design integrates students' academic development with small projects involving meaningful places, images and objects. Knowledge application is expressed through creative outcomes (including an annotated map and object biography) akin to the 'expressive ways of knowing' Taylor (2009) promoted as a means of fostering transformative learning.

Units on Offer

New students will be enrolled in the *Diploma of Family History (R2H)* when an application is successful in a unit below.

Foundation Units	Study Period	Apply
Introduction to Family History	Semester 2: 8 Aug – 30 Sep 2016 (7 weeks)	**Apply Now**
Writing Family History	Spring: 21 Nov – 9 Dec 2016 & 9 Jan - 27 Jan 2017 (6 weeks over two 3 week blocks)	Read More
Convict Ancestors	Semester 1: 25 Apr – 17 Jun 2016 (6 weeks over 8 weeks) **(Closed)** Next intake TBC.	Read More
Place, Image, Object	Winter (late): 27 Jun – 6 Aug 2016 (6 weeks) **(Closed)** Next intake TBC.	Read More
Second Level Units	**Study Period**	**Apply**
Writing the Family Saga	Winter (late): 27 Jun – 6 Aug 2016 (6 weeks) **(Closed)** Next intake TBC.	Read More
Convicts and their Legacy	Semester 2: 29 Aug – 14 Oct 2016 (7 weeks)	**Apply Now**
Oral History	Spring: 24 Oct – 9 Dec 2016 (7 weeks)	TBA
Families at War	Planned for 2017	TBA

Figure 2: The suite of units to evolve since 'Introduction to Family History' in 2014, and in which 'Place, Image, Object' is now included (UTAS 2016b).

Students new to higher education in 'Place, Image, Object' are guided through core academic skill development with which they are encouraged to consider further study in, for example, genealogy, history and the creative arts. Both online units are therefore designed as 'tasters' with potential to inspire new interests and build confidence in a supportive community of practice, as well as forming part of larger course sequences. Notably, these courses have also necessitated significant re-working of student support procedures at the college and faculty level that continue to be finessed with each iteration.

Curriculum design strategies for social engagement and innovation

The cases of new creative arts learning sketched above are essentially 'practice-based' in the creative practice sense. Initial exploratory forays – such as a single unit or MOOC – were enacted, reflected upon, iteratively re-made, and evolved into further components that intersect with a range of synergistic knowledge and practice domains. As creative practitioners, we are well-placed to undertake what anthropologist Tim Ingold (2013, 7) terms the 'art of inquiry', 'corresponding' with other knowledge domains and their practices by *doing* creative work with them, and not limiting our reach to academic domains. Our excursions in the Tasmanian context, such as the 'Live Site Catalyst' case, therefore present opportunities to design subsequent learning experiences for a wider public. This enables us to be in the world, participating, making and observing, being immersed in popular culture and social diversity, in place (and online), rather than continuing to describe and fix the world via disciplinary frameworks. We also need to be alert to unexpected, emergent practices when co-engaging in targeted social settings (Fountain 2014; Julier 2007), and being receptive to collaborative incursions.

We are then forging a socially-engaged, design-led view of course development that seeks to meet unmet needs, give voice to personal and shared motives, and simultaneously respond to, and initiate, evolving practices (which are inherently social as Reckwitz (2002) highlighted). Our design strategy also resonates with Bailey's (2010, 43) course design principles which translate readily from his postgraduate multi-disciplinary design context to in-situ and online learning contexts: nurture experimentation and creativity; foster a community of practice with a shared language; and promote shared values by developing confidence and self-awareness through collaboration.

In light of the educational attainment agenda in Tasmania (to greatly improve secondary school completion and higher education participation), we need to extend these principles with a commitment to design learning experiences that are transformative for individuals and the

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collectives who coalesce around common social motives. This involves creating the conditions for imaginative, intuitive 'artful learning' (Mantas and Schwind 2014) and ways to unleash students' new learning via 'expressive ways of knowing' (Taylor 2009). Our great challenge is to balance such learning with academic development that equips a greater proportion of students to pursue further study. This progression has been evidenced in the cases of the Dementia Care and Family History courses, reflecting the whole-of-person shifts in awareness, reflective capacity, motivation, and subsequent action arising from the enactment of transformative learning principles (e.g. Butterwick and Lawrence 2009; Taylor 2009).

Conclusion

We have framed the necessity to develop adaptive capacity and the current 'un-disciplining' of knowledge as opportune in the Tasmanian context. Here, the College of the Art's key agendas align with a social innovation mission, and our approaches with new audiences illuminate the great scope to co-engage in creative work in order to meet unmet needs. Our discussion of the three cases – an intensive public art excursion into community and two incursions from unfamiliar disciplines resulting in online units – has interrelated fertile ideas around social motives and practice with contemporary curriculum and transformative learning approaches, also with sensitivity to place. As noted, we are now seeing these excursions and incursions feeding back and enriching our renewed core degrees in fine art and music launching in 2017, and seeding further research in transformative pedagogies. As staff and students become part of this wider research-led, practice network we foresee an amplification of the social utility, impact and resilience of the creative arts in Tasmania. In articulating these nascent strategies through reflective scrutiny of our context and the examples outlined, we hope to connect with, and progress this work with others similarly pursuing social innovation through creative practice.

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