



An Embodied, Dialogic Endeavor: Towards a Posthumanizing Approach to Creativity with Dr. Kerry Chappell

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“The insufferable arrogance of human beings to think that Nature was made solely for their benefit, as if it was conceivable that the sun had been set afire merely to ripen men's apples and head their cabbages.” – *Cyrano de Bergerac*

“A means to enmeshing ethicality within our creative processes and actions is through embodied dialogue as the driver of the creative process.” – *Kerry Chappell*

In this article series, we have engaged in interviews with creativity scholars, researchers, and thinkers across domains. In seeking to give voice to the diversity of perspectives on creativity, our work has spanned disciplines and viewpoints, from neuroscience to design, or education to business, and more. In this article, we extend that voice to another scholar, Dr. Kerry Chappell, who as part of her own work has also sought to broaden the scope of perspectives and ways that people contribute creatively with her focus on questioning the *ethical and posthumanizing elements of creativity*.

Introduction

Lately, educational scholars have been advocating culturally sustainable and humanizing approaches to research (Paris 2012; Paris and Winn 2013; Smith 2013). Such

approaches include new critical perspectives that are respectful to the research participants, in all their forms, and stakeholders and appreciative of their cultural knowledge or background. That is, such approaches allow respectful and sustainable space and time for non-dominant and non-traditional perspectives and means of knowledge creation and expression, and unmask colonial and marginalizing perspectives (Mehta 2017; Razack 2009). This has been a move toward designing more humanizing and even post-humanizing learning experiences and teaching practices that offer learners a chance to be creative and succeed academically (Chappell 2018; Paris and Winn 2013).

Research in creativity, like much educational research, has borrowed methodologies from psychology and used quantitative tools to understand and explain creative pursuits and expressions (Runco 2014). While these approaches have shaped what we know about creativity today, they have also been dominated by Eurocentric and colonial perspectives (Banaji et al. 2010). To overcome this concern, some researchers have started to shift towards designing and questioning more critical and humanizing approaches to studying creativity (Chappell 2008).

While most critical researchers study power and justice in education, others have been studying holistic meanings of learning, knowing, and being, bridging gaps between the understanding of the mind, body and materiality in creativity (Chappell 2018; Paris and Winn 2013). One of these researchers is Dr. Kerry Chappell at the University of Exeter's Graduate School of Education.

Dr. Chappell was trained professionally as a dance artist after she studied experimental psychology at Oxford University. When she began her educational research, as a transdisciplinary scholar, she merged her interests in dance, psychology and education to understand how creativity could be nurtured.

Dr. Chappell's approach to creativity has come through a humanist to a posthuman perspective: a branch of philosophy and critical theory that seeks to reevaluate humanism in

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relation to ethics, justice, and transdisciplinarity (Chappell 2018). In this, creative exploration of all possibilities of existence is necessary to expand to a holistic understanding of human experience and that of ‘others.’ Achieving this goal requires an ethical approach to inquiry that respectfully moves beyond a human-centric perspective to examine or include all perspectives through their relationships with each other. The first step, then, is to build these inter-epistemological relationships. Through these relationships between perspectives arises a unique understanding of creativity.

Embracing the Posthuman to be more Human

Dr. Chappell’s conceptualization of creativity, ironically, is constructed out of a reexamination of the basic principles of humanism; specifically, by challenging the human arrogance in explaining the world. In our conversation, using posthuman theory, she describes it as such:

... how can we be less arrogant as humans; how might we de-center our human perspective? And it is not to say that everything becomes dehumanized. How can we step out of our humanness and see how we interact with all the other sort of players or actants... whether that is technology, nature, animals, objects? *How can we take a more dispersed view of our existence and the creative process in relation to that?* [emphasis added] And how can that make us think differently about ethics as well?... We are listening, we are taking on-board invitations from other players, and trying to work with those creatively... How can we move forward with the creativity debates, if we start to bring in some of those de-centered human ideas?

Creativity as an Embodied Endeavor Creativity, according to Dr. Chappell, is about the notion of “embodied dialogue.” She started thinking of creative embodiment, first, as a dance artist. Eventually, taking a more transdisciplinary perspective, she revised her understanding of creativity to be more of an *embodied endeavor*. This means thinking about how creativity happens in all bodies and materialities, not just from the neck up inside the head. Using a Bakhtinian notion of dialogue, connected with Barad’s (2003) understanding of intra-action, she encourages people to think of creativity as a mind-body-material integration. In this Bakhtinian approach, the questions lead to answers that lead to more questions, continuing a dialogic cycle.

In an embodied-dialogic sense, creativity is curiosity-driven and thus leads to new knowledge and newer understanding. This may even cross paths with new methodologies and epistemologies. Then, creativity extends from being

individual and, in addition, becomes communal and collaborative as well by being dispersed across domains, objects, people, environments, etc.

Dr. Chappell suggests that a more personal, every day, little ‘c’ creativity—creativity in small ideas such as finding new solutions to everyday challenges (Craft 2001)—is important to understand an embodied dialogue as part of the process of creativity.

Balancing Practices of Creativity

Blending her experiences as a researcher, an educator, and a parent, Dr. Chappell argues that the fundamentals of nurturing creativity as a posthumanizing practice emerge out of a balance of respect, autonomy, collaboration, play, and design. When nurturing creativity, she emphasizes that:

It is all about this system of balances... Another balancing act you are trying...if you are nurturing creativity is getting people to be immersed. Going back to the notion of flow in creativity, being immersed in creativity, but also being able to step away from it, and making time in the schools for that to happen.

Within the concept of creativity, based on our interview with Dr. Chappell, three core ideas stand out as crucial: the right to creative expression, the autonomy or freedom to creative exploration, and the idea of play—in the sense of exploration and experimentation of ideas.

The Right to Be Creative The notion of creativity as a posthumanizing practice is rooted in an understanding that every child has a right to be creative. Denying children a chance to explore ideas and understanding in creative ways is, in a way, denying them a fundamental right.

Even when evaluated from an instrumental perspective thinking of future jobs, Dr. Chappell argues that we need schools to allow creative explorations so students are being prepared for jobs that do not exist today. In her words:

I think from all of my experiences—and I would actually put into that list my experience as a parent as well—they have all reinforced for me the idea that every child can be creative and that every child has the right to that experience. And I think we are to a certain extent denying children that in some of the schooling models we’re using at the moment. They are going to go into a world where we don’t know what many of the jobs are that they’re going to be doing. And I think we have to find ways to allow children and young people to exercise their creativity.

The Freedom to Be Creative Encouraging a sense of autonomy and agency in schools, among both students and teachers, is important. Designing environments that not only allow creative exploration but also encourage it are central to autonomy. When designing creative environments, a creative structure is important, as she notes, “It is not all about magic creativity tasks, but... about how tasks can be open or closed at different times in order to facilitate bits of the creative process.”

For educators in schools, this means having the courage to find ways to support each other and their students to be creative. For policymakers, this means listening to educational research on creativity. Creativity cannot be injected into schools on demand as a special subject or activity. It needs to be embedded across the school activities, curriculum, and its functions so it allows new, positive and creative educational futures to emerge.

Playing to Be Creative In order for creativity to be nurtured, play is crucial across educational settings and not limited to, once again, a dedicated subject. Allowing students and educators to be curious and explore their curiosities means being equally playful in science, arts, math, or language at all ages.

Encouraging positive and productive risk-taking and problem solving helps nurture creativity. Through play, then, it is important to encourage students and educators to take risks and work towards a problem they can solve.

Transdisciplinary Collaboration

For creativity to be nurtured in and across domains and disciplinary boundaries, Dr. Chappell advocates that it is critical to collaborate across disciplines. Such collaborations begin with a transdisciplinary understanding refined through a dialogue on epistemological differences.

Starting with Dialogue In order for creativity to flourish, the notion of dialogue cannot be limited to personal, every day, little ‘c’ creative embodiment, but also should be relevant to inter-disciplinary and inter-epistemological spaces. Dr. Chappell commented that:

I think [disciplines like arts and sciences] can be in conflict but, for example...one of [our research] projects down in Cornwall in the UK simply asked students young people, teenagers, to go out onto the beach and to explore and ask questions about their environment. And they didn't specify it has to use science knowledge or it has to use arts-based knowledge... They were making performance pieces about the beach, but they were also asking questions about rock formation, diving into scientific disciplinary knowledge. And those things

were able to come together because of the openness of the inquiry at the very beginning.

Intentional Transdisciplinarity Drawing on her prior experience, Dr. Chappell underscores the value of having a transdisciplinary background to creatively explore curiosities. Her expertise in dance, psychology, and education helps her see things in new ways and find new solutions. We have also found transdisciplinarity as crucial to creativity (Henriksen and Mishra 2015). Dr. Chappell sees disciplines not as “glued together” but as she puts it:

[A] mix of perspectives as a way of really getting to the bottom of questions that you are curious about...If you have a question that you're curious about sometimes your knowledge from an art form might help you; sometimes the sciences might help you. So, it's not just doing a discipline for the sake of it. It's really trying to...answer some of the big questions that we're facing.

Inter-epistemological Respect In pursuing transdisciplinary questions, one is expected to run into questions that may need unique approaches that combine insights from different areas of thought. For this, one needs to know that there are multiple possibilities of *knowing* itself that need to be considered with equal respect to one's own epistemological perspective. The epistemological differences between sciences, arts, philosophy, or humanities, are not in conflict but are complementary.

Creativity is such a transdisciplinary topic itself that every discipline will have its own approach to understanding it. Psychologists, sociologists, artists, all may perceive and study it differently. Instead of thinking of these differences as contradictory to one other, we need to think of them as offering unique insights into creativity. Dr. Chappell suggests:

I think it gives us lots of perspectives on a concept that we're all trying to understand, to demonstrate whether it's there or not. So I think they are all complementary, I don't think it's about right and wrong in this kind of research.

Transdisciplinary Rigor As mentioned, when working across disciplines, dialogue is the key starting point. And one of the key points of this transdisciplinary communication is to negotiate rigor. Creativity is not an “anything goes” area, but instead an area that can allow quality to flourish across expectations, thereby, enriching its understanding. Dr. Chappell reminds us that:

When you have a selection of researchers and practitioners who are working at a high level in their field,

we can all learn from those different approaches... When you're doing transdisciplinary work, you have to have conversations early on about what it means for people coming from different disciplines to work rigorously and with a kind of quality to what they're doing.

Giving examples from her own collaborations with a colleague from a more core sciences background, Dr. Chappell offers what transdisciplinary rigor could look like:

[I]n terms of how we approach knowledge, I think we were coming from quite different places... [In my work,] I was acknowledging different ways of knowing, such as embodiment...felt knowledge, aesthetic knowledge, which were not normally on my science colleague's radar. And yet, when we started to talk about them, we could find common ground and we could find ways to understand each other. Similarly, I wasn't so knowledgeable about her science disciplinary knowledge but we found a way to kind of bring those two things together.

The challenging dialogic approach to collaborating beyond epistemological and disciplinary boundaries brings with it a multi-faceted understanding of creativity that is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve from within one approach.

Researcher-Practitioner Collaboration

A bigger part of the challenge of understanding creativity is intertwined with knowing whether it can be taught or nurtured, especially in educational contexts. Through her work as an educator, Dr. Chappell has discovered two ways of overcoming this challenge: by collaborating with teachers and encouraging creative explorations among them. However, it would not be fair to present this collaboration purely as a way to gain better understanding for research; it is also an attempt to design more creative spaces in schools and other educational settings to allow for creative exploration for both students and teachers.

Nurturing Creativity through Collaboration Dr. Chappell's initial collaboration with teachers stemmed from a misrepresentation of creativity as a standalone artistic concept that could be injected into the curriculum on demand. She wanted to shift from this notion to a more collaborative idea of designing creative spaces with the teachers. Treating teachers as co-creators of these creative classroom spaces instead of implementers of new research was important. Speaking of her collaboration with teachers:

You need to co-research with them... It is not, "here's the idea, go and do it." It is, "Right, how do we do this?"

How do we move from where you are to where it is possible to be with creative ideas and creative pedagogies?" And again, that is not an 'anything goes' approach... You know there are really robust methodologies, action research, and [participatory] research... where you are being rigorous about how you are researching with practitioners—and sometimes even with students as co-researchers. And that can really embed ideas in education.

Quiet Revolutions Through collaborations with teachers and students, it is also possible to push back on marginalizing and oppressive policies. Sometimes, when policymakers are not on board, "quiet revolutions" can help change minds. Creativity can help design transformative solutions in scenarios where voices are not being heard. Using social media and taking advantage of networking via the internet, one can create "cumulative effects" within education.

One of the ideas that I have worked with, with some of my students and colleagues in the past, is the idea of quiet revolutions; that sometimes you may not be able to shift a policymaker's perspective. And that you need to work together in a more bottom-up way with colleagues, with peers, with students, with teachers, with networks of people; perhaps taking advantage of the internet, social networking that those offer.

In the absence of a listening ear from policymakers and other administrative stakeholders, Dr. Chappell suggests that people will try and find other ways of making the system work to be more creative and inclusive. Sometimes, she suggests, a bottom-up way, a grassroots movement, is what you need to get things done.

Technology and Creativity: the Balancing Act

Dr. Chappell's posthuman and dispersed view of creativity has roots in how she sees the relationship of creativity with technology. Technology allows us to try things differently and think differently, which opens door for dispersive creative exploration as well.

In her work with Peter Twining and Anna Craft at the Open University, Dr. Chappell used the Second Life game, a virtual learning environment (VLE) where participants could co-create an educational setting and rethink "school" more creatively. Here, people from across the globe could join in and experiment with new ideas on what a more pluralistic educational setting could look like.

In another example, speaking about social media, Dr. Chappell reminds us that while we need to tread carefully

and realize that it can be dangerous, social media offers capacity for bottom-up quiet revolutions. Understanding the affordances of new and digital tools, people can use social media spaces conscientiously to challenge the status quo, especially when it is being used to marginalize voices. This, as seen in recent U.S. and world political rhetoric, can be used by fringe groups to spread hate and conspiracies (Gagliardone et al. 2015); hence, the need for careful deliberation and media literacy.

Speaking of digital tools, Dr. Chappell also acknowledges the potential of technology to enhance creativity in new ways that allow exploration and experience of beauty in forms not possible before. Using coding as an example, she reminds us of the possibilities of aesthetic experience through, for instance, searching for beauty in computer programs and software code (Chandra 2014). Technology, by itself, is not harmful or beautiful, it is contextually-dependent on how people use it.

Dr. Chappell is also mindful of the constraints of technology, especially when it comes to hindering creativity. Using examples of mobile applications that claim to make children more creative, she shares her concern that:

I watch some of the apps that my children manage to find... They have a banner on that says: ‘Get Creative!’ with our app. And it is the sort of color-by-numbers board... That is, to me, the worst of technology, coupled with creativity, equals the arts, equals coloring-in... People think they are being creative when actually it is doing the absolute opposite as far as I can see.

When it comes to creativity, Dr. Chappell argues that ethics, too, go in tandem with creativity. Connecting the abundance of misleading tools to an omnipresent urge to monetize creative pursuits, she explains the role of ethics in creativity:

[Y]ou can make a lot of money out of a quick app but... if you want to label something as creative within technology...you have to think about what that actually means. And how we can harness the power of technology to ...make more than we are capable of just on our own... We have created technology but it feels like it is a kind of tipping point where it might be able to assist us in...things like developments in AI, and how they might work with virtual learning environments... [It means] being very careful and ethically responsible about how we use those technologies.

The ethics of creativity are a recurring theme in Dr. Chappell’s perspective on creativity in general, especially when it comes to technology.

Ethics of Creativity

Whether it be designing creative spaces in educational contexts or transdisciplinary collaboration, according to Dr. Chappell, creativity needs to be assessed from an ethical perspective. She suggests we always “think of creativity as something that has impact... We need to think of the ethics of those impacts.”

Using plastics as an example of a creative innovation that turned out to be mostly unethical from an environmental perspective, Dr. Chappell emphasized:

When they created plastic, it was a great new invention that could keep things watertight. And now we are in an awful mess with the way we didn’t think about the consequences of what we had created... That is one of those situations where I think if we could decenter a bit and really start to think about arguments and problems from other perspectives, we would stand the chance of doing a better job.

Once again, showing practical implications of a posthuman perspective to creativity, Dr. Chappell ties ethics of creativity with educational practice and technology:

When we create, it will always have an impact on people. And I don’t think we think about that enough. So, what are the knock-on effects of a piece of artwork...[or] creating something in an online environment. I think particularly in online environments, there’s a real danger of seeing yourself as so detached from those that you are impacting on, that we stop paying attention to ethics. [Ethics is about] long-range responsibilities and we have to try and find ways to think beyond what is in front of us.

The dispersed, posthuman approaches address a foundational issue with creative work in online and digital spaces. Creative pursuits and products in these settings can often be detached from the other human beings and other-than-humans it may have an impact on. May it be online research, educational design, or other creative explorations, it is crucial to think ethically of how it could affect the people and others who may experience it.

Challenges for Creativity

Overall, several key challenges evolved out of our discussion with Dr. Chappell. She shared her concerns about creativity in a digital world and what that means for the arts and other disciplinary explorations. Among these, the challenges to creativity that stand out are capitalization of creativity in the

name of innovation, isolating creativity to the arts, and challenges with nurturing it in educational settings.

Creativity as a Capitalistic Machine for Innovation The first key challenge to creativity, according to Dr. Chappell, is how it is often monetized by software companies to push products that claim to nurture creativity. Also, disguised as innovation, a lot of practices are considered creative when their ethics are not discussed. Dr. Chappell argues that without evaluating the ethics of it, innovation may not necessarily always be creative. She explains:

When creativity becomes purely coupled up with innovation—the idea of innovation—you can end up with newness for its own sake, which then gets connected to a...capitalist marketized notions of newness, and it becomes...self-perpetuating without thinking about the ethics—the impact of the creativity... Sometimes, we can be in danger of...encouraging that kind of creativity to feed into work-based models.

Dr. Chappell emphasized the need for balance between an instrumental need for preparing people for new jobs and the aesthetic need for creative exploration:

I am not saying that we don't need to prepare young people for jobs...for their future and to be future citizens. But, we do need to be careful, I think, about...how creativity is encouraged in terms of its connection to innovation or ethics.

Creativity as Limited to the Arts The second key challenge to creativity is the mistaken disciplinary isolation of it to the arts. Thinking of creativity as something unique to the arts is a limiting notion because it undermines existing creativity in business, sciences, and other disciplines often considered as different from arts. This, according to Dr. Chappell, is a problem of mindset:

Creativity gets coupled with the arts...they are seen as synonymous. In order to inject creativity into schools and to research it, you just need to bring in the arts. It is an argument you hear a lot in the UK at the moment... [T]he arts [are] very much pushed to the sides, so the arguments that are being made are, 'well, we need to bring the arts back in because then you have...the creativity.'

As a solution, she encourages intentional transdisciplinary collaboration:

I just think we are shooting ourselves in the foot because you can have creativity in any discipline... [I]f we

couple it up to the arts it becomes a very particular kind of creativity that is aesthetically-driven. It is about artistic excellence...and I think we need to decouple this creativity-arts match in order to research it properly.

Nurturing Creativity in Schools Finally, the third key challenge to creativity is designing ways of nurturing it in educational settings. The idea of nurturing creativity is complicated because it is intertwined with challenges of defining creativity, measuring it, designing creative environments, and changing preexisting mindsets towards creativity. Tapping into her experience as an educator, Dr. Chappell explains this challenge in relation to requests from schools to bring in, for example, a dance project seemingly to inject creativity into the learning:

...and quite often I think 'we're talking about different things here. I am not sure if we are on the same sort of plane.' And that was what really made me want to start asking the question of the 'what is creativity,' 'how do we nurture it,' 'how do we know when it is happening?'

Following these questions to understand the challenge of nurturing creativity, she puts the onus on researchers to find mixed methodologies to study and understand creativity across domains. Being a multifaceted concept, creativity needs unique perspectives to study it with rigor and share these nuanced understandings. Such transdisciplinary collaboration is at the root of curating solutions to defining and nurturing creativity that steps beyond existing limiting mindsets towards what it means.

Conclusion

Dr. Kerry Chappell's research on creativity from a posthuman perspective is a unique way to design more ethical and inclusive creative practices. Her emphasis on the ethics of creativity and mind-body-material connections is a reminder of how easy it is to lose humanity and empathy for humans and others in pursuit of innovation. Creativity can be a deeply humanizing and transdisciplinary concept, which also requires thought beyond the human. This means inter-disciplinary dialogue and critical perspectives that challenge existing assumptions are essential to understanding it in a holistic way. This begins with a mutual respect and understanding of perspectives different from one's own.

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