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## (Im)possibilities of Courageous Creativity in Comparative and International Education Research

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# (IM)POSSIBILITIES OF COURAGEOUS CREATIVITY IN COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION RESEARCH

CIESC Presidential Lecture, 14 June 2013, CSSE Congress, Victoria, B.C.

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## **Introduction**

A few years ago, while writing a chapter for my book on *New Thinking in Comparative Education* (Larsen, 2010a), I began reading and thinking about creativity and educational research. Since then I've done some further reading, research and reflection on the topic, and I'd like to share with you this afternoon some of my thoughts about both the impossibilities and possibilities for creativity in comparative and international education research. What I'd like to do over the next 60 minutes is the following. First, I will provide an overview of various theories of creativity that attempt to explain the products associated with creativity, characteristics associated with creative people, the processes associated with creativity, and the places where creativity is thought to be fostered.

Creativity has become ever so popular in current policy discourses. I turn my attention to describing the creative economy discourse that has been taken up by policy makers across a wide range of settings. I note here, as an aside, that while this talk is couched in international terms, I speak most directly based on my knowledge and experience of education primarily in English speaking countries. Over the past decade or so, creativity has become very popular amongst policy makers. Governments in numerous jurisdictions have called for initiatives to enhance the creativity of their populations as a means to foster economic growth. I review a number of recent policies that emphasize the significance of creativity and innovation for economic competition. Education policy makers, too, have now also jumped on the creativity bandwagon, arguing that students, in schools, colleges and universities need to be more innovative and creative.

One of my main arguments is that despite this call for creativity, schools and universities are places where it is extremely difficult to foster creativity given the stresses and strains, students, teachers (in the case of schools) and professors (in the case of universities) face in their work due to performance based management policy reforms. On one hand that does not really matter because the type of creativity that most policy makers desire in students today is a domesticated form of creativity, linked tightly and directly to economic productivity. In this respect, creativity has been co-opted, managed and tamed by neoliberal economic discourses about the creative economy. However, as I argue in the latter half of my presentation, what we really need is to reclaim creativity in its playful, rebellious and risk-taking forms. I end with some possibilities in how we can do this as courageously creative comparative and international education scholars.

## **Fostering Creativity: Different Theories and Approaches**

There are many theories of creativity that try to explain why some people are more creative than others. Creativity has been extensively investigated and measured in the field of psychology ever since the 1950s address to the American Psychological Association by Guilford who is best known for his writing about divergent thinking. Theories of creativity (particularly investigations into why some people are more creative than others) have focused on a variety of aspects. The

dominant factors are usually identified as the “four Ps” – product, people/person, process, and place. ‘Products’ research examines inventions, publications, works of art, etc and the aim of this research is to count and judge or evaluate these creative products in an objective way. A focus on creative products usually appears in psychometric attempts to measure creativity (Runco and Albert, 1990).

‘People Perspective’ research has attempted to determine the core characteristics, personality traits, or tendencies that are typical of creative people. The most well-known researcher in this area is Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1996) who has defined creativity in terms of those individuals judged to have made significant creative, perhaps domain-changing contributions to society. Based on his research about creative people, Csikszentmihályi outlined some of the personality traits of creative people, some of which I will outline here.

Creative people tend to have lots of physical energy, but are often quiet and at rest. They tend to be both naïve and smart, although there is very little evidence to suggest a relationship between traditional measures of intelligence and creativity. Creative persons harbour opposite tendencies on the extroversion- introversion spectrum, exhibiting both at the same time. Hence we have stereotypical images of the solitary genius as well as the creative person who actively engages with others, engaging ideas, sharing thoughts, etc. Creative people are also intrinsically motivated. They have the ability to derive rewards from the activity itself rather than from external incentives such as power, money, or fame.

And creative persons have not only internalized their domain/field of study, but are also rebellious, risk-takers who challenge taken-for-granted practices and assumptions within their own domain or field of study. Associated with this notion of risk-taking is the play-like quality of creativity, a theme I return to later in this talk. Yet, although creative persons may have a playfully light attitude, they are also disciplined, hard-working individuals, firmly rooted in a clear sense of reality. Similarly, the research describes creative people alternating between imagination/ fantasy and a rooted sense of reality (Csikszentmihályi, 1996).

The third body of research on creativity is the ‘Process’ approach that focuses on the cognitive (and later social) processes associated with creativity. There has been much empirical study in psychology and cognitive science of the processes through which creativity occurs. A focus on process is shown in cognitive approaches that attempt to describe thought mechanism and techniques for creative thinking. Theories such as Guilford’s (1950) invoking divergent rather than convergent thinking, or those describing the staging of the creative process, such as Wallas (1926) are primarily explanations of the creative process.

Summarizing his own and other people’s work in this area Wallas, in his book *The Art of Thought*, described four stages of creation. The first stage, *preparation*, involves consciously studying a task, and investigating it logically by standard means. The person expecting to gain new insights must know their own field of study or domain well, a point the Csikszentmihályi reiterated sixty years later. The second stage, *incubation*, is when the conscious and unconscious mind are mulling over the problem in difficult to define ways. This is also known as the mystical stage in which one is not directly thinking of the problem but unconsciously brooding on the matter. Wallas noticed many great ideas came only during a period spent away from a problem, usually after actively engaging with the problem. *Illumination* is the name that Wallas gave to the third stage, when there is a “click” or “flash” of a new idea, which often comes to an individual in a time of mental relaxation. This is also known as a mysterious or Eureka stage, a moment of creation characterized by sudden illumination when an individual gets a ‘feeling’ that a solution is forthcoming. In the fourth and final stage, *verification*, efforts are made to see if the

“happy idea” actually solves the problem. Since “great” ideas don’t always work out in actual practice, this final step is vitally important to the success of any project. During this stage of concentration, ideas are tested, adjusted and reduced to their exact forms.

Psychological models that have attempted to understand personality characteristics and cognitive processes associated with creativity are limited, however. Prediction based on these factors has left much of the variance in creative achievement unexplained. Factors such as intrinsic motivation, playfulness, etc. are only correlates of creativity, conditions that facilitate its occurrence. Moreover, most of these psychological theories assumed that creativity is something intrinsic to particular individuals. They don’t tell us what creativity *is* and where it can be found. This caused psychological researchers such as Csíkszentmihályi to engage with more sociological explanations of creativity and a shift to systems or social processes approaches to the study of creativity.

In his 1996 book, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, Csíkszentmihályi turned his thinking to examine how creativity can be learned. He explained that to study creativity by focusing on the individual is like trying to understand how an apple tree produces fruit by looking only at the tree and ignoring the sun, soil, etc. that supports its life. Thus he asked the question: “What are the social processes that contribute to creativity?” Through his later research, he argued that creativity is not an attribute of individuals, but of social systems making judgements about individuals. It is impossible to define creativity independently of a judgement based on criteria that change from domain to domain and over time. For example, Rembrandt’s creativity was constructed after his death by art historians who placed his work in the full context of European painting, pointing out the novelties and differences between his work and that of his predecessor. “With a comparative evaluation of art historians,” Csíkszentmihályi (1996) argued, “Rembrandt’s creativity would not exist” (p. 199). Creativity is also said to vary from culture to culture. For example, cross-cultural research focused on Hong Kong found that Westerners view creativity more in terms of the individual attributes of a creative person (as the above review suggests), while Chinese people view creativity more in terms of the social influence of creative people, such as what they can contribute to society (Niu, 2006). In these ways, we can speak of the socio-cultural contextual nature of creativity.

The final (and related) approach to the study of creativity is known as the ‘Place Perspective.’ This research looks to the environments which are conducive to creativity (e.g. Amabile, 1996). A focus on *place* considers the environments or circumstances in which creativity flourishes, such as degrees of autonomy and access to resources. Creative lifestyles are characterized by nonconforming attitudes as well as flexibility. Creativity is said to flourish in social environments that are stable enough to allow for continuity of effort, but also diverse, open and flexible enough to foster creativity in all of its forms. So what we have here then is a body of literature that attempts, through empirical research, to count and evaluate creative products, determine the characteristics associated with creative persons, and the cognitive and social processes associated with creativity, as well as the places where creativity is most likely to thrive. I shift gears here and turn my attention (and yours) to the creative economy discourse that has gained considerable traction over the last decade or so.

### **The Creative Economy Discourse**

Creativity is very popular these days. Many have written about the profound shifts Western societies have undergone from pre-modern, agricultural to modern, industrialized societies to post-modern, knowledge based economies. Drucker (1993), drawing upon his management

background, was one of the earliest proponents of this view, claiming that we have undergone a profound shift from an industrial society to a knowledge society in which the main means of production are now knowledge based. Various names have been given to this new era, including the information age, knowledge capitalism and new knowledge economy. The conception about the state of contemporary society sees knowledge as the key features of the economy. More recently, however, there has been increasing interest in what is now called the creative economy. Richard Florida's work exemplifies this view with his emphasis on human creativity as the ultimate economic resource. In his book, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), he paints a glowing picture of the shift from the industrial age to the creative economy. He writes:

That driving force is the rise of human creativity as the key factor in our economy and society. Both at work and in other spheres in our lives, we value creativity more highly than ever, and cultivate it more intensely. The creative impulse – the attribute that distinguishes us, as humans, from other species – is now being let loose on an unprecedented scale (p. 4).

Creativity, according to Florida, is now viewed as the essential element of the new global knowledge economy. Thus we can see that much of the current interest in creativity and innovation stems from concerns in the private and public sector about economic productiveness in the context of global capitalism.

Given this economic conception of creativity, it is unsurprising that policy makers have joined the creativity movement. For over a decade now, numerous national and international reports, strategies, and policies have emphasized the significance of creativity and innovation for economic competition. Here are a few examples. In Australia, Queensland's *Smart State* strategy, launched in 2008, aims to embrace knowledge, creativity and innovation as the basis for new economic growth (Queensland Government 2008). Finland has also been at the forefront of stimulating creativity and innovation through government, university and business cooperation (Bontje and Musterd, 2009). Since the release of its 2000 *Unlocking Creativity* initiative, Northern Ireland's Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has worked with numerous other governmental departments (e.g. Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Education, Employment and Learning) to foster creativity within the cultural, educational, training and economic domains (DCAL, 2000).

The UK government has also pioneered a comprehensive policy program for creative industries, resulting in the Creative Industry Mapping reports in 1998 and 2001 to raise awareness of the importance of creative industries and institutions (such as advertising, architecture, crafts, design, film and video, music, the performing arts, television and radio), and the contribution they make to economic development (DCMS, 2001). Given the interest in creativity and innovation amongst European governments, it is unsurprising that the EU designated 2009 the 'Year of Creativity and Innovation'. We turn to the United Nations for a final example of this economic discourse on creativity. The 2008 UN *Creative Economy Report*, claimed that "[t]he creative economy has the potential to generate income and jobs while promoting social inclusion, cultural diversity and human development." (United Nations, 2008) This creative economy discourse has also been taken up by education policy makers.

### **Creativity and Education Policies**

There are a number of high-profile instances of education policy makers who have advocated for more attention to creativity in the classroom. In the United Kingdom, the 1999 report of the 'National Advisory Committee on Creativity and Cultural Education' claimed that the development of creative and cultural capacities in students should complement the push for

literacy and numeracy skills (National Advisory Committee, 1999). Similarly, in the United States in 2008, then-Senator Obama released his Platform in Support of the Arts, in which he argued for re-invigorating creativity and innovation and reinvesting in arts education. This was followed three years later by the US President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities' report, entitled *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America's Future through Creativity Schools*, which details the powerful role that arts education strategies can play in closing the achievement gap, improving student engagement, and building creativity and nurturing innovative thinking skills (President's Committee, 2011).

In Singapore, a country that ranks high in the PISA test, schools are urged to foster creativity. Three major education policy initiatives have been launched in that nation since 1997 to foster creativity and innovation. The first, *Thinking Schools, Learning Nation*, focuses on developing all students into critical thinking, active learners. The second initiative attempts to incorporate information technology in teaching and learning in all schools. And the third initiative broadens university admission criteria to include students' results in school project work and extracurricular activities. The expectation of all three initiatives is that the revised criteria will promote "desired" qualities such as creativity, curiosity and teamwork (Tan and Gopinathan, 2000).

And in Finland, a country that also has garnered much attention due to its long-standing high ranking in the PISA tests, creativity, innovation and risk-taking in teaching and learning practices is also activity encouraged in schools (Sahlberg, 2006; 2011). As Sahlberg (2011), writes in his recent book *Finnish Lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland*, "[a] component of educational change that creates new ideas and innovation should provide enough encouragement and support for risk taking that will enable creativity to flourish in classrooms and schools." (p. 143). (I am a bit hesitant to discuss Finland here in this part of my talk as I think it is an example of an outlier in terms of how creativity has been taken up in schools.)

Other education policy makers have directed their attention to enhancing creativity amongst post-secondary school students. The Ontario government, for example, in its newly released vision for post-secondary education in the province claims that, "Ontario's colleges and universities will drive creativity, innovation, knowledge and community engagement through teaching and research" (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities, 2012, p. 7).

## **Education and Creativity**

Despite the fact that education policy makers, across a range of settings, have called for enhancing creativity and innovation in education, most schools (and I would argue universities) are not places where creative people and the creative process are truly valued. Rather, as the popular writer, acclaimed speaker and creativity expert, Sir Ken Robinson argues, schools devalue creativity and focus on subjects with measurable outcomes, such as literacy, numeracy and science, which can be assessed through standardized tests (Robinson, 2001; 2006). In his best-selling 2001 book *Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative* (and many of his subsequent talks, which are widely available through YouTube), he claims that creativity is undervalued and ignored in Western culture and especially in our educational systems. According to Robinson:

We have a big problem at the moment – education is becoming so dominated by this culture of standardized testing, by a particular view of intelligence and a narrow curriculum and education system, that we're flattening and stifling some of the basic skills and processes that creative achievement depends on (quoted in Azzam, 2009, p. 25).

Robinson is not alone in this critique. Other academics have provided empirical evidence to demonstrate that contemporary educational reforms that focus on performance based management, such as standardized, wide-scale testing and a curriculum aligned tightly to measurable outcomes hinder children's creative capacities and abilities to think critically. Other related research demonstrates that standardized testing affects many teachers are forced to teach to the test, rather than supporting the development of creative teaching skills and methods (e.g. Jones et al, 2003; Klein, Zevenbergen & Brown, 2006; Nichols and Berliner, 2007). Similarly, reforms targeted at specifically at teachers such as performance appraisals, teacher testing and other types of surveillance/ monitoring practices operate in ways to reduce opportunities for autonomy, innovation and creativity in the classroom and collaboration between educators (Larsen, 2005, 2009). My own research on the impact of performance appraisals on Ontario teachers has shown that these forms of teacher evaluation are not conducive to facilitating creative, outside of the box teaching pedagogies. Rather, teachers (as I found in my study), developed fail-safe lessons that they tried out with selected students prior to their appraisals to ensure that they were "bullet-proof" (Larsen, 2009).

### **Taming Creativity**

So why then, in the current educational climate of competition, mistrust, standardization and surveillance are policy makers calling for the development of creative and critical thinking skills in our students? To understand the seeming contradiction, I turn to Hay and Kapitzke's (2009) critical account of Queensland's *Smart State* strategy, which I referred to above. According to Hay and Kapitzke, Queensland government authorities associate creativity with individuals who are innovative, enterprising and entrepreneurial. Moreover, creative individuals are responsible as they "resemble successful investors ...able to maximise opportunity by speculating on the future." (p. 155). Current discourses of creativity that are driving both economic and educational policy, argue, Hay and Kapitzke's (2009) argue, involve the management and co-optation of creativity by the private sector. They write that creativity:

is no longer framed as an atypical and frequently transgressive phenomenon. Rather, of necessity, it must be mainstreamed and domesticated as a mundane attitude and capacity in which individual citizens become self-investing and self-managing subjects through the ethical work of self-discipline and self-surveillance (p. 158).

Indeed, they demonstrate how contemporary discourses of creativity that are driving educational policy are technologies of governance that aim to produce a form of subjectivity necessitated by the instability of global capitalism. Thus we can see how the domestication or taming of creativity has led to a safe, ends-oriented, economic version of creativity palatable to a wide range of policy makers looking for the next quick fix to the economic crises their nations face.

What I am left wondering is whether or not there is any place in all of this for what I call a more courageous form of creativity rather than the type of tamed and mainstreamed creativity that Hay and Katpitzke refer to? More specifically, what does this all mean for our work as comparative and international education scholars? The last part of my talk is divided into two sections. First I will talk about the impossibility of courageous creativity in higher education and then I will shift perspective and talk about the possibilities for courageous creativity in higher education.

### **The Impossibility of Creativity in Higher Education**

What is the general climate in the higher education institutions within which most of us work? There is much research that describes and analyzes the impact of the current neoliberal agenda on higher education institutions. I am going to take some liberties here in generalizing about a wide set of trends that I know have been taken up differently and with different effects across a wide range of settings in both the Global North and Global South. I borrow Marginson's (2008) description of New Public Management in higher education to outline some of the key components of contemporary higher education. These include funding-based economic incentives, user-driven production, an emphasis on entrepreneurialism, output monitoring and measurement, competitive ranking of personnel and institutions, various performance management strategies such as performance appraisal and performance pay, contracts with incentives to partner with industry and commercialize research, and measurement systems of accountability and audit (p. 270). Many of these technologies, as Marginson (drawing upon Foucault), calls them, have led to increasing levels of work intensification for university faculty, similar to what has occurred within schools.

The question his article entitled 'Academic Creativity under New Public Management' is: "What happens to the scope for radical-creative imagining" within the context of NPM systems Marginson asks in? (p. 281). I provide a few examples here of the challenges of being creative in our research in ways that are not mainstreamed or managed by current economic driven discourses. NPM with its emphasis on accountability and audit based schemes shifts autonomy away from individual academics to the systems established to measure the value of an individual's work and the institution within which one works. Performance based appraisals, which include measuring the output of one's research productivity, and related university ranking models, shape us as researchers in calculable ways and require what Kenway and Fahey (2009) assert is a compliant research imagination.

Academics face increasing pressure to conduct research with outcomes that are practical and measurable as evidenced by the mandates of major research funding agencies such as SSHRC and NSERC in Canada. Under the 'Research Excellence Framework' in the UK, for example, measures have been introduced to stop funding of "pointless research" in higher education. Researchers now have to prove that their educational research is relevant and influences society, the economy, or public policy in order to secure significant grants (Curtis, 2009). Performance based funding, in which future funding is based on past performance, has other effects on creativity. Innovations must meet the test of market usefulness and economic returns, and in so doing generate a structure of winners and losers (Marginson, 2008). Many have criticized these trends, noting the implications of focusing too heavily on measurable outcomes and the short-term impact of research. Inventor Willard S. Boyle, for instance, a recent Nobel Prize winner, lambasted Canadian research funding rules that lack imagination by requiring researchers to submit detailed business plans outlining potential gains and losses to justify their research (Boyle, 2009).

The focus on output measures such as numbers of publications, citations, citation impact measures are so common in our work now that we take them for granted. However, as Marginson (2008) points out, they affect the work that we do. He states that "the more specific and attenuated the outputs, the more the range of activity – and the potential for imagining – will be restricted and the more the work will be determined by known categories and predictable products with less space for the novel and unknown" (p. 284). The issue is that much creative work, as noted earlier, is not actually driven by practical, measurable aims or by external incentives such as power, money, fame (or high rankings on performance reviews). Rather, much



creative work initially seems to be irrelevant and obscure, a point I will return to in just a moment.

Faculty members today are experiencing the same kinds of work intensification that characterize the working lives of teachers in public schools due primarily to financial cut-backs from governments who once demonstrated a commitment to higher education that is no longer the norm. For many, heavier teaching and service workloads take precedence over research and there is little time and space to engage in research. My own experience speaks to this, but there is also empirical research attesting to the increasing work intensification for university faculty.

This work intensification has major implications for the fostering of creativity amongst us. The research focusing on the cognitive processes associated with creativity emphasizes the slow, steady process of creative thought. Wallas' stages of creative thinking involve a period of time when the individual is mulling over a problem, brooding and in a period of mental relaxation. I don't know about you, but I would not use the words: relaxation, brooding or mulling to describe the academic work I do. It is increasingly difficult to carve out periods of time like this to nurture our creative selves when course grading has piled up, another committee meeting is called, students and others are expecting 24/7 responses to their email queries and so on.

Finally, I noted above that 'place perspective' creativity research points to the types of environments that support the creative process: ones that are diverse, flexible, non-conforming and autonomous. Creativity, to repeat, flourishes best in social environments that are stable enough to allow for a sustained and steady effort, but also open and flexible enough to foster creativity in all of its disruptive, serendipitous forms. As well, creative persons are said to be both introverted and extroverted, or "hot and cold" in requiring both active engagement with others, as well as periods of isolated, solitary contemplation. This mix of environments is, however, increasingly difficult to find in current higher education contexts, and that is not simply due to the types of neo-liberal reforms that I described earlier, but also to the challenges that faculty members, especially women, face in trying to juggle the demands of their professional work while maintaining their own healthy lifestyles, as well as attending to the needs of other community and family members, both young and old.

### **Possibilities of Cultivating Courageous Creativity in Higher Education**

You may have noticed that I have yet to define what I mean by creativity, and specifically courageous creativity. I will attempt to clarify what I mean by both now. There is a long history of philosophers and psychologists attempting to define creativity. I cannot in this talk do justice to the complexities of understandings of creativity, but point to a couple of ideas that are the most salient. Most agree that creativity involves the ability to synthesize information and see old problems in new ways. As Copley (2001) asserts, creativity is the production of novelty. However, it is not simply about combining ideas in new ways, but rather involves the ability to distinguish between new combinations that are irrelevant and those that are truly complex. This is what Poincaré refers to as an act of the subliminal self, which is "capable of discernment; it has tact, delicacy; it knows how to choose, to divine" (Quoted in Hammershøj, 2008, p. 553).

In this respect, creativity is linked to the imagination through which one is able to represent or create mental images of that which does not now exist. As Kant (2003) in his *Critique of Pure Reason* explained, "imagination is the power (the capacity, the faculty) to represent in the intuition an object even without its presence." This is a kind of second seeing through the process of forming images that represent something not seen by means of what has been seen.

Since creativity involves seeing old ideas in new ways, creativity is also said to involve risk-taking and a certain degree of subversiveness, and this is what I mean when I refer to courageous creativity. The problem is that today's dominant creative economy discourse has tamed and harnessed creativity. I argue here that what we need to do is set creativity free and reclaim its transgressive and courageous nature. I would like to point to a few possibilities for cultivating a courageous form of creativity in educational research, and to do so I must return to some of the research on creativity that I reviewed at the start of my talk.

I mentioned a moment ago that much creative work seems initially to be irrelevant and obscure. As Einstein is often quoted as saying: "If at first the idea is not absurd, then there is no hope for it" (Quoted in MacHale, 2002). Here is an example I found in my research on creativity from 1940 that resonated with me. In the *Mathematician's Apology*, his lament for creativity in mathematics, G.H. Hardy (1940), the English mathematician gloried in the pointlessness of his research, declaring:

I have never done anything 'useful'. No discovery of mine has made, or is likely to make, directly or indirectly, for good or ill, the least difference to the amenity of the world... Judged by all practical standards, the value of my mathematical life is nil; and outside mathematics it is trivial anyhow. I have just one chance of escaping a verdict of complete triviality, that I may be judged to have created something worth creating. And that I have created something is undeniable: the question is about its value (p. 49).

And although Hardy's work did prove to be of great 'use' after completion, it was not motivated initially by a desire to be useful and practical.

My second point is probably not what you might expect. Creative persons, according to much of the psychological research, are not only rebellious, risk-takers who challenge the practices and assumptions within their own domains, but they are first and foremost individuals who have internalized their fields of study or domains. It is this latter aspect of creativity that I would like to focus upon here. I was very fortunate to have Dr. Robert Cowen in the Institute of Education at the University of London as my doctoral supervisor. Through him I learned much about the background of our field, the lively debates that have characterized comparative and international education, and the importance of thinking deeply about the theories that we draw on in our research. This knowledge will also help scholars in our field know what the absences and gaps have been and are, pointing to directions for new, exciting and creative research

I wonder, however, about how we are preparing new Canadian scholars in our field and whether or not they have a solid understanding of the history, the debates (both methodological and theoretical), the politics and the major findings of research in the field of comparative and international education. Research that Suzanne Majhanovich, Vandra Masemann and I carried out, mapping the state of comparative and international education in higher education institutions in Canada points to evidence that fewer new scholars are immersed in understanding about our field through introductory (and advanced) courses in comparative and international education. In fact, we concluded that with the exception of the 'hybrid' collaborative programme at the OISE/UT, there are no stand-alone comparative education departments or even programmes in any Canadian universities (Larsen et al, 2007).

While a solid grounding in one's own field of study or domain is considered a precondition for creativity, there are other conditions that research has shown can facilitate the creative process. Inter, cross or trans-disciplinarity can provide spaces where creativity can be nurtured. This is one of the real strengths of the field of comparative and international education, which has drawn upon various bodies of disciplinary knowledge such as sociology, history, economics, anthropology and cultural studies. We have numerous examples of scholars within

Canada who have brought their disciplinary expertise to the study of comparative and international education. For example, Vandra Masemann (CIESC President from 1985-1987) stands out for her work as an anthropologist in pushing comparativists to engage with culture in their research. And some graduate students and faculty at the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education have been drawing on Latour's work in science, technology studies, pushing the boundaries of comparative education work in new and exciting ways.

However, I would argue we need to move beyond simply borrowing from various disciplines to crossing the borders of disciplines. Bhabha (2004) calls the questioning of disciplinary authority and working on and across disciplinary borders "interstitial interdisciplinarity" (p. 3). This provokes us to look to other disciplines for inspiration in carrying out our comparative and international education research. Along with my colleague, Jason Beech in Argentina, I have attempted to engage in this process by drawing upon the work of critical geographers such as Doreen Massey and Edward Soja to argue for a critical geographic spatial imaginary in comparative and international education. This theoretical research, which we have been working on over the last couple of years, has no practical or useful implications, but we do hope that our ideas will provoke comparativists to rethink some of the interpretive concepts they draw upon and consider foregrounding space and spatiality in their research (Larsen and Beech, 2014).

We are increasingly seeing other evidence of border and boundary crossing in research in comparative and international education in Canada too. The last issue (December 2012) of our journal *Canadian and International Education*, on the theme of 'Theorizing International Education' contained a number of multi-authored papers by a wide range of scholars crossing many disciplinary, methodological and theoretical borders. As Jane Kenway (2012), in her commentary on the special issue writes, the "research field of international education which is burgeoning, in part, due to the fact that internationalizing imperatives and activities in all education sectors are also burgeoning. But it is also growing because of its relationship to the many other fields with which it overlaps. These overlap make it a very 'inter', and in some cases 'trans' methodological and theoretical research endeavor" (p. 2).

Finally, courageous creativity also involves a playful and a rebellious approach. Radical breakthroughs in knowledge, what Kuhn (1962) named paradigm shifts, require a certain amount of risk-taking and rebellion as individuals who are game-changers, challenge many of the fundamental assumptions, beliefs and common practices associated with their disciplines, fields of study or domains. Be warned! This will involve, however, a certain amount of anxiety, fear, terror, humiliation, and social shame. Being courageously creative with one's research is not for the faint-hearted.

Risk-taking is also associated in many ways with being playful. Indeed, creative ideas often arise from the simple acts of playing. Play has been viewed as a central concept associated with creativity stemming back to the nineteenth century ideas of Rousseau. Playing is done for its own sake and therefore seems apparently purposeless. Play provides freedom from time, and a diminished consciousness of self that can allow us to stop worrying about external expectations of ourselves. Huizinga (1959) in his seminal text, *Homo ludens; A study of the play-element in culture*, summed up the characteristics of play as:

a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner (p. 8).

The key is that playing is done for its own sake and involves some form of self-transcendence, moving us beyond the 'normal' activities of being an academic to a place we sometimes rarely go.

So to sum up, what I would like to propose to provide the conditions for more courageous creativity in comparative and international education research is the following. We need to engage in more 'pointless' research. It is important to know one's own field of study, whether that is comparative and international education as a field, or the disciplinary background(s) within which one works. We need to cross more borders, disciplinary, theoretical and methodological. And finally, we need to take risks, be rebellious and play. I leave you with a picture of my almost 6 year old son. He's been a reckless, rebellious climber since the day he starts pulling himself up off the floor. Here he is in one of his most favourite places, high up in a tree. I hope that we all are able to push ourselves to climb in forests up trees that we are both familiar with and that pose new and exciting challenges for us to be courageously creative in our work as comparative and international education researchers.

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