

An investigation into the heuristics of mindfulness in Higher Art and Design education

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Abstract

This study presents an educational vision whose purpose is to encourage a more mindful education. The main thrust of the thesis focuses on the phenomenal nature of creative ideation, and how teaching and learning strategies can be designed, developed and implemented to 'enlighten' the individual to the richness and subtleties of conscious experience. A developmental continuum is established which contextualises and supports heuristics of this nature, and the argument is located within an emerging ontology which moves beyond both Dualism and Reductionism.

The thesis is concerned primarily with Higher Education, and more specifically Higher Art and Design Education. Through a series of case studies, which explore the global aim of this educational vision, local issues are unfolded to illuminate the inadequacies of our present educational reality and point to more mindful possibilities.

The first series of case studies focused on the phenomenal nature of drawing. These studies examine not only the students' states and qualities of consciousness, but describe detailed strategies of how to facilitate creative breakthroughs such that the student is able to observe and learn from the phenomenal content of their insight experiences i.e. to heuristically learn about the nature and organisation of subjective life. As one student commented:

"Areas suddenly appeared as if by magic in front of me. The time from being despondent to the 'realisation' of how the drawing should proceed was not gradual, it was quite sudden - and I felt inspired! Total confusion giving way to self-knowledge / knowingness of how to proceed."

The second series of case studies focused on a specific process for closing the gap between experience and reflection. These case studies were designed (with the same global aim) for Postgraduate and Undergraduate Design courses, but were examined locally over variable time periods, and to various intensities. The process promoted a type of learning where there was a transformation from an attachment to the known and an aversion with the unknown, to an empathy with knowingness.

A student commented to the effect:

"I now have an understanding of my understanding..."

Thus the educational vision which I propose draws on a rich diversity of theory, from changing belief systems, to creating the appropriate environments; whilst simultaneously placing emphasis on the facilitation of subjective development by managing the threefold relationship between the various creative processes, the students and oneself (as educator).

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