

# The pedagogical value of transformation:

## six reflections on arts-based engagement



**Catherine Etmanski**

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Royal Roads  
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# VUCA\*, RUPT\*\* GLOBAL SYSTEMS POLYCRISIS



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\* Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous

\*\* Rapid, Unpredictable, Paradoxical, and Tangled (Centre for Creative Leadership)

<https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/navigating-disruption-vuca-alternative/>

# 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES



“Unless we change directions we’ll end up where we’re going.”

(W. Reese, Personal Communication, Circa 2000)

# Ways of Knowing

“Fiction is knowledge.  
Poetry is knowledge.  
The arts are ways of  
knowing.... Knowledge,  
like fiction itself, is  
liminal space. It never  
arrives. It is always on  
the brink.” (Neilsen,  
2002, p. 206)



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Neilsen, L. (2002). Learning from the liminal:  
Fiction as knowledge. *Alberta Journal of  
Educational Research*, 48(3), 206-214.

# ARTS-BASED ENGAGEMENT

## *WHAT DO I MEAN BY THIS?*

- Employing the arts or creative methods in teaching, research, leadership, community development, activism, etc.
- Clover (2010) identifies 4 ways that adult educators employ the arts:
  - artists as educators,
  - arts-based research,
  - arts-based engagement and knowledge mobilization,
  - and art education

# SOME CONSIDERATIONS

*ADAPTED FROM*

Etmanski, C. (2020). Six reflections on feminist aesthetic practice. In D. E. Clover, S. Dzulkipli, H. Galderman, & K. Sanford (Eds.) *A feminist adult educator guide to aesthetic, creative and disruptive strategies in museums and community* (pp. 254–260). An initiative of Gender Justice, Creative Pedagogies and Arts-Based Research, University of Victoria.

<https://onlineacademiccommunity.uvic.ca/comarts/feminist-adult-educators-guide/>

# SIX REFLECTIONS

1. Creativity and the arts are not inherently participatory or progressive.
2. Value the process and the product.
3. Value artists' expertise.
4. Transformation takes many forms.
5. Creative and arts-based methods are deceptively powerful.
6. Creativity and the arts are more than utilitarian tools.



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# REFLECTION 1

## *CREATIVITY AND THE ARTS ARE NOT INHERENTLY PARTICIPATORY OR PROGRESSIVE*

- E.g., Advertising and/or propaganda
- The extent to which they meet these criteria is determined by the way in which they are facilitated.
- To be effective methods for change,
- like other methods or practices, it is helpful when they are embedded within a larger community-oriented and decolonizing framework, one that fosters emancipatory change and promotes human flourishing

# REFLECTION 2

## *VALUE THE PROCESS AND THE PRODUCT*

- Sometimes the intended result a creative product (e.g., theatre production)
- In that case, artistry and aesthetics become relevant considerations, particularly for feminist works that do not wish to be dismissed as inferior and thus, lose the power of their messaging
- At times, a collective creative process may serve solely to build relationships, empathy, and trust among participants,
- Consider your goal, intended outcomes, desired impact, and audience
- For arts-based research, this includes data collection, analysis, knowledge translation & mobilization, and more

# REFLECTION 3

## *VALUE ARTISTS' EXPERTISE*

- “Using” the arts can be seen as offensive or distasteful to artists
- understand that there is a range of different skills and knowledges associated with the arts, just as there is with education, research, community
- development, or strategic activism (A/R/Tography)
- consider additional training or seek guidance from individuals who have more skill



# REFLECTION 4

## *TRANSFORMATION TAKES MANY FORMS*

- Ah-ha moments of insight through symbolism
- Political, educative, or consciousness-raising effect
- Relationships, trust, and community-building
- Heal wounds around the arts
- Experience of beauty and aesthetics

# REFLECTION 5

## *CREATIVE AND ARTS-BASED METHODS ARE DECEPTIVELY POWERFUL*

- Often seen (or dismissed) as trivial or fun
- Symbolism can bypass rational thought process and bring emotions to the surface, very quickly
- Recommend additional training in particular method, in group facilitation, trauma-informed practice, and in active listening (EQ and acute empathy)

# REFLECTION 6

## *CREATIVITY AND THE ARTS ARE MORE THAN UTILITARIAN TOOLS*

- beauty and aesthetic form need not have a secondary utilitarian purpose
- In the face of neo-liberal corporate globalization, rising authoritarianism, polycrises, and more it can be difficult to remember that the arts have their own place and intrinsic value in societies the world over
- Wherever there are humans is there is human-made art





# BEAUTY AND THE ARTS

We want bread and we want roses too!

~ *Women Garment Workers Marching in New York, 1908*

Find a way to make beauty necessary; find a way to make necessity beautiful.

~ *Anne Michaels (Canadian Poet and Novelist)*

Beauty will save the world.

~ *Fyodor Dostoyevsky (Russian Novelist)*

The day is coming when a single carrot, freshly observed, will set off a revolution.

~ *Paul Cézanne (French Painter)*



# BEAUTY AND THE ARTS

When I am working on a problem I never think about beauty, but when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong.

~ *R. Buckminster Fuller (American Architect)*

If art cannot change the world, it can help to change the consciousness and drives of the [people] who would change the world.

~ *Herbert Marcuse (Frankfurt School Critical Theorist)*

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## Transformational

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- <https://www.royalroads.ca/about/academics/learning-teaching-research-model>



The background of the slide is a vibrant peacock feather pattern. A large, semi-transparent purple rectangle covers the middle section, featuring a white silhouette of a person standing with their back to the viewer, holding a globe. The text is overlaid on this purple area.

# THANK YOU

## References

Clover, D. E. (2010). A contemporary review of feminist aesthetic practices in selective adult education journals and conference proceedings. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 60(3), 233–248.

Davis-Manigaulte, J., Yorks, L. & Kasl, E. (2006). Expressive ways of knowing and transformative learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 109, 27–35.