

In search of interdisciplinary artistry: teachers collaborating across disciplinary chasms

Many universities are emphasizing the importance of multi-disciplinary collaboration in both teaching and research, but in most of higher education, reward and reputation is wholly geared towards discipline-based parameters. Although extreme collaboration is sometimes called transdisciplinary or “beyond all discipline” (Nicolescu, 2018), there are even advocates for indisciplinarity: “transgression of organisational boundaries” (Mitchell, 1995).

This section summarises how two colleagues from apparently un-related disciplines collaborated actively over several years to co-create, evolve and refine an arts-based reflective learning method, namely the creation and use of “zines”, small booklets hand-made by paper-folding, (Kyle and Warchol, 2018). The method was initiated in a school of art and design. In parallel, a business school had been evolving partly pre-printed reflective workbooks and journals to encourage reflection both by students of management and by professional managers (Holtham et al, 2021).

Low-key collaboration within a large EU project connected two teachers across the apparently wide chasm between business and art/design. It was not until 2019 that explicit effort was put into the collaboration leading to joint production not only of customised zines, but of learning processes that would aim to maximise the value of the pedagogic method, primarily in disciplines other than art and design. Zines have been used with undergraduates and postgraduates, in executive education up to and including chief executives, and within organisational change initiatives. Key distinctions were needed between:

- Art-based methods: non-artists drawing on tools and methods originating in the fine arts;
- Artistic expertise: skilled in the practice of the fine arts;
- Artful mindset: ingenuity and lateral thinking in creative problem solving in any discipline.

For business learners, the priority was achieving the intersection of art-based and artful, but not requiring or assuming artistic expertise (Adler, 2006; Barry, 1996). Neither the concept of artfulness, as used in the collaboration, nor of pedagogic artistry as emphasised in this book, necessitates artistic expertise. But one conclusion from the case study is that professionals in any discipline, even without any skill in fine art practice, can infuse their

professional practice with mindsets evolved in the fine arts, including imagination, ambiguity (Weil, 1986), negative space (Ou, 2009), playfulness and embodiment (Tyson, 2016). This infusion applies as much to teachers in any discipline, not just those in or related to the fine arts.

The two collaborators reviewed:

- (a) the importance of the art-based/artful/artistic triad in the context of both educational artistry and professional excellence.
- (b) Factors promoting the trajectory towards interdisciplinary thinking and practice

What began as multi-disciplinary evolved into transdisciplinary and now has elements of indisciplinarity. The shared focus of both academics has been developing methods for teaching, learning and executing everyday reflective practice (Schön, 1987). The most recent paper-folded zine arising from the collaboration (Biagioli and Holtham, 2022), has involved two zines folded from initially octagonal shapes, and which sets out to document the evolution of the zine method itself. This was explicitly designed as a limited-edition risograph printed artwork, designed to showcase the value of indisciplinarity.

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