Creativity, Inquiry and Learning in Arts Education

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Renewed language of arts education: 3.7 Creativity in arts education
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As participants in an increasingly interactive visual and virtual world we all look at images, objects, or events in the same way because we process the information as stimuli through our visual perceptual system. But we don’t really see with our eyes, they merely take in the sights and send them on their way via the optic nerve to the brain where they become insights. Perception is thus far from passive—a lot happens after light patterns hit the retina and we proceed to make sense of it. Sensory perception begins by taking in incomplete information from our surroundings and these visual bits and pieces are tracked to an array of places in the brain that process it so that we are able makes sense of we are looking at. This all happens in a split second.

Despite looking in the same way, we see things differently. It is when we ask the question, ‘what does it mean?’ that we bring into play other cues and here individuals and communities will differ in the meanings they give to the things they see around them. To make sense of information that we may be unfamiliar with we make use of what it is we know for this gives us a means to frame what we don’t know. Furthermore, this is contingent on creative participation in the practice of ‘making’ meaning, and this is embodied within the thoughts, actions, and forms we create. Creativity has a long tradition as a ‘doing’ or ‘making’ practice. There seem to be three characteristics that describe creativity:

- First, creativity refers to the individual capacity to see and understand things in new ways that others also find important.
- Second, creativity is a process of learning that helps address artistic, educational, social, cultural and technological issues of the times.
Third, creativity is a site beyond the self whereby creative inquiry takes place in public—it is not just a habit of the mind, but is characterized by individual agency and social action. Creativity, can be described as a mindful activity whereby meaning is embodied in objects, events and experiences. Furthermore, by responding in a creative way to individual, social and cultural constraints and contexts the significance of creative practice can be enhanced in the minds of others. The promise of change that comes from creativity takes shape in the things we make, through what we experience, or from what we come to see and know through the experience of someone else. Creative learning and creative inquiry thus turn questions into understanding that give rise to more questions. If we believe that the outcome of inquiry is the creation of new knowledge this means that knowing, or the capacity to use our understanding in new ways, will always be incomplete. Dealing with this process of knowing and unknowing drives creativity and is at the core of learning in arts education. This presentation will describe the contexts that need to be considered in constructing frameworks that embody creativity as learning and creativity as inquiry in arts education.