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THE CONVERSATION

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Creativity in schools sounds good – so what's the hitch?

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Why aren't governments more committed to fostering creative inquiry all the way through to high school? AAP/Dan Peled

British scholar Bill Lucas recently asserted the need for a consistent, appropriate and measurable definition of creativity. In his words:

if creativity is to be taken more seriously by educators and educational policy-makers then we need to be clearer about what it is ... and to develop an approach to assessing it which is both rigorous enough to ensure credibility and user-friendly enough to be used by busy teachers.

And as arts education expert Ken Robinson has long argued, "Creativity now is as important in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status".

If popular media, government and economic policy is anything to go by, creativity's day has come. At least the kind of creativity that can be conflated with notions such as innovation, productivity and globalisation.

Creativity is changing the way we think about the arts, pedagogy and publics – but why is it important and why do schools suddenly think they need it?

What are creative pedagogies?

Creative pedagogy like creativity itself is variously defined depending on context and region.

In the UK, what was being written about as creative pedagogies by Anna Craft and other educators soon morphed into creative learning – as opposed to creative teaching practices. Actually, the two must be considered in tandem as they occur simultaneously. Elsewhere, interest in creative pedagogies is on the rise as governments seek new ways of enhancing the teaching and learning of creativity and its presence in schools.

But there are contradictions in that process.

Policymakers are scrambling to bump up creativity and innovation in their national curricula, while simultaneously reducing discipline-based arts instruction in the national Australian Curriculum (2011). The recent review of the National Curriculum went even further in this regard.

These contradictions have been vigorously resisted by many education experts, including Robyn Ewing, as damaging to the long-term health of Australia's creative future.

But Australia is not alone. UNESCO tells us that:

the Arts in most, if not all, cultures are integral to life: function, creation and learning are intertwined.

Yet when UNESCO meets for its 38th General Conference in November next year, it will consider eliminating its creativity program altogether, after recently ranking it last out of its 48 priority areas.

Much current research in both arts and education, including my own work, addresses this tension. American educationalist Alane Jordan Starko's 2013 study *Creativity in the Classroom: Schools of Curious Delight* seeks explicitly to nurture creativity in schools within the context of national curricula and tightening testing cultures.

The international arts research journal *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* featured a special issue on Creative Pedagogies that seeks from multiple global perspectives to define and deepen understanding of what creative pedagogies might be.

In Australia, a new position paper by theatre consultant and arts education specialists Meg Upton and Naomi Edwards suggests another solution. They foreground the ways in which professional theatre and arts companies might enhance their education programs to pick up the government slack.

Creative pedagogies and arts education: not quite the same thing

Globally, early childhood and primary education research continues to note the value of creativity, curiosity and imaginative play for young children. As students progress into secondary education, however, time for arts and imagination falls away to make room for literacy, numeracy and science instruction, standardised test preparation, college entry and international rankings.

Creativity that is tied to authentic learning celebrates the multiplicity of meanings, and pushes back against standardisation. A good example is Ben Goldsmith's recent article for **The Conversation** that highlights the multiple nature of literacies including, importantly, digital literacies to address creative pedagogies in more nuanced ways.

Broader definitions of literacy and numeracy will help build flexible and lateral ways of teaching creatively in classrooms and workplaces, and bridge the unnecessary divide between arts, creativity and productivity. After all, education, arts, and industry need each other, and work best in tandem.

That's why, amidst considerable forces to the contrary, creative pedagogical innovations that effectively link the arts, business, cultural and education sectors continue to emerge. See for example the extraordinary work of Mary Ann Hunter and her Tasmania-Chicago Arts Partnership program **Curious Schools**.

Or a recent OLT-funded **Creativity Masters** unit offered as a MOOC (Massive Online Open Course) through the Australian Catholic University by Associate Professor Kym Fraser.

These and other strategies, including government investment in enhancing creativity in secondary schools across Australia, bode well for the continued rise of a more nuanced creativity in pedagogy, curriculum and creative industries.