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Editorial

Hybrid Spaces: Re-imagining pedagogy, practice

and research for creativity in unforeseen times

Madeleine Sclater

Eclectic, visionary, incisive, relaxing, practical and entertaining. These epithets are not often associated with an academic conference. But the whole organising team, especially the administrators, speakers and presenters at IJADE 2021 rose to the considerable challenge of the International Journal of Art and Design Education’s first fully online global conference, held on 26-28 March 2021 (Riding, Sclater & Gregson, 2021). The team successfully blended intellectually challenging, spiritually uplifting and relaxing inputs into a perfect mélange for a stimulating and engaging conference. It was jointly organised and supported by a collaboration between Tate Liverpool; The Glasgow School of Art; Goldsmiths, University of London; Canterbury Christ Church University; the National Society for Education in Art and Design (NSEAD) and Wiley. This was truly an interdisciplinary event, emboldening participants to engage in addressing societal, political and environmental impacts of their creative work; finding ways to address issues of participation, inclusion and access in challenging online and hybrid spaces in art and design education; and sensitively engaging in re-imagining sustainability, creativity and wellbeing in unforeseen times.

On the opening day (Friday 26 March) the theme was ‘societal, environmental and political impact’ of Art and Design Education. After a welcome by the journal editors, the internationally renowned writer and cultural critic Professor Henry Giroux gave us a powerful and impassioned keynote entitled ‘Critical Pedagogy, Fascist Culture and Hope in Dark Times’ (NSEAD Inspirations, 2021a). Henry, who was for fifteen years a student and friend of the world famous intellectual and freedom fighter Paulo Freire, until the latter’s death in 1997, argued that education is a central feature of politics and that critical pedagogy has a crucial role to play in fighting the resurgence of neoliberal fascist politics, particularly in this age of pandemics. Freire was himself most famous for arguing that culture and politics are inextricably linked (Giroux, 2021). This analysis positions education and creativity at the centre of the political stage and is highly pertinent to the challenges faced by art and design education at all levels. Later, we participated in ‘Mindful Origami’ with Artist Facilitator Honey Dearsley who invited us to unfold our minds and engage our sense of fun and creativity at the end of the day. Honey is an artist, a creator, a maker and a thinker with a varied career in education, working with families and schools. Always curious, and with an energy for learning and trying new things, Honey initiated The Art Hive in July 2019 providing art clubs after school. Honey works in her community with senior artists and adult artists requiring support to make their art. Honey is currently creating online content for future workshops, devising practical wellbeing activities for young people, in addition to facilitating online sessions for families, colleges and conferences. It was the perfect relaxing end to a thought-provoking day.

On Saturday 27 March, we welcomed the theme of ‘participation, inclusion and access’. In a deeply practical and engaging keynote (NSEAD Inspirations, 2021b), Diana Laurillard, Professor of Learning with Digital Technologies, UCL Knowledge Lab, shared with us the underlying theory of her ‘Conversational Framework’ for understanding learning (Laurillard, 2002). Building upon many decades of research into student learning, she presented an exciting and graphic way to use it to inform teachers’ approaches to learner-centred design - truly exploring opportunities to innovate with blended and online pedagogies. Diana was formerly Head of the e-Learning Strategy Unit at Department for Education and Skills (2002-2005) and Pro-Vice Chancellor for learning technologies at the Open University (1995-2002). She has also researched MOOCs for professional education in challenging contexts, learning design, and digital games for dyscalculia. Other projects include: ‘The Transformational Potential of MOOCs’ (in the Centre for Global HE at UCLIOE); a project on ‘Future Education’ in the RELIEF Centre at UCL-IGP. Diana’s recent book is ‘Teaching as a Design Science’ (Laurillard, 2013).

In the afternoon, Chila Kumari Singh Burman gave us a wonderfully vibrant presentation of her explorations of cultural identity, gender and representation, continually questioning the role of women, especially south-Asian women, in the world. Chila has worked across the mediums of printmaking, painting, installation, sculpture, photography and film. In 2017 she was awarded an honorary doctorate for her contribution to the Arts from the University of the Arts in London. Chila’s ongoing recent ‘Bindi Girls’ explores Asian feminisms. This is achieved through a collection of feminine forms. A continued theme of ‘ice cream’ references her father, who arrived in the UK as an immigrant from India in the 1950s and was an ice cream salesman for over thirty years. Her use of ice cream as a motif also satirises the sexualisation of women, particularly alluding to advertising. Chila’s works in public collections include the Tate collection, Wellcome Collection, Science Museum Collection, and the Arts Council Collection.

On Sunday 28 March the theme was Creativity and Wellbeing. In a truly life-affirming keynote entitled ‘A pedagogy for sustainability: Revisioning education for the Age of Ecology’ Satish Kumar (NSEAD Inspirations, 2021c; BBC, 2005) talked about the need for a new education system that will be responsive to the ecological integrity and sustainability of the ecosystem. He argued passionately for education for the whole person as the only solution to the ecological crisis that we face. He also argued that education is much more than the servant of an economic system perpetuating consumption. Art and Design Education is a key feature of such a vision. A former monk and long-term peace and environment activist who was influenced by Krishnamurti (Krishnamurti, 1974), Satish has himself been influencing the global agenda for educational change for over 50 years (see for example TEDx Talks, 2017). Inspired in his early 20s by the example of the British peace activist and world-famous philosopher Bertrand Russell, Satish undertook an 8,000-mile peace pilgrimage. Depending on the kindness of strangers and carrying no money, he and a colleague walked from India to America to present a modest packet of ‘peace tea’ to the leaders of the world’s (then) four nuclear powers. He is Editor Emeritus of Resurgence and Ecologist (Resurgence and Ecologist, n.d.).

The General Secretary of the National Society for Art and Design Education (NSEAD), Michele Gregson, Liz McFarlane the current president of NSEAD, and Rachel Payne, the immediate past president of NSEAD, delivered a thought-provoking final address. Together they reflected upon the ever-changing environment of Art, Craft and Design Education and considered what ‘change’ signifies as NSEAD endeavours to be more inclusive and responsive to the needs of art educators and their learners.

The conference aimed to address new and adapted conceptual, digital and physical spaces for our practice. The past months have challenged all of us working in Art and Design Education and research, to re-imagine and review our practice. As well as addressing the challenges and barriers that have emerged, the conference focused on opportunities for reflection and innovations in our pedagogy. Papers highlighted research developments and approaches that are showing potential to help us understand and evaluate new and hybrid pedagogies, modes of engagement and participation. The conference provided a stimulating platform for academics, teachers, students, organisations and community members to critically explore these issues in the arts in contemporary education. A wide range of well-received papers was presented, and those presented here were selected by the delegates and editors to give a flavour of an extraordinary and invigorating event.

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