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Lockdown Learning… an interdisciplinary approach

Abstract

2020 will be remembered as a critical turning point for Education. An unpredicted pandemic took nations leaders by surprise and led to freedoms we had become accustom to, being suspended. The response from education was to diversify into virtual/blended learning models to support the continuation of learning and knowledge generation. Many were affected, but none more so than the creative disciplines. There was much negativity, reporting on the loss of culture and traditional studio ecosystems. But for a sector which pre-COVID had a growth five-times higher than the economy (Creative Industries Federation, 2020), the UK's creative sector had much to offer in terms of innovative pedagogy. A case study is presented from a higher education institution that responded, reframed and re-thought learning and teaching in the wake of the global crisis. By adopting an opportunistic approach to innovate teaching and learning practice though transforming physical interdisciplinary collaborations, into flexible virtual creative spaces it was able to provide a blue print for lockdown learning.

"Creative Connections" at Staffordshire University focused on: resilience building and flexibility, adopting novel approaches to deal with the challenges, it captured opportunities within what became an extended period of uncertainty. This teaching and learning initiative, funded through the Royal Academy of Engineering Visiting Professors Scheme, adopted to provide virtual innovative interdisciplinary challenges to: increase learning opportunities within a world of uncertainly, build sustainable networks to ensure participants were best placed for life after study, cultivate employability skills through introducing the concept of "play" (risk taking) within the new norm for learning. The pedagogical model was based on embedding interdisciplinary creative "virtual" design challenges into the learning journey. Working with externally stakeholders from the technology industries, creative/heritage disciplines and education, we bought together students from different locations into a virtual space to co-create, collaborate and network.

The creative design challenges were designed to develop: skills and knowledge for advancing employability and commercial awareness; networking opportunities to build connections across disciplines within the university and beyond; and creative flair through working on wicked problems which by their very nature were loosely defined. By bringing together individuals from different disciplines a rich fusion of skills, attributes and knowledge cumulated in a set of innovative proposals and creative solutions to the set challenges in a dynamic and fast paced environment which promoted the notation of "play" and co-creation.

This paper presents a synthesis of approaches which innovated and transformed creative co-creation from a physical learning environment to a virtual space. It provides a framework for innovative pedagogy, which developed a legacy for learning to promote play and interdisciplinary team collaboration. In the hostile environment of the Pandemic one could ask "What are universities for…?", whilst many responses spring to mind the one that resonates is "to generate knowledge for the good of mankind". Knowledge comes in many forms and through creative design challenges we

transformed the learning experience of a generation that will be more versatile than any other to respond, reframe, re-think and re-invent knowledge.

Reference:

Creative Industries Federation (June 2020) Report: the projected economic impact of covid-19 on the UK creative industries, https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/publications/report-projected-economic-impact-covid-19-uk-creative-industries [accessed Jan 2021).