

Knowing through imagination: exploring shifts in mindset as practice

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Proposal type: reflective-imaginative workshop

Text

What kind of consciousness do we as learners, educators, researchers, and human beings wanting to lead a “right life”, base our thinking and actions on? Is a perceived gap between academic scholarship and activism, between thinking / knowing and caring / doing, related to a mindset that fragments reality: into subject and object, mind and matter, me and other?

Whilst criticism to such dualistic paradigms comes from many disciplines, it still dominates most of societal and academic life. An alternative, or complement, can be described as a more relational, participating, or holistic mode of consciousness that conceives of reality as a whole, where thinking, feeling, and doing are fundamentally intertwined (Code, 2011). However, we seem to be unable to expand from one into the other without partly leaving the trodden path of rational-dissecting thinking, and journeying into the unknown. This view reflects perspectives on transformative learning that value the extrarational, and place the psycho-spiritual next to the critical and analytical (Formenti & West, 2018).

In this research workshop, we will explore an experimental, connective approach to engaging with both the world “out there”, as well as with our inner lives. We will engage with our capacities for imagination and active, attentive perception beyond taking the world for granted. Through a series of steps working with these artistic research strategies, we will arrive at a reflection on what this has to do with challenging forms of learning and research that separate the knower from the world of action in struggles for the good and beautiful.

This exploration is part of my practice-based, transdisciplinary PhD in social sculpture and expanded art practices. The term social sculpture was coined by German artist, educator, and political activist, Joseph Beuys. It refers to his idea that “Every human being is an artist” (Beuys, as cited in Lerm-Hayes & Walters, 2011, p. 63), capable of shaping life in all its aspects more creatively as a work of “art”. Whilst partly meant as a provocation, this idea

relates to a view of the “aesthetic as ‘enlivened being’” in all spheres of life, as opposed to the anaesthetic, that which makes us passive (Sacks, as cited in Lerm-Hayes & Walters, 2011, p. 82).

My research builds on strategies designed to explore experiences in relation to such ideas, whilst investigating if and how they can enable shifts in mindset that bridge the gap between knowing and doing, as the potential starting point for meaningful, creative agency. This reflective-imaginative workshop therefore explores the question whether there is a necessary gap between being both a knower and a doer, in relation to the idea that life is art. It will provide a space for dialogue and connectivity, in which the idea of life narration becomes a live practice based on individual and shared experiences that activate the imagination in how we know ourselves, each other, and the world.

Question: What does it mean to be an activist and whose values do we represent?

Key words: Activism, social sculpture, transformative learning, connective practice, mindset

References:

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