Wise Humanising Creativity: Changing How We Create in a Virtual Learning Environment

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ABSTRACT

This article interrogates how a particular conception of creativity: ‘wise humanising creativity’ (WHC) is manifest within a virtual learning environment (VLE) with children and young people. It reports on the outcomes of C²Learn, a three-year European Commission funded project which introduced innovative digital gaming activities to foster co-creativity in the VLE between players. Theoretically the paper builds on previous work, which has conceptualised the potential for WHC within VLEs, as well as other educational contexts. Within C²Learn, arguments have been made for WHC as an antidote to overly-marketised, competitive notions of creativity, as well as for WHC supporting a view of childhood and youth as empowered—rather than ‘at risk’—within digital environments. In particular, this paper focuses on outcomes of the project’s final piloting in England, Greece and Austria across the primary and secondary age ranges. This research employed a bespoke co-creativity assessment methodology developed for the project. In order to document WHC, this methodology opted to evidence developments in lived experience via qualitative methods including teacher and student interviews, fieldnotes, video capture, observation and student self-assessment tools. The paper articulates how WHC manifests in C²Learn’s unique VLE or C²Space, and its potential to develop more nuanced understandings of creativity across digital environments. It then goes on to consider WHC as a useful concept for changing how we create within VLEs, and the implications for educational futures debates and wider understanding of creativity in education as a less marketised and more ethically driven concept.

KEYWORDS

(WHC), C²Learn, Co-creativity, Digital Gaming, Gameful Design, Social Networking, Wise Humanising Creativity

INTRODUCTION

In the last twenty years, there has been a growing shift in understanding creativity in education, from an individualised concept, to one which is collaborative or group based, and which is ‘everyday’ in its occurrence (Banaji, Burn & Buckingham, 2010; Craft, 2002; John Steiner, 2000; Sawyer, 2003). These shifts have provided the foundations for new arguments for creativity as a 21st century ability which children, young people and citizens need to thrive together as a response to rapid change and
constant uncertainty (Chappell & Craft with Rolfe & Jobbins, 2011; Craft, 2011; Robinson, 2015). Simultaneously, much has been written, especially in the United Kingdom, regarding the multiple rhetorics of creativity which place differing emphases on creativity’s social, cultural, democratic and personal dimensions and their influences on creativity in learning and teaching (Banaji, Burn & Buckingham, 2010; Sefton-Green, Thomson, Jones & Bresler, 2011). Developing within this shifting conceptual landscape are a collection of ideas that have emphasised the importance of co-creativity within education, the role of generative possibilities, the question of the ethical impact of creativity, and the related pedagogical dynamics. These ideas are Wise Humanising Creativity (WHC) (e.g. Chappell & Craft, with Rolfe & Jobbins, 2011; Chappell & Craft, 2011; Chappell & Swinford, in press; Craft 2013), Possibility Thinking (PT) (e.g. Burnard, Craft & Grainger, 2006; Craft 2002; Craft, 2014), and the ‘4Ps’ of creative engagement (Craft, 2011). They spotlight and challenge the dominance of Western-centric, marketised creativity, positing a more humanising ethically aware alternative which views children and young people as empowered creative contributors alongside adults.

Together and separately, these theories have been elaborated from empirical research in a variety of educational settings (e.g. Chappell & Jobbins, 2015; Chappell, Slade, Greenwood, Black & Craft, under review; Craft & Chappell, 2014; Cremin, Burnard & Craft, 2006; Cremin, Chappell & Craft, 2012). Together, they put forward a strong theoretical argument for better grasping the meaning of creativity as distributed between people, objects and ideas (e.g. Chappell with Craft, Rolfe & Jobbins, 2012; Craft, McConnon & Matthews, 2012) and for the need to engage with the consequences of creative activity as ethically laden (e.g. Chappell, 2008; Craft, 2013). Primarily, these ideas have been applied in formal education within a multitude of settings including within generic (e.g. Craft et al., 2012), arts-based (Chappell et al., 2011) and science-based learning contexts (Craft et al., 2014; Cremin, Glauert, Craft et al., 2015). Most recently, triggered by Craft (2011), this collection of ideas has been applied within explicitly digitally driven educational contexts (Chappell, Craft & Walsh; 2014; Walsh, Chappell & Craft, 2017; Walsh, Craft, Chappell & Kouloris, 2014; Walsh & Whitehouse, 2017). This has been with the aim of challenging more competitively, individually derived conceptions of creativity within digital learning (e.g. Edwards-Groves, 2011; Tapscott, 1996; Walsh, 2007) and of placing a stronger emphasis on collaboration and ethics.

This conceptual entry into the digital arena was marked by the Creative Emotional Reasoning Computational Tools Fostering Co-Creativity in Learning Processes (C²Learn) Project (www.c2learn.eu). This was a three-year European Commission funded research initiative, which aimed to introduce and pilot an innovative VLE to foster co-creativity in learning processes in formal and informal educational settings with seven international partners. Rather than focus on creative competition and ‘winning’, the C²Learn computational tools and environment were designed to incorporate the fundamental elements of co-creativity such as WHC, PT, the 4Ps (Walsh et al., 2014; Walsh et al., 2017) as well as reframing (Stenning et. al, 2016) and emotive lateral thinking (Scaltsas, 2016). These included the WHC notion that the computational tools coupled with engaging experiences, could potentially encourage students to go on journeys of ‘becoming’ (Chappell et al., 2012). These journeys are based on the reciprocal relationship between the participants’ creative ideas and their developing identity. As they co-create, it is argued students collaboratively and communally develop new ideas but as they themselves are the substance of those ideas, they are also creating or ‘becoming’ themselves. In this sense, students through co-creating with each other and VLE’s artificial intelligence (AI), are making and being made. These journeys are characterised by co-participative generativity (students playing with one another, with adults and AI), within shared group creative identities, for example within the digital quests, games and activities. The tools also raise dilemma-based questions
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