Guest editors' introduction to special themed edition: Creativity and play in the regions

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This issue of *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development* is entitled "Creativity and play in the regions". This themed edition aims to explore the ways in which creativity can operate as a teaching and research focus within contemporary higher education. In connection with the *SLEID* journal's focus, it is specifically interested in the way in which regional universities can use creativity as a means of engaging their communities of interest: students, academics and citizens. We are also concerned with the connections between creativity and play, and the challenges these offer to learning and research. In what ways can universities mould their pedagogy to engage the principles of play? What role can research play in facilitating the development of creative projects and opportunities of play within regional settings? The purpose of this edition is to explore the educational provision of creativity and play and the opportunities for their expression in regional and rural communities.

The first article, "Creativity, play and the regional university" by Jeannette Delamoir, presents an overview of literature on creativity and play, in order to demonstrate their value for learning and teaching in regional universities. While play is intrinsically related to learning, creativity is something that can be cultivated in individuals as an integral part of all human endeavour. Together, then, play and creativity might be incorporated into curriculum design and teaching practices of regional universities in order to reach and retain their student cohort.

Both Sue North ("Creativity: Not the economics, but the art, of living") and Geoff Danaher ("The region as performance space: a distinctive take on the creative industries") express concern about the trend for universities to co-opt creativity into "creative industries". Both writers fear that "market logic" (as Danaher identifies it), as the foundation of creative industries, can impose significant constraints upon creative practice. To these writers, commodification can be fatal to creativity, and furthermore, such a focus can only separate the regional university from its community. Danaher's speculative paper, for instance, suggests that regional Australia—far from being disadvantaged or culturally poor—offers unique opportunities for the flourishing of creativity that is firmly rooted in, and a response to a specific place. North unequivocally declares that "creativity is specifically *not* economic", and her paper focuses on the tensions between creative activity for its own sake, and "marketable' creativity" (p. 2). Her argument is that regional universities' bonds with their communities must be based on non-

economic factors such as respect for the communities' values, with creativity understood as "a way of expressing an understanding of the everyday." She sees creative activity, such as writing, as being able to address social problems and, at the same time, build closer connections to their communities: "Much or what goes on in a social and cultural context is only explicable through creative express and needs to be understood for the successful function of society."

Donna Lee Brien's paper, "Facilitating futures in the creative industries: a study of regional Australian university writing students", contrasts with the previous two. Based on her survey of creative writing students, she argues that the university's role to prepare students for the workplace includes preparing them for working in the creative industries, if they are studying "creative" courses.

Donna Wright's article, "The humanity of creativity: the transformative value of the imagination in setting up sites for new knowledge construction," looks at community in a different way. The paper is based on her project *Big blue ball: Pictures, people, place*, in which participated 100 people from around the world. Via the Internet, they looked at ambiguous images and interacted with them to create new images. The project sought to better understand the variety of reactions from diverse cultural backgrounds, and to create an opportunity for intercultural play. Diversity of experiences, say many experts, is a powerful impetus for creativity, and Wright's article clearly endorses this. But furthermore, because her project was conducted by the global technology of the Internet, it demonstrates the productive interconnections between awareness of the specifically local, on the one hand, and the global on the other hand. Regionality is, in this perspective, not a disadvantage, but is valued and a source of creative possibilities.

The findings of McLeod, McCarthy and McConachie, presented in "Unlocking creativity in tertiary students", reveal enhanced potential for creativity in students who have participated in a programme to develop optimism about their studies. Although further research would be needed to ascertain if the students were, in fact, more creative, the connections among creativity, self esteem and intrinsic motivation are clear. Equally clear are the links among lack of creativity, negative emotions and pessimism.

Steven Pace, in "Play and flow: Implications for online learning", also looks at the processes of creativity and play, but through the lens of "flow", that intense and enjoyable state of concentration that has been described by Csikszentmihalyi in *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience* (1990). Pace suggests that instructional design can and should offer deeply satisfying, intrinsically motivated experiences of learning, by drawing on research into the conditions that induce flow. Direct links between flow and learning have been established: playing computer games offer flow experiences through their combination of challenges, instant feedback, and clear goals. These offer strong suggestions for creative instructional design that would immerse students in a pleasurable learning environment that is, because of their familiarity with playing recreational computer games, reassuring.

Janet McDonald's article, "Living data in the Lower Balonne: Cultural enablement or cultural imposition?", is set in the context of a mutually beneficial partnership between the University of Southern Queensland's Creative Arts area and the Queensland Murray Darling Committee, which focused on the role of theatre and visual arts in promoting natural and resource management within schools and communities in Lower Balonne district in south western Queensland. The article explores how stories generated by children about the Balonne River constituted

"living data" that became the basis of a play produced by USQ, and performed for schools and communities in the area. McDonald considers some of the ethical and other considerations shaping the ways in which such living data are converted into theatrical performance.

The final article, "The waving torch draws unbelievable pictures" by Rhian Hinkley and Tessa Dwyer, is a specially invited practitioner paper describing a project that demonstrates the conjunction of play, creativity, and community. Tessa Dwyer is a PhD candidate in Cinema Studies (School of Culture and Communication) at the University of Melbourne, researching issues of film translation, while Rhian Hinkley is a new media artist and filmmaker who has a diverse body of work ranging from Web-based artificial intelligence to contemporary spaghetti westerns. The Waving Torch project involves "an interactive digital drawing tool" that draws in light on a large screen, and demands whole-body movement rather than small movements of the fingers and hands. Its design was specifically "to enable people of all abilities to access technology and develop new modes of creative expression." The experience of using it is equally challenging and fun for people perceived to have disabilities, and those who don't. The tool, therefore, provides a level playing field; no matter what one's abilities, the waving torch is just as difficult, and just as much fun. The lesson here in building community cohesion through creativity, play, and the sophisticated application of computer technology is one that can be profitably learned by regional universities. (See Rhian Hinkley and Tessa Dwyer in this issue.)

Taken together, we hope that these articles will contribute to an ongoing dialogue about the role of creativity and play in the regions, and, in particular, their implications for learning and teaching in regional universities, on the one hand, and their part in promoting links between such universities and the communities they serve, on the other.