

UAL Educational Conference July 2021

Crisis and Transformation

An exploration of how creative arts lecturers in higher education talk about reflecting on their teaching.

Annamarie McKie

Associate Dean Student Experience, LCF





Some assumptions

Creative arts lecturers don't do
“edu-speak”

Creative arts lecturers do not reflect
on their teaching

**Creative arts lecturers don't
respond to educational frameworks**

Creative arts lecturers like more
expressive forms of reflection



Wicked problem (Rittel and Webber, 1973)

Reflection is a complex term that has not been examined critically and reflexively within the disciplinary teaching contexts it could most usefully serve (James, 2007; Orr et al, 2010)

‘matches and mismatches between academics’ and developers’ understanding of reflection in disciplinary teaching contexts (Akerlind, 2007; Boud and Walker, 1998; Clegg et al, 1999).

‘critical conversations on where reflection in, on and for action can lead, have been lost in the evanescence of competing needs, space and time (Burnard and Hennessey, 2006; piv).

Research aim and research questions

Research aim:

To explore how creative arts lecturers working in higher education talk about reflecting on their teaching using their own 'discursive repertoires' (Brookfield and Preskill, 1998; Trowler, 2008) and terms of reference.

Research questions:

1. What words, phrases and metaphors do creative arts lecturers use when talking about reflecting on their teaching
2. What incidents, experiences and events do creative arts lecturers refer to when talking about reflecting on their teaching?
3. How might creative arts lecturers' talk about reflection on teaching be helpful for an academic developer?

Research Methodology

Qualitative-interpretive

Social constructivist

Research methods: Semi structured interviews, Personal Reflection

Research tools: Interview Schedule, Reflective Journal



Data collection

10 x 45 minute interviews with creative arts lecturers

Disciplines: architecture, computer animation, graphic design, theatre, illustration, fine art, photography, fashion, creative education

Interviews took place in 2 external creative arts universities.

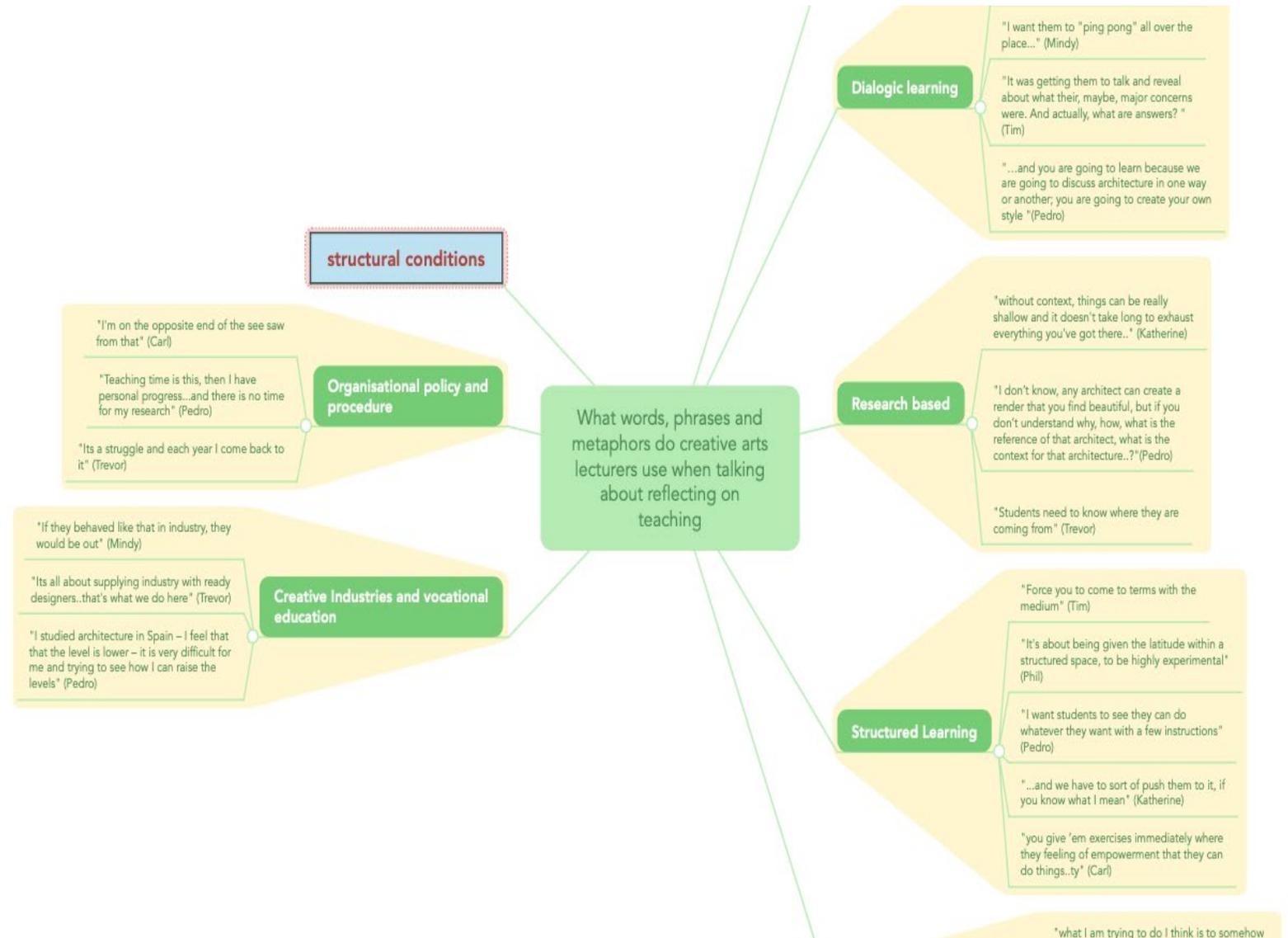
Research participants

- 10 creative arts lecturers (all pseudonyms)
- ‘purposive and convenience sampling’ (Patton, 2002)
- Voluntary informed consent
- Sampling criteria:
 - Discipline: theatre and performing arts, music, film, creative writing, graphic design, photography, visual arts, or creative arts education
 - Type of creative arts lecturing role: Programme Leader, Course Leader, Lecturer, Senior Lecturer.
 - All teaching in higher education
 - Employed at one of the two specialist creative arts universities (University A or University B)

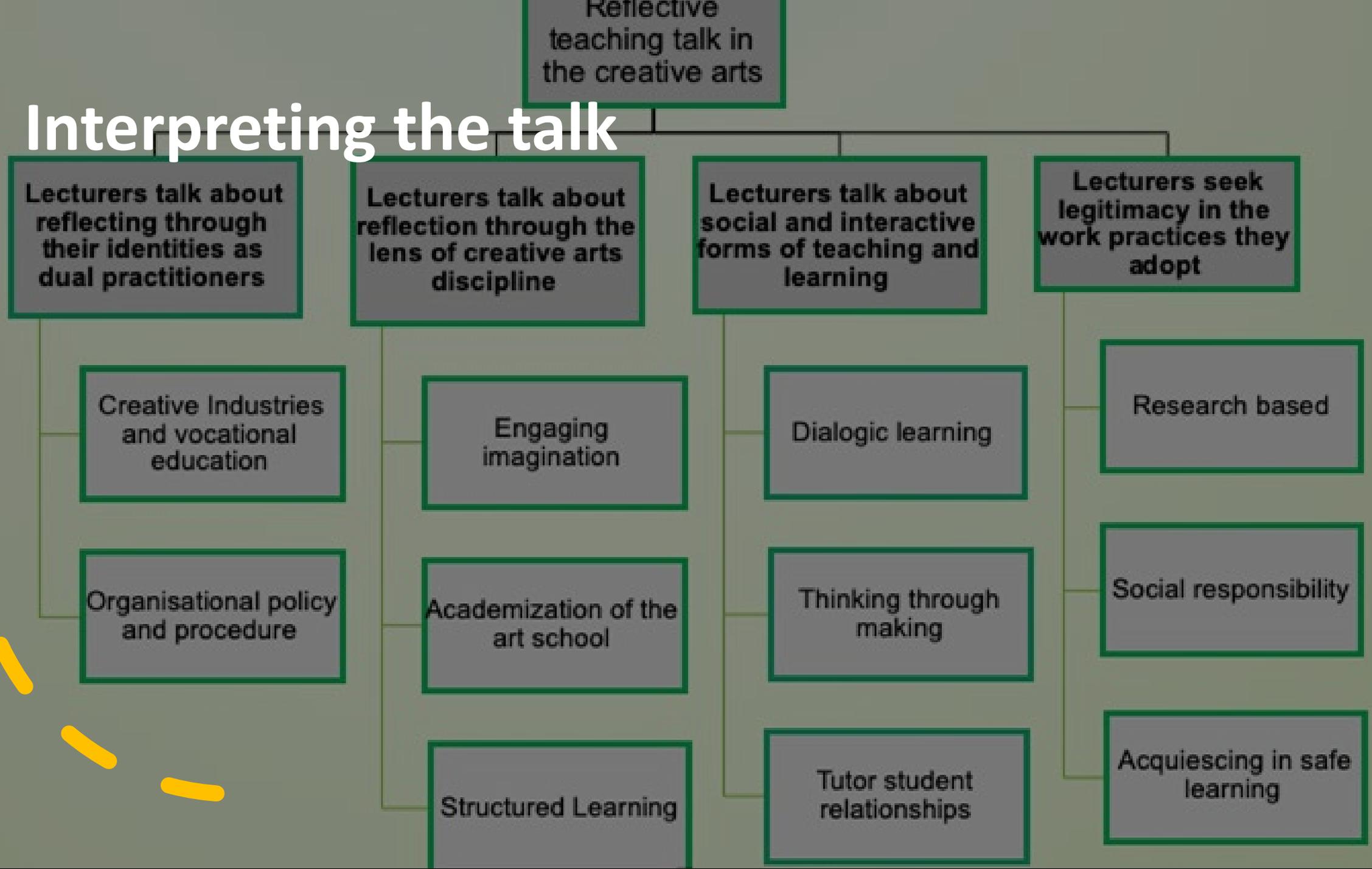
Pseudonym	Role	Creative arts discipline
Carl	Course Leader	Creative Computing
Pedro	Unit Leader/Critical Studies Lecturer	Architecture/Critical Studies
Mindy	Course Leader	Graphic Design
Eleanor	Subject Leader	Creative Education
Phil	Unit Leader	Illustration
Tim	Course Leader	Fine Art
Katherine	Unit Leader	Drama and Performance
Mary	Associate Dean: Learning and Teaching	Design Studies
Trevor	Course Leader	Fashion
Ruth	Course Leader	Animation

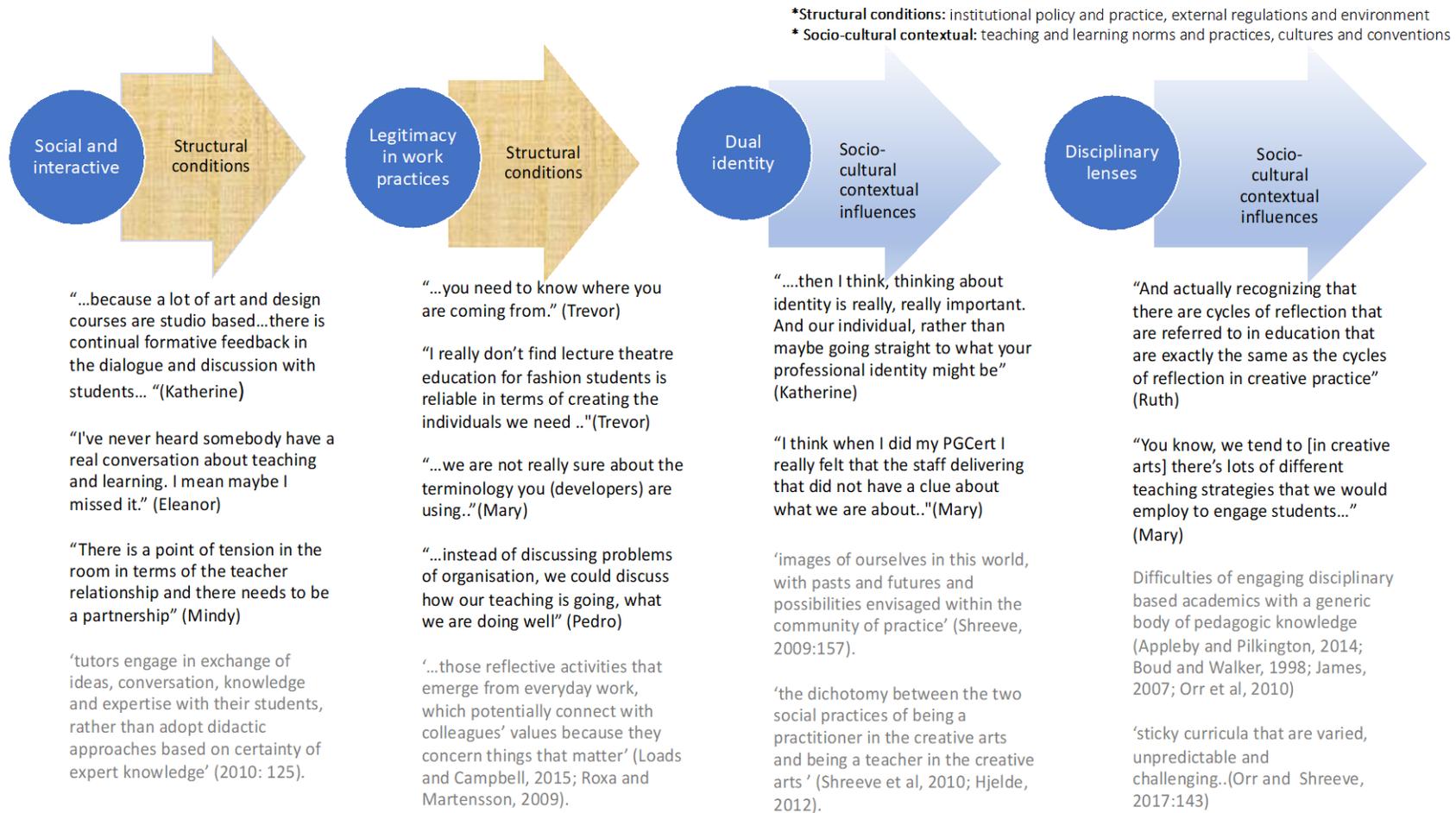
Data analysis

- Inductive interpretation
- Constructivist thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)
- Used a lens of sociocultural contexts and structural conditions



Interpreting the talk





So, what might be helpful from all of this talk?

Conclusions: revelling in the oblique- ness

- Deeper understanding of creative arts teaching and learning contexts (dialogic, divergent, ambiguous, oblique, open-ended)
- Academic development approaches based on a certainty of knowledge are problematic for creative arts lecturers who are used to continuous exchanges within studio-based contexts.
- Reflection might be better understood through a disciplinary or dual identity lens rather than through a generic model which leads to the perception of a 'right way to reflect' (Hjelde, 2012).
- Possibilities of utilizing dual identity and disciplinary lenses (e.g thinking through making, dialogic exchange, engaging imagination) to enable more meaningful reflection on teaching.
- Inter-subjective understanding and empathy (Brookfield and James, 2014) to develop a more authentic understanding of creative arts teaching realities.

Oblique Strategies for reflecting on teaching?

Hey, what's that sound: Oblique Strategies

Forget Aleister Crowley and his tarot pack, this set of cards devised by Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt has been a bigger source of inspiration to frustrated musicians



▲ Decks appeal ... Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt's Oblique Strategies pack of cards. Photograph: Public Domain

What are they? The most famous of Brian Eno's dadaist mind games with music production. The original Oblique Strategies (Over One Hundred Worthwhile Dilemmas), was a set of cards created by Eno and his painter friend Peter Schmidt, and published as a signed limited edition in 1975. On each card is printed an (often quite abstract) instruction, which is invoked when an artist, producer or band has reached some form of creative impasse and requires external disruptive influence to suggest new ideas.

Work at a different speed

See something new in yourself as a teacher, by locating previously unconscious material or seeing familiar aspects in fresh ways

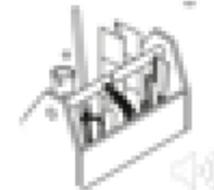
"So, there are times here when we stop and think at staff development and you know people will present or you know something very current and changing, and it might be assessment strategies or whatever. And you think, ok, so historically it used to work like that now it's like this, so what are we going to do next, and I love all that..." (Trevor)



Don't avoid what is easy

Set up safe spaces to get used to ideas in education, deconstruct terms and un-learn previous practices

it's almost like creating the perfect sand box....Yeah, it's like a page that you can mess up. You can do anything you like to it" (Tim)



Turn it upside down

Disrupt reflection on your teaching by thinking about it as a provocation, a story, poem or metaphor



“To some extent I put myself at the opposite end of the see saw..”
(Carl)

“..but it is so divergent at the same time – there is so much to it, that it is almost like you are ping ponging from one place to the next..” (Mindy)

Use your own ideas

Use reflective practices that are personally meaningful and that connect in with the realities of your creative arts context

“When actually, it's not that the whole thing is new, it's just understanding "oh, all right, okay, there's something theoretically that supports what I'm doing there." And actually recognizing that there are cycles of reflection that are referred to in education that are exactly the same as the cycles of reflection in creative practice and the things that are happening all the time”.
(Ruth).

State the problem in words as clearly as possible

"the most terrifying thing you can do to a student is give them a blank page, and say, "Can you just draw, please?"
The most terrifying.. (Carl)

*Talk through your
teaching challenges
with your colleagues
aiming to gain a better
understand of each
other's problem*

...one thing that you come to learn quite quickly is that, to have really unbridled, highly experimental kind of doing, you need structure for that to happen within.
(Tim)

Use an old idea

*Locate an idea from
your creative arts
practice to put a fresh
perspective on your
reflection as a teacher*

“It was like a kind of manifesto, a call to arms for illustrators and their responsibilities and what they could do. And right at the end he was asking this question, “well what's the point? What's the point of us?” And as soon as I read that and I came back to the team, I was like “look, we've got to read this.” (Ruth)

Work at a different speed

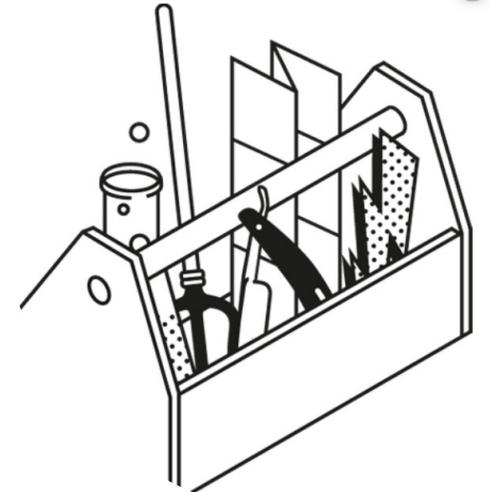
See something new in yourself as a teacher, by locating previously unconscious material or seeing familiar aspects in fresh ways

”So, there are times here when we stop and think at staff development and you know people will present on you know something very current and changing, and it might be assessment strategies or whatever. And you think, ok, so historically it used to work like that now it’s like this, so what are we going to do next, and I love all that..” (Trevor)

Don't avoid what is easy

Set up safe spaces to get used to ideas in education, deconstruct terms and un-learn previous practices

‘It's almost like creating the perfect sand box...Yeah, it's like a page that you can mess up. You can do anything you like to it” (Tim)



Thank you for listening...

Annamarie McKie

Associate Dean Student
Experience

London College of Fashion

a.mckie@fashion.arts.ac.uk

