

Artist as Superconnector Superconductor
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COLLABORATIVE DIALOGUE: CONNECTING, CONDUCTING...



This presentation explores the influence and importance of collaborative practice, investigating the impact of shared learning, with an aim to identify attitudes that might inform knowledge construction with others. Alongside this is concern on how we foster independent learning with under graduate students embarking on BA programmes who lack maturity, confidence and are unprepared to take initiative.

Drawing upon empirical data, the research explores innovative, interdisciplinary learning and student engagement through partnership, practical activity, discourse and play. Using the 'RE:CREATION' case study this describes how collaborative dialogue encourages and supports reflective learning.

Located in Featherstone Castle, the RE:CREATION weekend encouraged different ways to engage with place, culture and heritage, offering practice-led approaches to enhance research skills, raise aspiration and encourage risk taking within a community of practice. Bringing students and staff together from partnering institutions, along with alumina, invited professionals, in a space of productive leisure, the distinctive castle setting offered a multi-layered environment for thinking and reflexivity. Space to 'recreate' ideas and materials through creative exploration and exchange. This gives positive examples of connections and collaborations encouraging and inspiring the freedoms of creativity and ownership of learning.

In contrast, it reflects upon studio activities with year 1 BA students who increasingly start their academic journeys with limited life experience, afraid of collaboration and lacking insight of what the potential connections and collaborations can offer. This questions how we prepare students for the role of 'superconnector' or 'superconductor', especially those who arrive fresh from A Level study. As tutors, it is easy for us to identify how shared, creative approaches offer a distinctive methodology towards learning, generating supportive environments and conditions that enable participants to reflect, explore and ultimately learn. We may structure activities that involve collaboration but there seems to be a worrying resistance towards them that stems from a result driven culture and an increasingly insular, self-conscious mentality of individuals.

Following a brief presentation, I wish to stimulate and facilitate debate with peers that examines transformative learning and individual participants perspectives, recognising shared processes in which facilitator and participants benefit. I would like to stimulate discussion exploring:

- **How do we scaffold reflective practice with learners who look to us to give them the answers?**
- **How do we enable students to become active agents who value collaborative dialogue?**

RE:CREATION blog: <http://recreationfeatherstonecastle2016.tumblr.com>

Judy Thomas

Judy Thomas completed her practice-based PhD at Northumbria University, with her area of study concentrating on the Artist Facilitator role and collaborative practice within the context of artist-led learning programmes. She is Programme Leader for the MA Contemporary Arts and Education programme at Northumbria University. She also teaches on the BA Fine Art programme.

Her previous roles include Learning Manager at Creativity, Culture and Education, Learning Manager at Waygood and Programme Manager (Learning and Inclusion) for Liverpool Biennial. Before this she was Acting Head of Education & Public Programme for BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead.