Sheridan College

SOURCE: Sheridan Institutional Repository

7-8-2020

All Parts of the Same Thing: Dispatches from the Creativity Everything Lab

David Gauntlett
Ryerson University

Mary Kay Culpepper
Ryerson University

Follow this and additional works at: https://source.sheridancollege.ca/fhass_creative_humanities

Part of the Higher Education Commons

ALL PARTS OF THE SAME THING: DISPATCHES FROM THE CREATIVITY EVERYTHING LAB

David Gauntlett & Mary Kay Culpepper

Abstract

While government and society consider creativity an essential trait for university students, and indeed everybody, disciplinary silos continue to be maintained, and there is little consensus on how to approach its teaching, research, and general cultivation. For universities to transform into places where a diversity of creativities thrives for students, faculty, and the varied constituencies they serve, new and open thinking is mandatory. In this paper, we detail the transdisciplinary roots of our work in the Creativity Everything lab at Ryerson University. As a team of researchers developing projects and experiences that embrace a wide range of creators and creative practices, we are fashioning the lab to facilitate the actions of doing and making in learning and research. Three case studies – our ongoing efforts at supporting learning for students, a research project on platforms for creativity, and the community outreach of the 2019 Creativity Everything FreeSchool – explore how teaching, research, events, and collaborations in multiple media intersect in a multifaceted system for relating to and engaging with creativity. Our studies suggest that creative practice-as-research helps people make connections that fuel curiosity and experimentation. We argue that engaging in multiple perspectives of the "everything" of creativity better equips our students, university, and public to reap its benefits and rewards.

Keywords

Author Affiliations

David Gauntlett, PhD, Canada Research Chair in Creative Innovation and Leadership, School of Creative Industries, Faculty of Communication & Design, Ryerson University (david.gauntlett@ryerson.ca)

Mary Kay Culpepper, PhD, Postdoctoral Fellow, Creativity Everything Lab, School of Creative Industries, Faculty of Communication & Design, Ryerson University (culpepmk@ryerson.ca)

ALL PARTS OF THE SAME THING: DISPATCHES FROM THE CREATIVITY EVERYTHING LAB

David Gauntlett & Mary Kay Culpepper

When the *Creative Canada Framework* (2017) declared its intention to transform the institutions that serve the country's creative and cultural life, Canadian universities seized the opportunity to burnish the fields of study that served its purpose. The framework's emphasis on creative industries, including publishing, music, cinema, crafts, and design, presented those who teach and research these subjects with the chance to consider its implications for our students, our institutions, and ourselves.

With our backgrounds in media production and analysis, we readily saw the potential in the framework's mandate. As creativity scholars, however, we were acutely aware that the route to achieving that potential was uncharted. Paradoxically, that ambiguity allowed us the opening to develop a learning environment (Gauntlett, 2019)—and a mindset (Culpepper & Gauntlett, in press)—that builds on a diffusion of ideas and theories. These derive from disciplines claiming creativity at their core, as well as our experience as educators, researchers, and creators in our own right.

The result, the Creativity Everything lab at Ryerson University, is the centre of a diversity of activities through which students, faculty, and the community at large can rediscover the changes in outlook, possibilities, and identity that accrue to them by participating in the creative process. We predicate our work on the notion that the act of making things is essential to understanding creativity and identifying how it affects our lives. This perspective has helped us see that creativity is not only the lab's reason for being; it is the reason for everything we do within its purview.

In this article, we discuss how the lab's origins lay in frustration with the often-rigid way academia regards creativity, a treatment we argue runs counter to its potential to prepare people for living in the present as well as the future. We describe how Creativity Everything functions as a setting for its multidisciplinary researchers to explore the workings of creativity as we develop projects and experiences involving a wide range of creators and creative practices. In a trio of case studies, we relate how the facets of the lab—teaching, research, events, and collaborations—interweave in a platform for creativity that serves the broadest possible audiences of students, colleagues, and fellow citizens. In reviewing our creative practice-as-research mindset, we detail how it colours our teaching, our research, and dissemination in diverse media, our students' learning outcomes, and how, in

the process, creativity can stretch the boundaries of what universities can be and do.

A Conduit for Creative Trust

Now in its third year, the Creativity Everything lab serves the university and the public with a variety of teaching, online and video projects, collaborations, events, outreach, writings, and opportunities for making things. The lab forms a backdrop for the creative experiences of the people who work with and through it. We aim for it to embody the sort of enterprise that teacher and artist Corita Kent specified in her first rule for engendering creativity in students—that is, a trusty and trusted conduit for creativity (Kent & Steward, 2008).

That sounds simple, but the realization of it was hard-won. The theories and principles behind the lab were cultivated over decades. Between us, we have many years of experience in media as well as the academy. Working with and for media organizations, we sought and supported creativity with our colleagues and audiences; the more music, magazines, or websites we made, the more we saw that it was the connections to others' creativity that enhanced our abilities to think and act creatively. Our ad hoc observations-through-work of the creative process—and, more specifically, how it plays out in the lives of regular people—drove us to formal study.

There we discovered a splintered prism. Although creativity is "a fundamentally human characteristic that is central to our well-being, our productivity and our prosperity" (Jackson, 2006, p. 1), disciplines historically have fragmented its understanding. Much early research was grounded in psychology, where creativity has been a subject of ongoing study since the 1950s. However, it was (and is) undeniable that other fields – particularly those that pertain to the humanities – offer invaluable theoretical approaches to understanding creativity's distinctive social and cultural facets and to fuse theory with creativity as lived experience.

We have stumbled, more or less, across insightful articles about the practices of creativity in journals from assorted humanities domains such as architecture (e.g. Baker, 2017; Kreiner, 2017), archeology (Dann & Joliet, 2018; Douny, 2014), performing arts (Beer & Hes, 2017; Harrison & Rouse, 2014; Tracy, 2019) and communication studies (McIntyre, 2019; Trotman, 2019). They are generally written in field-specific argots and published in journals and books aimed at those who already understand what they were saying. They thus fell shy of making a substantial interdisciplinary impact. In effect, the restrictiveness of academic fields in general effectively reinforced their differences. It sustained their divisions, setting a challenge to those like us who sought a broader vista of creativity.

However, we find the most exciting thing about studying creativity —and expressing it—is the realization that it is inherently transdisciplinary. Our perspective was echoed by Hennessey and Amabile in their

examination of the facets of creativity research: "Only by using multiple lenses simultaneously, looking across levels, and thinking about creativity systematically, will we be able to unlock and use its secrets" (2010, p. 590).

For them and us, systems theories of creativity—which build on similar constructs in physics—allowed a way forward. Social psychologists (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, 1988; Montouri, 2011; Sawyer, 2006; Glaveanu, 2017; Glaveanu & Tanggaard, 2014), devised these theories to speculate where creativity comes from and how it is perceived. They maintain that "creativity results from a complex system of interrelating and interacting factors" involving individuals, society, and culture (Kozbelt, Beghetto, & Runco, 2010, p. 28). This made sense to us; after all, everyone who makes things does so in specific personal, social, and cultural contexts.

Systems theories of creativity also reiterated some of the social and cultural arguments that we found useful in building our models. For example, more than a dozen years ago, as we were exploring the relationships between making and self-concept (Gauntlett, 2007), we drew upon strands of research that helped us to understand, in different ways, how creativity influences identity (Culpepper & Gauntlett, in press a). These incorporated the philosophy of science, sociological debates about how people order their social realities, and the limited advances in neuroscience on the consciousness of personal identity.

Simultaneously, we accessed readings from academics and creative practitioners who were interested in how creativity affects the lives of everyday people. Among them were 19th-Century philosophers such as John Ruskin (2009) and William Morris (2004), who saw creativity as a human quality of social value. Their aesthetic and utopian ideals can be seen to have presaged the contemporary crafts revival, the maker movement, and the positive intentions of social media—but not the assorted negative practices of social media companies, such as mass surveillance (Zuboff, 2019), devising algorithms that marginalize users on the basis of gender, race, and socioeconomic status (Nobile, 2018), and exploiting unpaid users for their experience and content creation (Sadowski, 2019).

Five Guiding Thinkers

The work of many interdisciplinary thinkers has informed the ethos of Creativity Everything. We will here mention five key examples. First, from feminist critiques of research methodology, we took the point that both quantitative and qualitative methods are often problematic in the way they treat participants. People give up their valuable time to share experiences or feelings with the researcher, who says 'thank you' and walks away, to publish their findings in obscure journals in exchange for intellectual prestige. Participants typically only get a simulation of a real conversation, cannot really shape the research agenda, and have no agency in how the dialogue is framed (Reinharz, 1992; Leavy & Harris, 2018). Avoiding these

kinds of exploitation can be a set of knotty problems even for the most well-meaning researchers. They are not easily 'solved', but we believe it is important that researchers should do their best to mitigate them. We seek to do this enabling participants to have as much voice as possible, in a making and talking session which is designed to be a rewarding way to spend time, where they are able to shape what they do and how they do it, and bring in elements which may not have been part of our research agenda.

Our second influence is the anthropologist Tim Ingold (2010, 2013), who positioned making at the centre of creativity, developing individuals and cultures, reinforcing the notion that creativity is contextual: "I want to think of making [...] as a process of growth. This is to place the maker from the outset as a participant in amongst a world of active materials. These materials are what [they have] to work with, and in the process of making [the person] 'joins forces' with them, bringing them together or splitting them apart, synthesizing and distilling, in anticipation of what might emerge" (Ingold, 2013, p. 21; emphasis in original). Third is the radical philosopher Ivan Illich, who outlined the moral and ethical case for why people need to have access to the resources and possibilities of creativity: "People need . . . above all the freedom to make things among which they can live, to give shape to them according to their own tastes, and to put them to use in caring for and about others" (1973, p. 11). Fourth, musicologist and composer Christopher Small (1998) envisioned music as a way of exploring, affirming, and celebrating human relationships. He coined the verb *musicking* to highlight music as something we *do*, rather than a *thing*. Musicking happens through composing, performing, listening, practicing, dancing, or any other act involved in the generation of music. "The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies" (1998, p. 13). This insistence on creativity as something that people *do*, process not product, was striking.

The fifth thinker in this list is Janelle Monáe, the musician, performer, and producer. She has spoken in several forthright, thoughtful interviews about the ways in which she has created her own path, starting by reflecting on her own identity, emotions and concerns, and then working outwards from this, to "impact people and be helpful to others" (Sewell, 2019). Speaking about coming out as queer, Monáe says:

> I knew that by being truthful through my art, people were gonna have questions, and I had to figure out a way to talk about it. And in having those talks with myself, I realized it was bigger than just me. There are millions of other folks who are looking for a community. And I just leaned into that. I leaned into the idea that if my own church won't accept me, I'm gonna create my own church. (ibid)

Helping people with diverse voices to find ways to express themselves is central to Creativity Everything.

If we take them together, these ideas suggest ways in which we can

bring people together in various formats to connect through making, and in the process, position creativity as a social verb, leveraging its potential to change people and societies. We have also looked to many other artists and other cultural producers for insight—how they kept going when projects went awry, the benefits of daily practice, and the contexts that guide their work. The diverse and growing group includes Canadian artists such as photographer and podcaster Jodianne Beckford, painter Bobbie Burgers, music producer Tasneem, and portraitist and storyteller Alia Youssef. As contemporary humanities practitioners, they foreground the generativity that interests us.

These different sources allowed us to tap what the anthropologist Eitan Wilf called "the ethnographic contexts of 'creativity'" (2014, p. 398). More specifically, we examine the ways that people who engage in creative processes talk about what they do, how they share with others and the effect that making has on individual identity. We are also curious about the outcome of teaching and learning creativity with our students, and whether what they learned through making things in our classes could propagate creativity in other areas of their lives.

Of course, all theories can be said to scaffold on what precedes them, and we are in effect constructing a bricolage of theory and applied knowledge. The term is fitting: "The etymological foundation of bricolage comes from a traditional French expression that denotes craftspeople who creatively use materials left over from other projects to construct new artifacts" (Rogers, 2012, p. 1). The reference to the diversity of sources is fitting, too. With Creativity Everything, we apply translational academic rigour to our work, wishing "to speak correctly about the world that we want to capture it fully, through rich accounts from many places and diverse voices" (Gauntlett, 2019e).

Our bricolage led us towards a definition of creativity that would address the everyday activities of individuals—who knit, for instance, or make music, or build things with Lego, or make YouTube videos—and the processes they follow to create things:

> Everyday creativity refers to a process which brings together at least one active human mind, and the material or digital world, in the activity of making something. The activity has not been done in this way by this person (or these people) before. The process may arouse various emotions, such as excitement and frustration, but most especially a feeling of joy. When witnessing and appreciating the output, people may sense the presence of the maker, and recognise those feelings. (Gauntlett, 2018a, p. 87)

It is a little overcomplicated because it is trying to capture certain things missed in other definitions, while seeking to sidestep specific definitional traps that others have fallen into; see Kampylis & Valtanen (2010) for a robust discussion of these. Crucially, though, this definition highlights a human

process which does involve the creation of things, but which is about the exchange of emotion. This, then, became foundational to our approach.

From Theory to Reality

The inclusive nature of Creativity Everything forsakes siloed disciplines for an "everything lens" that is most interested in working with actual creative people. By that, of course, we do mean everyone: students, our partners in the lab, those who work in the creative industries, people we encounter locally, international networks, and anyone we can reach on the internet.

　　If Creativity Everything can be said to have a bias, it is towards actual *creating* because action informs perception, which in turn informs knowledge (Briscoe & Grush, 2017). It emphasizes learning from all kinds of real creators through listening, conversing, and making; it is, therefore, inclusive of media and people, regardless of background and orientation. Its baseline is pleasurable engagement taken seriously – that is, playing to learn about creativity – a duality that Dewey (1933) found to be the optimal state of mind for learning.

　　Indeed, the lab is arguably more mindset than a place (Culpepper & Gauntlett, in press b). Creativity Everything surfaces in classes, research projects, and an array of pop-up events that engage the public. In effect, we want to offer to everyone the invitation to step into a supportive, open-ended space and experience how it feels to see oneself as a creative being. We want to stir in as much variation in activity and people as possible, and not put a border around creativity. Ultimately, we want people to broaden their sense of themselves as creative, and we know that getting people to create is the most effective way of making that happen.

　　Three recent projects from the lab illustrate that point. The first involves the curriculum design for a widely subscribed class based in the School of Creative Industries at Ryerson University. The second is a research project that imagines inclusive new futures for makerspaces. The third is a community-based fortnight of workshops under the Creativity Everything banner. Beyond illustrating the tenets of Creativity Everything, these examples demonstrate our contention that theory is practice, making is thinking, and doing is researching.

Case Study: Supporting learning

Action is the most straightforward way to bridge creativity theory and practice, and this principle is demonstrated clearly in the practice of teaching, or rather, supporting people in learning. It is, at its essence, a compelling way to test how well our theoretical scaffolding holds up to the rigors of actual human experience. It is also key to fulfilling the imperatives that make up the *Creative Canada Framework* (2017).

　　Given our theoretical backgrounds, our classes centre on learners who

make things in and for the course, and we consider ourselves learners as well. As noted in a note-to-self blog post, reflecting on what the distinctive point of a "teaching" session must be:

> The only thing that gives any meaning and purpose to a taught course like this is the meaning-making and dialogues and relationships in the room. The course is led by me and can totally take my own curious perspective on the topic as a starting point—rapidly followed by the thoughts and feelings of everyone else in the room—otherwise what's the point . . . The *only* distinctive thing about the university course is that we come to this place and have personal approaches to the matters in hand. (Gauntlett, 2018b; emphasis in original)

To put it another way, this relational model of teaching means that we are transparent about our interpretations of creativity, and work alongside students to come to new mutual understandings about what it means to make things now (Gauntlett, 2019d).

There are many routes within this mode of learning—all of which involve making—so students complete assignments like keeping creativity journals, making class presentations, talking with visiting speakers, and participating in workshops. The goal is to help them create multiple pathways of reflective learning, the kind that is most meaningful and personal in the long run.

The prototypical course of this type is "Your Creative Self," an elective available to students across the university. As the course description put it, "This course is about self-driven creativity—making media, making inspirations, and making a difference. Everything begins with creative individuals. We may move in and out of creative communities, and collaborative environments, but the one constant is your own creative self" (Gauntlett, 2019a).

Bringing this about required a mix of linked strategies that abandoned the classic lecture/assignment dyad in favour of a constructivist approach (e.g., Dewey, 1933; Ingold, 2013; Papert, 1981) that focused on reflexive making. To some, this direction will recall Ratto's ongoing emphasis on the role of critical making – that is, engaging with tools and materials to facilitate new thinking, particularly about science and technology – in pedagogy (2011; Ratto & Hertz, 2019). To that end, homework in the form of readings and videos allowed students to cover established constructs of creativity; we discussed these briefly each session. The decision freed class time for the more affecting business of reflective exercises in which students were encouraged to consider the origins of their ideas, questioning their motivations and rationales, and, crucially, what compels them to create. Accordingly, each session included approximately 45-minute-long exercises, which required the flexibility, fluency, and tolerance for ambiguity demanded of or all creative action (Osborn, 1953). From a blog post about the experience:

> . . . I do [the exercises] myself in class too, for the first time for me, as it is for [the students]—typically thinking 'Oh, this is

hard!' Of course, the reason I do it too is not because I think my responses are especially important but just because I want to be participating as well, alongside the students—we are all uncertain creators, finding our way, individually but also together. (Gauntlett, 2019a; emphasis in the original).

With 55 students, the size of this class allowed for the making sessions to conclude with shared debriefs in small groups. Also, each class could feature five-minute presentations from students about their own personal creative projects. To reinforce reflexivity, they were asked to describe in their presentations the creative challenges they faced and what they gleaned from meeting them. Because they pursued activities that ranged from tap dancer to social media influencer to spoken-word poet, the ideas and discoveries the students shared were often inspiring and sometimes moving. Tellingly, post-class evaluations indicated that the students highly valued this part of the curriculum.

Three salient points from Ingold (2013) about making informed the content and construction of this course. First, learning *with* creativity carries more impact than learning *about* creativity; second, our meanings and understandings about creativity are built by going forward with action; and third, transformational (as opposed to documentary) learning carries with it the more significant potential for lasting change. These precepts also pertain to research, as the next section details.

Case study: Makerspaces project

Across Canada, makerspaces are familiar fixtures in cities, schools, public libraries, and occasional pop-up locations. They routinely provide space and equipment—often in the form of 3-D printers, circuit boards, and vinyl cutters—as well as education and resources for children and adults who want to learn, create, design, and invent. The potential they offer in building imaginations, however, is inevitably constrained by physical affordances of time, space, and money. Moreover, the STEM-focused cultures of many makerspaces have prompted questions of equality, sustainability, and convertibility of skills that must be addressed to open them up to diverse users. The concept of "the makerspace mindset" (Thestrup & Velicu, 2018), suggests a way past those constrictions for groups to collaborate regardless of place via such strategies as resource sharing and online sessions. In turn, the makerspace mindset could realize its promise by leveraging "platforms for creativity" (Gauntlett, 2012, 2018a) that can assist in strategizing how to equitably direct efforts toward a more expansive and sustainable society for creating. We use the phrase "platforms for creativity" to indicate any kind of environment, event, tool or toy, online or offline or both, which invites people to step into a sphere of creativity that they would not otherwise have experienced.

Our project (Culpepper & Gauntlett, in press) aimed to explore

these strategies in detail. We argued that educators and others who run makerspaces should consider "platforms for creativity" as integral to the makerspace mindset. Together, we contend, mindset and platforms can facilitate the development of more and better ways for all kinds of people to share in the individual and social benefits of making and sharing.

The lab began this project with an extensive review of inclusion/ exclusion in Western makerspaces (Payette, 2019), with particular emphasis on the numerous subtle and informal ways in which people not from the dominant demographic were often led to conclude that the space was not really "for them." This was augmented with an examination of global makerspace cultures. Tired of male-dominated spaces, and bored by the brown-and-grey "machine shop" aesthetic of many makerspaces, we were still interested in the ways that makerspace users can connect with each other—to exchange ideas, learn from each other, and build ladders of inspiration—regardless of physical space. One educator called this "learning *glo-cally*" (Thestrup, personal communication, 2019).

In assessing how to square these interests, we investigated the theoretical underpinnings of the makerspace movement (Papert, 1991) and its current interpretations (Collins, 2019; Kim, Edouard, Alderfer & Smith, 2018; Pepler et al., 2015). One of the most potentially transformative things to emerge from the makerspaces is the *maker mindset*: "[A] can-do attitude that can be summarized as 'what can you do with what you know?' It is an invitation to take ideas and turn them into various kinds of reality. It is a chance to share in communities of makers of all ages by sharing your work and expertise" (Dougherty, 2013, p. 9).

That was the starting point for what Thestrup and Velicu (2018) term the *makerspace mindset*—a pedagogical turn that emphasizes the potential for creating a culture for building creativity, equity, and collaboration while allowing for the ambiguities and benefits of bringing people together. Its most relevant characteristic is that the connections and understandings that happen in the makerspace are more important than the physical parameters of the space itself. Accordingly, the makerspace mindset emphasises characteristics such as playfulness, improvisation, and a tolerance of ambiguity over those of competition, rule-following, and certitude. The change in perspective could hold open the possibility of increasing the diversity of makerspaces, combining learners of all ages and backgrounds, making all kinds of things to explore their creative identities. After all, when people get together in person or virtually to make things, they forge shared understandings. Over time, these can extend past individual relationships to potentially contribute to local resilience, sustainability, and, perhaps in time, broad social change.

In our assessment, we argued that such a shift necessitates the structures offered by platforms for creativity. While many things can be said to be platforms—YouTube, for example, or fabric scraps and a glue gun, or electronics kits, or even paper and crayons—it is crucial that any potential

platform for creativity, online or offline, supports and nurtures people's creativity.

Importantly, this underlined that platforms for creativity must also offer an invitation to join in, and opportunities to connect with others, a perception borne out by our research experiences (Culpepper & Gauntlett, in press b). In our sessions, we ask people to make things; with the invitation to join in, everyone is acknowledged as a creator. Moreover, the things they make can be as simple or elaborate as people wish. That removes the spectre of competition and allows a group acknowledgment that everyone has something to express. As we conduct reflexive debriefs about the process of creating, these sessions invariably deliver insights on how groups and individuals relate to each other through making.

It is interesting to note that the makerspace mindset and platforms for creativity coexist to a degree in the Art Hives Network, a consortium of community-based arts entities across Canada and throughout the world (Timm-Bottos & Reilly, 2015). Art Hives frequently focus on art therapy, and their stated guidelines also promote the qualities of sharing, communication, and equity that we argue the most inclusive makerspaces and platforms encourage. Further, they aim "to build solidarity across geographic distances . . . [to] create multiple opportunities for dialogue, skill sharing, and art making between people of differing socio-economic backgrounds, ages, cultures, and abilities" (Art Hives, 2020). Directed by Janis Timm-Bottos of Concordia University in Montreal, the organization emphasizes a research-practice continuum borne of inclusive, open-ended investigation, and promotes creativity as a means for cultivating social change. In the context of the larger entity, each Art Hive represents a makerspace where many different kinds of people are welcome to explore ideas while creating art (and, in some places, gardens); correspondingly, each holds the potential to be the tool for conviviality that Illich (1973) envisioned.

Creativity Everything shares many of the same goals as the Art Hives network; our distinction is our stress on the experience of making a wide variety of things—some art-focused, many not—as a necessary step towards empowering creativity. An example is described in the next case study.

Case study: Community project

Toronto has a history of alternative and anarchist schools, arguably reaching an apogee with the Occupy movement in the wake of the 2010 G20 Toronto summit protests. Entities such as Anarchist U and the Free Skool were run by volunteers who facilitated open-to-everyone classes and discussion groups exploring political and social change (Doctorow, 2012; Kinch, 2013; Schantz, 2012). Contemporaneously, as it happens, we had accepted an invitation to run a book discussion and workshop for a separate Free School that the organizers hosted in their squat – an otherwise vacant mansion in the heart of London, United Kingdom (Gauntlett, 2019c).

These Free Schools had much in common. Their classes, whether they were about economic activism or the social meaning of creativity, maintained a commitment to inclusivity, open-ended exercises, and a distinct preference towards learning through making. Informed by these experiences, we created the Creativity Everything FreeSchool in the summer of 2019. Promoted as "Two weeks of creative everything, open to everybody," the FreeSchool was advertised by assorted electronic and physical means across Toronto and beyond (Gauntlett, 2019b). To see a video that introduces the Creativity Everything FreeSchool visit here.

We set up a diverse array of workshops, organized into three interconnected strands, *Making*, *Discovery*, and *Process*, although, of course, every session spoke in some way to making, discovery, and process. Classes were headlined by a range of activities such as drawing, problem-solving, fashion-hacking, poetry-writing and graphic design, but each was—in different ways—about creative identity and thinking of oneself as a creative person. The sessions were led by the research team at Creativity Everything as well as Toronto-area artists and creative practitioners.

The Creativity Everything FreeSchool was an immediate draw; more than 1,000 people requested free tickets, and hundreds of people attended (Senra-François & Gauntlett, 2019). It is worth noting that while the FreeSchool indeed served our students, it was also well-attended by makers of a range of ages and backgrounds from our community. Aiming at this mixed cohort brought the Creativity Everything FreeSchool closer to the roots of the original movement.

Because we could hardly count on everyone who came to, for instance, the cartooning class to be adept at drawing, we based our sessions on Seymour Papert's brilliant insight that creative and/or learning experiences should have "low floors, high ceilings, and wide walls" (Papert, 1980, 1993; Resnick & Silverman, 2005, p. 2). It means that the learning experience should be easy to step into (low floor), that a project can begin simply but with the ability to become complex if warranted (high ceilings), and that any materials should allow many different kinds of people to make and do many different kinds of things (wide walls).

Two examples from the FreeSchool illustrate the point. The graphic design class had people cut up textured papers to prototype the cover of the book they would write about creativity, resulting in both spare and elaborate renditions. Similarly, those who attended the session on fashion hacking brought in old clothes to revamp with actions as simple as changing a hem or as detailed as reshaping seams or adding contrasting fabric insertions. We documented the sessions in a video we produced for the Creativity Everything website.

In scope and delivery, the broad offerings of the Creativity Everything FreeSchool earned positive feedback from the attendees. Based on the written comments we solicited at the end of every session, they said they liked the variety, which encouraged them to think about creativity in different

ways through different media, and they emphasized that the free classes enabled them to participate fully. These responses—along with several anecdotal ones received during and after the FreeSchool—seemed to confirm that we had indeed modelled a place that everyone was invited to step into as a creative being.

That summer's experience also allowed us a new test of eight principles for successful platforms for creativity (Gauntlett, 2014, 2018a), which were initially developed to describe effective online creative platforms, but turned out to apply equally well to offline experiences:

1. **Embrace "because we want to"**: At the FreeSchool, we sought to go with the grain of what people already wanted to do and were interested in – while stirring in some challenge (which the participants also sought). They made and shared things they enjoyed, and that they could tailor to their wishes. They could draw, design, and make what they wished; our suggestions were prompts, not prods.

2. **Set no limits on participation**: As a platform, the FreeSchool welcomed anyone who wanted to come along. Classes were spread over the course of two weeks, and at various hours, to make it easier to find an accommodating time. Moreover, as the sessions were free, the cost of materials and tuition was taken off the table.

3. **Celebrate participants, not the platform**: The FreeSchool classes were designed in a way to encourage people not just to make, but also to share what they made with their tablemates and the rest of the people in the room. Through guided debriefs, the facilitators maintained the spotlight on individual and group creativity, rather than the format of the class.

4. **Support storytelling**: People connect when they tell stories, and when the stories scaffold together—as they often did in the process of the FreeSchool sessions—they build more significant meanings that can be understood by everyone in the room.

5. **Some gifts, some theatre, some recognition**: The Creativity Everything FreeSchool was in every respect a liminal experience. Its ephemerality accented the idea that the classes were a stage—for giving and receiving creative gifts, for performing creative identity, and for witnessing and applauding the contributions of others.

6. **Online to offline is a continuum**: They are not mutually exclusive, a distinction that many FreeSchool attendees instinctively understood. Anecdotally, they spoke of learning new creative skills on YouTube and other digital platforms; at the same time, they often added that they appreciated the advantages of individual communication and group energy afforded by the in-person classes—while sharing the highlights with their friends and colleagues on social media.

7. **Reinvent learning**: Following its antecedents, the FreeSchool encouraged people to learn from each other and to pursue the subjects and lessons they were most interested in. Similarly, there were no grades. Our emphasis was on

learning and self-development through the process of doing and reflecting on creativity, not really on the physical product of any session.

8. Foster genuine communities: The creativity engendered by the FreeSchool encouraged a flowering of formal and informal partnerships and practices. For example, we met Camille Favreau because she was an eager participant in as many sessions as possible, frequently skipping out of her job in a financial corporation in order to explore her creativity at the FreeSchool. Such was her enthusiasm that we invited her to run a workshop session on the creative eye, and later invited her to host and co-produce the Creativity Everything lab podcast (Favreau & Gauntlett, 2020). The FreeSchool also helped to build collaboration with other Toronto organizations, such as CreateBeing and Artscape Launchpad, and led on to the biweekly drop-in creativity sessions offered by Creativity Everything throughout the year. Because we like things to be fresh and surprising, the FreeSchool was never intended to be an annual event. Instead, we are using its lessons now to devise the next projects that will emerge from Creativity Everything.

Conclusion

The Creativity Everything lab, then, exists to invite people in, and share ideas. Previously we had assumed that the important activity was in writing and communicating about concepts and principles, and getting those out into the world, regardless of the constraints of geography. That remains important, but the Canadian emphasis on locating research of any kind in a 'lab', in which activities could be based, turned out to be a blessing, kick-starting a fresh experiment in community and place-making.

The notion that everyone has creative potential is very ordinary and obvious to us, and yet we are continually surprised to find many people who believe that they are not creative, and cannot be, because they were not born with it, and/or because some teacher or authority figure thoughtlessly dismissed something that they had created, when they were 14. Even so, they understand the metaphor that creativity needs to be *unlocked*, when we get the chance to introduce it, because they know what that locking feels like.

We also very often find that creativity is thought of as "arty" activities. Even when people are aware that the definition of the word reaches well beyond that sphere *in theory*, as it were, they will still say that they are not creative because they are no good at painting. By highlighting the unlimited ways in which people do create, Creativity Everything spurs the conversation around the opportunities to develop creativity as a discrete skill in and of itself, as well as the idea of creativity as a self-identity that you can step into.

The case studies discussed here, encompassing practices in teaching and learning, research, and community engagement, illustrate different facets of our approach to knowledge-building. As outlined above, creativity as an academic discipline has been dominated by psychologists eager to stamp it with the veneer of "scientific" certainties. We prefer to see creativity

as a field of diverse *practitioners*, learning by doing, and as a place of active discovery. This is not because of a lack of commitment to rigour. On the contrary, it is because we want to understand creativity fully and properly that we are uninterested in superficial methodologies, and seek instead a deep and respectful conversation about the real meanings of creativities, in all their forms.

Back in 1999, Nancy Cartwright, the philosopher of science with a background in advanced mathematics, published *The Dappled World*, which explains at the start: "This book supposes that, as appearances suggest, we live in a dappled world, a world rich in different things, with different natures, behaving in different ways. The laws that describe this world are a patchwork, not a pyramid" (Cartwright, 1999, p. 1). This approach seeks to build understandings by listening to diverse voices, rather trying to make everything all the same, and commends deep listening over statistical averages. We also take from philosopher Richard Rorty (1979) the idea that the work of scholars committed to progress should be about the generation of new ideas, in playfully prodding the academy in any ways that might be fruitful, rather than seeking only to extend the long roll of flat description. With Creativity Everything, we find this can be done in many ways – through research, events, teaching and learning, community engagement, digital media, collaborations with diverse organizations , and our own experiences of making things – which are all parts of the same thing, with the mission to unlock creativities for all.

References

Art Hives Network (2020, June 5). *About* (Web page). Retrieved from https://arthives.org/about.

Baker, G. H. (2016). *The architecture of James Stirling and his partners James Gowan and Michael Wilford: a study of architectural creativity in the twentieth century.* London, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Beer, T., & Hes, D. (2017). Sustainability in production: Exploring eco-creativity within the parameters of conventional theatre. *Behind the Scenes: Journal of Theatre Production Practice*, 1, 32–5.

Briscoe, R. and Grush, R. (2017). "Action-based theories of perception" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, E. Zalta (ed.). Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/action-perception/.

Canadian Heritage. (2017). *Creative Canada: Policy framework* (Web page). Retrieved from https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pch/documents/campaigns/creative-canada/CCCadreFramework-EN.pdf

Cartwright, N. (1999). *The dappled world: A study in the boundaries of science.* Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Collins, E. (2019, September 20). U*nstitching sustainability: (Re)making visceral connections when talking about sustainability in online, community makerspaces*. Paper presented at the Making Futures conference, Plymouth, United Kingdom. Abstract retrieved from https://research.brighton.ac.uk/en/publications/unstitching-sustainabilty-remaking-visceral-connections-when-talk.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1999). A systems perspective on creativiy. In R. Sternberg (Ed.) *Handbook of Creativity* (pp. 313 – 335). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

---. (1988). Society, culture, and person: A systems view of creativity. In R. Sternberg (Ed.) *The Nature of Creativity: Contemporary Psychological Perspectives* (pp. 325–339). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Culpepper, M. K., & Gauntlett, D. (in press a). From amateur to all-business: Women on the verge of craft entrepreneurship. In A. Naudin & K. Patel (Eds.), *Craft entrepreneurship.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

---. (in press b). Making and learning together: Where the makerspace mindset meets platforms for creativity. *Global Studies of Childhood.*

Dann, R. J., & Jollet, E. (2018). Looking for trouble: Archeology, art and interdisciplinary encounters. *The Senses and Society*, 13, 299-316.

Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think*. Boston, MA: D.C. Heath & Company.

Doctorow, C. L. (2012, June 6). RIP Erik 'Possum Man' Stewart [blog post]. Retrieved from https://boingboing.net/2012/06/05/rip-erik-possum-man-stewa.html

Dougherty, D. (2013) The maker mindset. In Honey, M. & Kanter, D. E. (Eds.) Design, make, play: *Growing the next generation of STEM innovators* (pp. 7-11). New York, NY: Routledge.

Douny, L. (2014). *Living in a landscape of scarcity: Materiality and cosmology in West Africa*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Favreau, C., & Gauntlett, D. (Producers). (2020, March 3). *David Gauntlett and Camille Favreau: Why we're making a podcast* (Audio podcast). Retrieved from http://www.creativityeverything.ca/david-gauntlett-camille-favreau-why-were-making-a-podcast-episode-0/

Gauntlett, D. (2007). *Creative explorations: New approaches to identities and audiences*. Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge.

---. (2012). *Media studies 2.0, and other battles around the future of media research*. London, United Kingdom: Amazon Kindle.

---. (2014). The internet is ancient, small steps are important, and four other theses about making things in a digital world. In N. Zagalo & P. Branco (Eds.), *Creativity in the digital age* (pp. 17-33). London, United Kingdom: Springer-Verlag.

---. (2018a). *Making is connecting: The social power of creativity, from craft and knitting to digital everything* (2nd ed.). London, United Kingdom: Polity.

---. (2018b, August 3). New course anxieties and two solutions [blog post]. Retrieved from https://davidgauntlett.com/digital-media/new-course-anxieties-and-two-solutions/

---. (2019a, February 9) 'Your Creative Self' course – hello insights [blog post]. Retrieved from https://davidgauntlett.com/creativity/your-creative-self-course-hello-insights/-

---. (2019b, 1 May). Creativity Everything FreeSchool [Web page]. Retrieved from http://www.creativityeverything.ca/freeschool/

---. (2019c, May 3). Origins of the FreeSchool [blog post]. Retrieved from https://davidgauntlett.com/creativity/origins-of-the-freeschool/

---. (2019d, July 5). Seeking an art-school ethos for my classroom [blog post]. Retrieved from https://davidgauntlett.com/creativity/seeking-an-art-school-ethos-for-my-classroom/

---. (2019e, November 24). The 'dappled world' and a more diverse perspective [blog post]. Retrieved from https://davidgauntlett.com/seven-keys-to-creativity/the-dappled-world-and-a-more-diverse-perspective/

Glăveanu, V.- P. (2017). *Thinking through creativity and culture: Toward an integrated model*. Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Glăveanu, V.-P., & Tanggaard, L. (2014). Creativity, identity, and representation: Towards a socio-cultural theory of creative identity. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 34, 12-21.

Harrison, S. H., & Rouse, E. D. (2014). Let's dance! Elastic coordination in creative group work: A qualitative study of modern dancers. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(5), 1256-1283.

Hennessey, B., & Amabile, T. (2010). Creativity. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 61, 569–98.

Illich, I. (1973). *Tools for conviviality*. New York: Harper & Row.

Ingold, T. (2010). The textility of making. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 34, 91-102.

---. (2013). *Making: Anthropology, archeology, art and architecture*. London: Routledge.

Jackson, N. (2006). Creativity in higher education: What's the problem? *Higher Education*, 7, 1-11.

Kampylis, P. G., & Valtanen, J. (2010). Redefining creativity – analyzing definitions, collocations, and consequences. *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 44, 191-214.

Kent, C., & Steward, J. (2008). *Learning by heart: Teachings to free the creative spirit*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Kim, Y., Edouard, K., Alderfer, K., & Smith, B. K. (2018) *Making culture: A national study of education makerspaces* [Research report, Drexel University].

Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336530623_Making_Culture_A_National_Study_of_Education_Makerspaces

Kinch, M. (2013, January 20). Toronto's free schools, it takes a community [blog post]. Retrieved from http://toronto.mediacoop.ca/story/torontos-free-schools/16025.

Kreiner, K. (2017). The competition between creativity and legitimacy. In Strebnel, I., & Silberberger, J. (Eds.), *Architecture competition: Project design and the building process* (pp. 45-58). London, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Kozbelt, A., Beghetto, R. A., & Runco, M. A. (2010). Theories of creativity. In J. C. Kaufman & R. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of creativity* (pp. 20–47). Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Leavy, P. & Harris, A. (2018). *Contemporary Feminist Research from Theory to Practice*. New York: Guilford Press.

McIntyre, P. (2019). Taking creativity seriously: Developing as a researcher and teacher of songwriting. *Journal of Popular Music Education*, 3, 67-85.

Montuori, A. (2011). Systems approach. In M. Runco & S. Pritzker (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of creativity*, pp. 414-421. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Morris, W. (2004). *News from nowhere and other writings* (C. Wilmer, Ed.). London, United Kingdom. Penguin.

Noble, S. U. (2018). *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism*. New York, NY: NYU Press.

Osborn, A. (1953). *Applied imagination: Principles and procedures of creative thinking*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Papert, S. (1980). *Mindstorms: Children, computers, and powerful ideas*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Papert, S. (1991) Situating constructionism. In S. Papert & I. Harel (Eds.), *Constructionism*, (pp. 1-11). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Payette, N. (2019). *Gender inclusion in makerspaces*. Creativity Everything working paper, Toronto: Ryerson University.

Peppler, K.A., Maltese, A., Keune, A., Chang, S., & Regalla, L. (2015) Open portfolio project: Survey of makerspaces, part I [Research report, MakerEd Open Portfolio Project]. Retrieved from http://makered.org/wp-content/

uploads/2016/01/MakerEdOPP_RB6_Survey-of-Makerspaces-1_final.pdf.

Ratto, M. (2011). Critical making: Conceptual and material studies in technology and social life. *The Information Society*, 27, 252-260.

Ratto, M., & Hertz, G. (2019). Critical making and interdisciplinary learning: Making as a bridge between art, science, engineering, and social interventions. In L. Bogers & L. Chiappini (Eds.), *The critical makers reader: (Un)learning technology*, pp. 17-28. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Institute of Network Cultures.

Reinharz, S. (1992). *Feminist methods in social research*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Resnick, M., & Silverman, B. (2005). Some reflections on designing construction kits for kids. In Proceedings of Interaction Design and Children Conference (pp. 117-122) New York, NY: ACM. Retrieved from http://alumni.media.mit.edu/~silver/radlearning/construction_kits_for_kids.pdf.

Rogers, M. (2012). Contextualizing theories and practices of bricolage research. *The Qualitative Report*, 17, 1-17.

Rorty, R. (1979). *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Ruskin, J. (2009). *Selected writings* (D. Birch, Ed.). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Sadowski, J. (2019). When data is capital: Datafication, accumulation, and extraction. *Big Data & Society*, 6, 1-12.

Sawyer, R. K. (2006). *Explaining creativity: The science of human innovation*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Senra-François, R., & Gauntlett, D. (2019, June 7). Creativity Everything FreeSchool exceeds all expectations [blog post]. Retrieved from https://davidgauntlett.com/creativity/creativity-everything-freeschool-exceeds-all-expectations/

Sewell, W. (2019, April 12). Janelle Monáe: Living Out Loud [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://www.them.us/story/janelle-monae-living-out-loud

Shantz, J. (2012). Spaces of learning: The anarchist free skool. In R. H. Haworth (Ed.), *Anarchist pedagogies: Collective actions, theories, and critical reflections on education* (pp. 124-144). Oakland, CA: PM Press.

Small, C. (1998). *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Thestrup K., & Velicu, A. (2019, April 1). The makerspace is a mindset [blog post]. MakeEYProject.wordpress.com. Available at: https://makeyproject.wordpress.com/2019/01/04/the-makerspace-is-a-mindset/

Timm-Bottos, J., & Reilly, R. C. (2015). Neighborhood art hives: Engaging communities in teaching and learning. O. Delano-Oriaran, M.Parks, & S. Fondrie (Eds.), *Service-learning and civic engagement: A sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tracy, D. (2019). Cain and culpability in Tony Kushner's Homebody/Kabul. *Modern Drama*, 62, 94-110.

Trotman, D. (2019). Creativity as a pastoral concern. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 37, 73-80.

Wilf, E. (2014). Semiotic dimensions of creativity. Annual Review of Anthropology, 43, 397–412.

Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. New York, NY: Public Affairs.