

Designing Learning Strategies through Cultural Studies

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When you inherit a language, it does not mean you are totally in it or you are passively programmed by it. To inherit means to be able to, of course, appropriate this language, to transform it, to select something. Heritage is not something you are given as a whole. It is something that calls for interpretations, selections, reactions, response and responsibility. When you take your responsibility as an heir, you are not simply subjected to the heritage, you are not called to simply conserve or keep this heritage as it is, intact. You have to make it live and survive and this is a process – a selective and interpretive process.

– Jacques Derrida

From Derrida's quote, there may seem no extended definition of 'Culture' as a subjective tail to the objective body of cultural studies for an ethnographer, an anthropologist, an archaeologist or even a sociologist but one may certainly dwell upon the "selective and interpretive process" of our inherent cultural progression. Admirably, great volumes of research have been devoted to the documentation and interpretation of our material culture and intangible heritage although our awareness in being the fortunate benefactors of our cultural inheritance may seem to lack deemed acknowledgement with regard to contemporaneous global trends. Communication, technology and accessibility have not only accelerated the cultural process but continue to influence its transformation greatly. We must not be left to hope for our culture to be referred to passively, for we are making history, to be breathed to life by generations to come. The tradition lies in our hands. Let us make a fresh discovery. Who are we? We have come to realize our potential of being the most evolved species. What shall be the next stage of our evolution? As a researcher in the field of museology, with a keen intent on studying processual cultures, I present an auto-ethnographic account of my initial reflections made during preliminary fieldwork and the ensuing experimentation in designing structures for understanding and teaching culture in an academic framework.

Cultural studies may be organized in a variety of ways – the scope of research being heterogeneous and thus difficult to gain an overview – given the diverse cultural concepts on which trans-disciplinary research may be based. Although cultural studies do not enjoy an established position within the traditional canon of academic disciplines, there

are many different areas of research which are explicitly identified as cultural studies endeavors by their proponents or as occupied with one or more aspects of culture. The structural and institutional fragmentation of cultural studies leads to a failure to tap possible synergies between individual activities. It is necessary then to strive for increased interdisciplinary and ultimately trans-disciplinary cooperation. However, this can only be achieved if new communication structures emerge and if these are encouraged and supported. As a result, research activities which combine and straddle individual disciplines are a first step in this direction. Cultural studies can truly become a new productive force in the entire economic system when the requisite paradigm transformation occurs in scientific thought and activity. An evolutionary, step by step modification of research structures in social sciences and humanities, as defined by the cultural paradigm, is not only realistic but has already begun to have its influence in some areas.

Museums, for example, display rich collections of material culture – archaeological remains, anthropology, art collections and heritage sites – over centuries, which evidently reflect processual change. The change we are undergoing is a change in 'kind' not a change of 'degree'. The medium that is producing this change is communication, not some influence of the West on the East. The phenomenon of communication affects a world not a country or just a single community. The Asian subcontinent is facing this change with the advantage of having a tradition and philosophy familiar with the meaning of creative destruction. In the face of the inevitable destruction of many cultural values – a drive for quality takes on a real meaning. It is not a self-conscious effort to develop an aesthetic – it is a relentless search for quality that must be maintained if our culture is to survive. (Eames, Charles and Ray 1958)

We are part of a human event. We are part of an exploration of ourselves, which is the key element of this research. We begin with "Know thy self", a phrase by Socrates from ancient Greece. As a challenge we must try and answer these five questions: Who am I? What do I do? What do I know? What do I believe? and what do I want? Creative Diversity, Intelligent Fast Failure (IFF) and the acronym CENTER are the core values which lead us to self-exploration. Everything begins with knowing who we are. (Russel, Dr. Susan)

Ben Franklin once said that mankind may be divided into three classes: those that are unmovable, those that are moveable and those that move. A growing field of research called Embodied Cognition is focusing on the connection between movement and creativity. Research has connected movement to faster, more innovative problem solving. In

addition to the connection between body and mind, movement often helps place us in a natural environment. Much research is discovering the link between exposure to nature and cognitive performance. E. O. Wilson, the American biologist, coined the term 'Biophilia' to describe the deep seated connection between human beings and nature. From elementary school, to high school, to career we sit behind desks. Our work and life environments are sedentary, largely immobile most of our waking lives. We were designed to move, not sit still. We have little difficulty connecting the importance of the quality and frequency of our movement to our bodily health. Think for a moment about some of our images for solving difficult problems and developing creative ideas: the pacing decision maker. What if physical movement has a direct effect on our creative thoughts? More so than just stress relief. (Jones, Joe)

Although most people might look for signs of creativity in the appearance of the bulletin boards, student made projects, centers and displays in a classroom, I feel a truly creative classroom goes way beyond what can be seen with the eyes. It is a place where bodies and minds actively pursue new knowledge. Having a creative classroom means that the teacher takes risks on a daily basis and encourages students to do the same.

– Pann Baltz, 1993 ATA Teacher of the Year as quoted in *Creativity in the Classroom: An Exploration*

Creative Diversity

There are many myths and misconceptions about 'Creativity' - to think about thinking, to think about our ideas and why ideas are different from person to person. In order to bust some such myths apart, try and figure out why they do not make sense and then put them together in a way that does make sense.

Myth #1: Only some people are creative. One of the most dangerous myths is that only artists, designers and musicians are "creative". And that engineers or accountants are not creative. If creativity is about producing something new then the subject matter is irrelevant. For example, I can be creative as an artist or an engineer, while planning my garden or organizing my closet. The subject does not matter.

Myth #2: Only certain ideas are creative. Usually, people think about the revolutionary, the breakthrough and the out-of-the-box ideas as being the creative ones but what about another kind of creativity – a kind of evolutionary creativity that digs down into a subject, where we figure out how the details work and as we put them back together we get more insights.

Therefore, we must look at the four principles of Creative Diversity (from the Creative Diversity Model – the concept of Paradox of structure introduced by Michael Curtin, Idea Evaluation Methods to Create a Strategic Plan) which help sort out our myths and misconceptions.

Principle #1: All people are creative; whether they have evolutionary ideas or revolutionary ideas; whether they are practical or outrageous, simple or complex.

Principle #2: Creativity is diverse. While everyone is creative, we are all not creative in the same way. Somehow, we have to describe these differences and there are many different ways we could think about doing that.

Principle #3: Creative Diversity has four key variables: Creative Style, Creative Level, Motive and Opportunity. Creative Level is about our mental capacity, may be with a special talent. Creative Style is about how our brain likes to work with all that knowledge and experience. For example, some people have a more structured way of working with what they have in mind; they polish their ideas more carefully and by using more detail, they tend to offer the evolutionary ideas. Then there are people who have a less structured creative style, they are the more tangential and "out-of-the-box" thinkers. Creative Style is a continuum and we all fall somewhere along it. By graphing Creative Level and Creative Style together, we get a wide variety of creative profiles and every single one of them is useful. Next, we are all motivated by different things. Depending on what motivates us, we determine how to apply our energy to creative endeavors. For example, some people are motivated by financial gain while other people by simply doing good work. Opportunity – we all perceive opportunity differently.

Principle #4: There is no ideal form of creativity. There is no one combination of those variables that is ideal. For example, sometimes we need revolutionary ideas in mathematics, sometimes we need evolutionary ideas in economics and sometimes we need Creative Diversity to solve a variety of problems. Let us begin by thinking about ourselves and the four variables of Creative Diversity. This will give us a glimpse of our individual creativity profile. (Jablokow, Dr. Kathryn W.)

When we need ideas that transform, we need to challenge assumptions and well-known ideas. It is essential to have a creative as well as a critical engagement in developing an idea. The key is to step back and develop an outsider mentality; talk with diverse people, read new books and magazines, watch new media and talk with contrarians. Put oneself in a position to interact with outsiders, maybe start as simple

as others in a different department or job in your own organization or group. For instance, go to the magazine rack; think about a magazine you would never think to read and you might find something very interesting there; you start to take on the abilities of an outsider. For example, if you work with numbers, talk with artists or designers do not forget Intelligent Fast Failure. Sometimes we will need to talk to ten people, read twenty ideas before we find the right one. Remember serendipity, we may talk to one person and get a new idea that might inform our next decision. (Jones, Joe)

Intelligent Fast Failure – IFF

Einstein was once quoted as a genius making all possible mistakes in the shortest period of time. The techniques of creativity and innovation are not difficult to understand but are challenging to practice and implement. Why? – Failures are a blow to our self-esteem. Much to the contrary, IFF is a learning process and has nothing to do with self-esteem. All we have wanted is to learn (and even teach) and test. In fact, the frequency and intensity of failures measures how well one is doing. Creativity and innovation often seem squishy but those who experiment and fail many times, invariably build the tallest structures. Thus, it has been evident for centuries that failure is an essential part of the creative process. The principle of IFF can be applied to inventing products, starting up businesses and even on improving a sport. Experiment < Fail < Learn < Create = IFF Mantra. (Matson, Dr. Jack V.)

CENTER

Many students and professionals have some very pressing questions such as: How am I going to succeed in my job? How am I going to work in the community? How am I going to balance family with work? There are a number of villains that crop up – Fear, Focus, and Experiment; the fear of getting a job or of maintaining relationships. Lack of focus results in people often wanting to do a thousand things but afraid to do one or two things really well for which they can be held accountable. We are also afraid to try and experiment. We are either bound up in doubts or over-confidence so that we are afraid to run the experiments which would enable us to move forward. In going through CENTER, we look at a number of statements or questions that we might use to establish how the CENTER applies to what we may want to do individually. So, the first letter “C” stands for Character: I am _____, I will be _____. The “E” is for Entrepreneurship: I take smart risks and run smart experiments towards my dream of _____. “N” stands for owNership: Based on my character I choose _____. The letter

“T” is for Tenacity: I will hold on in my pursuit towards _____. The next “E” is for Excellence: I will plan, focus and commit hardwork towards gaining skill in _____. The final letter “R” stands for Relationships: My family is _____, my home is _____. As we go through these letters and practise them, we realize our passions and purposes, for us to make a change in our area of the world. So, we must ask ourselves: How would I go through each of these blanks and start on my way to changing my corner of the world? (Velagol, Dr. Darrell)

Design Thinking

The tools used are simple and many of them have been introduced thirty to forty years ago. The Design Thinking process, also known as Problem Solving, incorporates IFF, prototyping and all kinds of idea generating techniques. The process works on real-world problems that are of interest to academic institutions, organizations, and even corporations. The exercise involves teams working on real-world challenges, coming up with solutions, prototyping them and then actually trying to sell them.

The six steps of the Design Thinking process are:

1. The right challenge (the sculpting phase): What is the problem I want to solve?
2. Make sure you get the available information about this challenge. Sources could be internet research or primarily asking potential users what kind of problems they have.
3. Share the collective information so that everyone can benefit from it.
4. Reorganize all the information collected during research and interviews – make sure to have the categories for the available information.
5. Synthesis Phase: Try to bring this information together to create, for example, personas – What is a typical user? Why is a typical person using the solution we are building? This helps to jump into the future users.
6. Ideation / Brainstorming: It is much easier to think about a solution when we are really into a topic. Based on the information gathered, we become creative. The heavier part is then to vote for the “right” idea.

After this ideation we must return to the users for validation and ask what they think of our ideas, for further improvisation and developing a prototype. (Carsten Becker, SAP University Alliance)

There has been a growing body of research since the 1980's in developing model approaches for integrating arts into regular classroom practice and answering questions by assessing these multi-dimensional performances. Some of them are as follows:

- 'Project Zero' carried out by the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a programme designed to develop and test a pedagogy of understanding, culminated its efforts towards the late 1990's focusing on teaching and learning interdisciplinary studies. Its principal investigators, Howard Gardner, David Perkins, Vito Perrone besides many other researchers and practitioners have collaborated to develop a framework that stresses in-depth learning. The refined and tested pedagogy is 'Teaching for Understanding' (TfU). At its core TfU is a performance view of understanding: If a student "understands" a topic, s/he can not only reproduce knowledge but also use it in unscripted ways – viz. 'Performances of Understanding' because they give students the opportunity to demonstrate that they understand information, can expand upon it and apply it in new ways.
- 'Artful Thinking' focuses on experiencing and appreciating art rather than making art, with the goal of using art as a force for developing learners' dispositions and creating connections between works of art and curriculum topics.
- Project MUSE (Museums Uniting with Schools in Education, 1994-96) explores the potential of art museums to serve as integral elements of education.
- During the late 1980's and early 1990's, the Rockefeller Foundation sponsored the project 'Arts PROPEL' to develop programmes combining instruction and assessment in three art forms: music, visual arts and imaginative (creative) writing. Learners approach the art form along three crisscrossing pathways that give Arts PROPEL its name: PROduction, PEreception and refLECTION.
- When students work on projects, they have a unique opportunity to exhibit skills and understanding in many areas and through a variety of media. At the same time, these projects can be difficult to assess because students' performances tend to be complex. Researchers of the APPLE Project (Assessing Projects and Portfolios for LEarning) focused on answering such questions of assessing students' performances. Many arts education partnerships between schools and professional artists and/or organizations are started but far too few survive beyond their first years and initial sources of funding.
- Arts SURVIVE (July 1997), a project sponsored by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, investigates arts education partnerships in order to ascertain why some partnerships survive and others do not. ArtWorks for Schools, a project funded by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, developed a programme that teaches high-level thinking in and through the arts. The purpose in designing such a programme is to help educators and learners discover the power of the arts to enrich high-level cognition across school subjects.
- The Creative Classroom Project (1999-2004) produced tools and knowledge to inform and support creativity in teaching.
- The instructional approach, which is broadly referred to as 'Visible Thinking', takes an integral stance towards the teaching of thinking, in the project 'Innovating with Intelligence'.
- Preparing youth and adults to live in a world where knowledge is constructed at an unprecedented pace and national and cultural borders are rapidly redefined, entails teaching them to organize their actions to pursue the understandings that they may need. Project L@titude focuses on such an understanding and intelligent action in various learning environments (classrooms and schools, art studios, museums, local communities, organizations and professions).
- The Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) research project, 'Educational Impact and Potential of the Visible Thinking Curriculum (1998-2001), aims to help students learn how to think by talking about art; involving qualitative and quantitative research methods in an effort to better understand the cognitive and social benefits the Visible Thinking Curriculum (VTC) does, or potentially can, provide students.
- Project Co-Arts (1991-96) offers teenagers apprenticeship style training to help build self-esteem and develop a keener understanding of their cultural identity. The project has developed a framework that will enable community art centers and other educational institutions to document and assess for themselves their educational effectiveness.
- Reviewing Education and the Arts Projects (REAP), sponsored by the Bauman Foundation, has published a series of meta-analytical articles reviewing the state of the evidence for transfer of arts learning to non-arts cognitive achievement.
- Educators know surprisingly little about how the arts are thought, what students learn, and the types of decisions educators make in designing and carrying out instruction. The Studio Thinking Project (2001-06) stresses upon the importance of the arts to the education of young minds.

The objective of such a programme is to create an alert conscience, especially amongst youth, concerned with the quality and ultimate values of our culture and environment. The key is to have a contemporary applicability which has been absorbed by traditional practice. The methodology for structuring and practically carrying out such a programme calls for education, not training. This involves Teaching for Understanding, implying the principal theory of Multiple Intelligences. Although based upon investigations in biology and psychology and intended for psychologists, the theory of multiple intelligences has a wide audience amongst educators. Tools such as Organizational Process-folios are an innovative way of making this understanding public, which involves documenting students' work, journal entries explaining how the work was initiated, developed and completed, video recordings of activities, presentations and interviews, tabulations of exercises, open-ended questionnaires, group discussions, feedback forms and critique sessions.

One of the aims in structuring a practice based research is to create an opportunity to develop frameworks that would facilitate in discovering, developing and articulating practice-based methodologies of creative practices within academic contexts. This in turn shall provide a convivial creative platform of arts practitioners – find new ways of articulating art practices and research questions within it or explore ways to connect the critical with the creative. Focusing on various practice and research themes, to draw an example, look at art within research context through the lens of auto-ethnography. Auto-ethnographic research is one of the most approachable methods – research told from the first person rather than the more traditional academic third person. Ethnography is a method from the social sciences, anthropology and sociology, which has been developed as a way to try and deal with some of the negative critiques of traditional ethnography. A classic ethnographic model is of a researcher doing fieldwork, perhaps living in a tribal culture for months or years and then describing that culture as objectively as possible with a sort of an expert third person voice. Subsequently, there have been many critiques of ethnography under the premise that an 'outside' researcher may never really bring complete objectivity to the way in which they understand and describe another culture. So a critic would ask questions like, how does one's own cultural conditioning impact on interpretations of some other culture? Auto-ethnography sought to face the subjectivity and cultural conditioning of researchers themselves head-on rather than pretending to objectivity. It is also uniquely suited to present findings from people who learn by doing, so it can work very well as a frame for practice-based research in the arts. In an auto-ethnographic work the researcher admits to or owns up to their subjectivity. They are explicit about the culture they are writing

from within. Auto-ethnographers are also often positioned within the cultures they are reporting on – insiders rather than observers, a dancer for example, rather than a dance critic. The concept of auto-ethnography can lend itself as a method for writing a practice-based research outcomes in the arts. Auto-ethnography has also been critiqued as a methodology with some problems of its own. Social sciences debate around the approach that auto-ethnographic works foreground the researcher too heavily and can be too subjective or too anecdotal. (Hill, Leslie 2013)

In true auto-ethnographic fashion, my research involves documentation and interpretation of cultural heritage. With the intention of exploring possibilities of 'Applied Learning' through museums, I have attempted to design study modules and workshops for educational institutions which would complement the existing academic curriculum with the idea of employing museum materials as tools of learning. Participants are grouped according to age and skill level.

The purpose of designing a serviceable programme is to bring about a 'Learning' and 'Understanding' of our ever evolving 'culture' and our very existence and also form a comprehensive awareness of how intricately varied disciplines are related. A museum serves as an unconventional institution for such a study that demands the attention of various faculties and exercises the study disciplines beyond a classroom. This not only makes for a functional programme of study but also initiates a student-directed learning process of discovering the multidisciplinary aspects of any given subject and also develops thinking dispositions. For instance, Language and Literature are closely associated with the Performing Arts – understand the rhythmic meter used in oral tradition. Mathematics is linked with Folk Art – design bead-work adornments, conceive a story and execute it over a scroll painting. Reconstructing a structural design of a proto-historic dwelling involves the faculties of Engineering and Architecture, which is actually introduced in a History and Archaeology curriculum. Physics and Chemistry are entwined with the Fine Arts – understand the complexities involved in the material and execution of ancient textiles, manuscripts, bronze cast sculpture and scroll paintings.

A particular group of students who have been exposed to the variety of training and discipline that might prepare them for such work are graduate architects – the disciplines of Physics and Chemistry are not unknown to them, they have in their training applied these disciplines to some sociological and human scale problems. They are aware of the use of materials and some of the functions of economics and they are apt to suspect that these have something to do with the history and

development of a culture. Naturally they need not all be architects – an equally responsible young engineer, economist, doctor, mathematician, philosopher or housewife might also be an aspirant; open to a wide range of artistic practice and also to various levels of experience.

As a productive outcome, the broadest service would go to society, through the fact that there is a group concerned solely with the quality of our progressive material culture and its inherent values. The greatest help would be to trigger similar attitudes even in other fields of study. A statement of quality values could form a contagious network. This could make an exhibition, even a documentary and word would get around that somewhere there is growing concern and that new and healthy values are beginning to appear.

Find values where others do not.

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