



ART-LED COMMUNITAS FOR DEVELOPING IMPROVED MENTAL HEALTH IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN A TIME OF RAPID CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Aimed at those who have a responsibility for policy and practice in relation to education, health improvement and community, this position paper explores how the corporatization of the modern university has arguably shifted how students see themselves – and how academics see students and how students see academics. Increasingly, education is being economized in an age of neo-liberalist ideology. Universities spend considerable resources on recruiting students, promoting *why* students should attend university but arguably spend far less on *how* they enable students to be effective learners. The author argues that it is time to pay attention to two key responsibilities in higher education: well-doing *and* well-being. However, it is argued in this paper that universities are far too focused on behavioural well-doing agendas and not sufficiently focused on experiential well-being of staff and students. This paper concludes that there is an urgent case for realigning higher education through acknowledging the fundamental importance of *communitas* – defined as “inspired fellowship” to enable human, personal, spiritual and social well-being. It is argued that universities must take seriously the mental health of their staff and students, and in so doing, the role of the arts may provide plausible answers in realigning the culture of higher education.

Key terms: art-led communitas, well-being, well-doing, higher education, mental health, digital stress, togetherness

INTRODUCTION

The issue of mental health within higher education is an important area for interrogation and it is timely that greater attention is being given to a range of issues affecting both students and staff in an era of unprecedented social and technological change. In finding solutions to problems of mental well-being it is essential to avoid over-medicalizing conditions and issues. Supporting this stance Christopher Dowrick and Allen Frances (2013) note that meta-analyses have suggested that antidepressants have little or no effect in mild depression. They state that turning grief and other life stresses into psychiatric disorders “represents medical intrusion on personal emotions”. Therefore it is necessary to find other complementary solutions to ensure the sound mental health of individuals.

Universities spend considerable resources on recruiting students, promoting *why* students should attend university but arguably spend far less on *how* they enable students to be effective learners. The author proposes that it is time to pay attention to two key responsibilities in higher education: well-doing *and* well-being. However, it is argued that we are far too focused on behavioural well-doing with an array of agendas and not sufficiently focused on experiential well-being. It is advocated here that we should be focussed on preventative measures (e.g. Australian Government Department for Health, 2011), which includes some “common-sense” approaches and the particular use of art to facilitate experiential opportunities for “togetherness”.

Drawing conclusions about the impact of the digital world and the contribution to such problems as diminishing mental health and loneliness is particularly difficult because there are contradictory findings, and multiple cross-sectional studies that dominate the literature, making causation difficult to establish (Nowland et al., 2018). Similarly, this paper does not aim to be a systematic review, so does not attempt to carry out a systematic search to identify all relevant evidence on this issue and nor could it. However the author cites information from various critical pieces, research and authoritative scholarly sources to develop a basis for the theoretical arguments presented. Posited in this paper is a model of art-led *communitas* for developing improved mental health in higher education.

A CRISIS IN MENTAL HEALTH

If we are to recognise the variety of reports, children and young people are indeed experiencing a crisis in their mental health (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006). Growing numbers of under-18s are suffering from anxiety, depression, eating disorders and other conditions. In addition, tragically more are self-harming and attempting suicide. School stress, social media, troubled family life and pressures to “succeed” are among the key reasons behind this rise experts popularly report. Consequently the UK’s National Health Service (NHS) is struggling to cope with the latest increase in young people needing psychological and psychiatric support. Theresa May has made children’s mental health a key domestic priority as Prime Minister. May stated:

What I am announcing are the first steps in our plan to transform the way we deal with mental illness in this country at every stage of a person’s life: not in our hospitals, but in our classrooms, at work and in our communities. (GOV.UK, 2017, unpaginated)

Globally, mental health is also a priority for the health agenda (WHO, 2017). Relevant to the discussion here, staff and students of universities are not exempt from the growing mental health issues experienced across society. In fact it might be the case that current pressures on higher education are substantially contributing to mental illness, an important point developed later in this paper. However, what do we mean generally by “mental health problems” in this context? Carter et al., (2017) suggest: “People experience mental health difficulties due to their inability to effectively respond to the stressors of life, making it difficult for them to function effectively and constructively” (p. 2). Therefore to understand the problem more fully it is necessary to unravel where this stress is originating.

PRESSURES OF THE DIGITAL AGE

Undoubtedly the Post-Millennials, otherwise known as Generation Z, or the iGen, have a range of new pressures that were unknown to previous generations when growing up. Although it cannot be claimed that life is more difficult for the Post-Millennials, there are new pressures that seem to be developing as a result of the digital age. Humans, by instinct, possess the desire to find information and are inquisitive to know everything around them. We also desire quick answers. Socially driven, we want to be liked. Social media, particularly for the younger generations has become a major occupier of time. We have seen that the large amount of social media outlets feed



into anxiety and peer pressure for young people and exposes them to potential on-line abuse (Carter & Goldie, 2017). The digital environment has created a situation where there is no possible end to where individual pressures might arise. Substantial compulsive behaviour has resulted, such as frequently checking smartphones, no matter where and when.

The easy access to information creates the illusion of intelligence however it comes at a price. There is a difficulty for the human brain in how we transform information into knowledge. Deep thinking occurs when the immediate (short-term) information is balanced with long-term memory (Ericsson et al., 1995). How we consolidate and reconcile this may in fact be called “wisdom”. However by its nature, the digital world floods our senses with the immediate, and the effects of this are now only being investigated as possible causes of deteriorating mental health. The constant bombardment of information can cause stress and what is generally being termed “digital depression”. While generally it is still in the early stages of research, claims are widely being made that high usage of the Internet, email, and social media can cause disengagement, even in employees. For those more susceptible to anxious thoughts and depression, connectivity is likely to intensify fatigue and digital stress. Masahiro Yamamoto and Matthew J. Kushin (2014) suggest that “engaging in polarized online environments, or being the recipient of criticism could have negative effects on self-image as well as impeding actualization of intrinsic and extrinsic awards” (p. 434).

Although difficult to accurately research in definitive terms, arguably the digital age has increasingly subverted our ability to have deep thoughts about subject matter – developing less slow, reflective thinking, less critical thinking and possibly less creative thinking – less mindfulness. Speed is taking over from higher forms of thinking. Increasingly we are finding it more and more difficult to concentrate for extended periods of time and to persist with lengthy prose (Carr, 2011). This has become a major challenge for formal education at all levels and there remains a great deal of work to be done to completely understand how the digital age is impacting as the phenomenon is only a post-1995 reality. In the short-term, many experts are now asking us to control our digital addictions and to actively switch off and have a “digital detox”.

Another area of concern for mental well-being are computer games and their associated levels of addiction. Gaming disorder is defined in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of



Diseases (ICD-11) as a pattern of gaming behaviour (“digital-gaming” or “video-gaming”) characterized by:

- 1) impaired control over gaming (e.g., onset, frequency, intensity, duration, termination, context);
- 2) increasing priority given to gaming to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other life interests and daily activities; and 3) continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences. (WHO, 2018, 6C51)

For gaming disorder to be specifically diagnosed, the behaviour pattern must be “of sufficient severity to result in significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning” and “would normally have been evident for at least 12 months” (WHO, 2018, 6C51). The pattern of behaviour described here could equally be applied to the use of other digital media, and it will be a challenge for the World Health Organization and governments alike to deal with this wider global epidemic.

THE CORPORATIZED UNIVERSITY

Another contributing mental health concern might well be the nature of contemporary universities. The fundamental big issue in current discussion is that increasingly, universities are being corporatized and economized. Higher education is being seen as a means to getting a job and viewed by governments as a way of stimulating the national economy. Employers, particularly big business call for the “best educated” to join their ranks. They want skilled and job-ready individuals who can add expertise to their workforce. Almost extinct now is the story of the junior entering the company in the mailroom and working his or her way up to become CEO.

The premise has become that higher education is beneficial to the economy. Have we moved so far from the ideal that education was for self-improvement and enlightenment and is now more about getting a qualification to get a “better” job (whatever that means)? Of course if going to university increases one’s chances of employment, then our former university students who are now making coffee at a well-known coffee chain should feel completely satisfied. Further, governments have been driven to increasingly move students into higher education. In the UK the Blair government set an ambitious target of 50% of the population achieving a degree and in 2004, as a justification to raising student fees, the Labour prime minister Tony Blair himself stated:



There is nothing off-beam about our target of 50% participation by under-30 year-olds by 2010. We are already at 43%, thanks to the huge but under-funded expansion which took place largely under the Conservatives. 50% is well within the mainstream projections of developed countries and many already have participation rates well above ours. (Blair, 2004)

However we have since seen the unfortunate negative impacts of this ambition, which arguably has done nothing to improve academic quality. Concerns voiced by academics are the obvious stresses that have resulted from this piece of social engineering. These include, but not limited to: pressure to pass students, a proliferation of universities, competition for student enrolments, lowering of entry tariffs – all resulting in the increased pressure on academics and an increasingly more ruthless approach to managing them.

The corporatizing of the modern university has arguably shifted how students see themselves – and how academics see students. Enrolment has become recruitment. Higher education might easily be mistaken as a supermarket where off-the-shelf courses are provided at a price to anyone, and even if you can't afford it you can take out a loan to pay for it. With the rise in individualism, neoliberalism and consumerism, the student has been repositioned, quite uncomfortably, as a “customer” replete with customer satisfaction surveys, entitlement and a “value for money” ethos. This shift in mind-set moves the student away from asking “why is it so” to questions of “what for,” “when” and “how much”. When we once valued “education for education’s sake” it was easier to accept the notion of higher education as a “rite of passage,” a time to explore and test not only oneself but also the discipline being studied. It provided the space to be experimental, innovative, creative, and above all, to be engaged. Students were politically charged and found themselves debating and testing ideas, social mores, values and beliefs, subverting and reconceptualizing. True to the etymology of the word, “education” is authentically about “leading out” not “leading into”. Additionally, against this backdrop of change in higher education is also the change in society where consumerism and “it’s all about me” and “I want it now” culture pervades.

Indeed one positive of universities marketing to a broader cross-section of society has potentially provided wider opportunities. Of course “access to education” is a valuable concept and arguably, many would agree that we do have a moral obligation to remove any unnecessary barriers that may exist, such as lack of finance. But it may be worth pausing to carefully consider what standards

should be preserved and what type of education is appropriate for different people. It does seem to be a rather middle class aspiration that going to university gives you a stamp of legitimacy. Is university really for everyone? Australia's TAFE system (Further Education), which has in recent times suffered changes in government policy in Australia, gives a level of education and training that provides a very adequate offer. Here students could extend themselves and also engage in pragmatic vocational training, thereby more appropriately filling a community's or country's skills gap (and with skills comes knowledge).

There are indeed many ethical questions that are raised in any discussions about widening access to higher education which one might ponder: *Do universities have an ethical duty of care to not compound the societal pressure to go to university? Is attending university right for everyone? Is there an ethics of relevance? Are we putting unnecessary pressures on young people that are making them ill?*



Figure 1: Model of Well-doing and Well-being.

So much attention is being given to promote the idea that students *should* learn, but less attention to *how* students learn (Atkinson, 2018, p. 3). Undeniably, we have two responsibilities in higher education: well-being and well-doing (see Figure 1). However, might we be focussing too much upon well-doing (represented by a range of agendas which on face-value appear to be for the “good” of individuals) rather than well-being? In the UK these well-doing agendas include “equality and diversity” and “widening participation”. However, has the unwitting effect been that whilst focussed on social engineering agendas we have been too preoccupied to give proper

attention to both common-sense welfare and authentic community cohesion? Undoubtedly the growing and almost unquestioned current public orthodoxy promotes the individual over the community as a whole. This ideology is seemingly fuelled by the consumerist society, opportunistic journalists and lawyers, all feeding directly into heavily opinionated social media. Despite our postmodernist cleverness, William James said it best as early as 1902:

[...] all our morality appears but as a plaster hiding a sore it can never cure, and all our well-doing as the hollowest substitute for that well-being that our lives ought to be grounded in, but, alas! are not. (James, 1982, p. 62)

With the literature reporting that university students are even more likely to incur issues with mental health than those in the general population (Stallman & Shochet, 2009), the call to action is long overdue. However, how can we as educators turn our attention to well-being and see it as a duty of care to ensure that we are focussed on the actual humans before us? The attention of academics has largely been diverted from personal interactions with students by the pressure of metrics and other personal performance indicators. Additionally student and academic interactions are increasingly being done remotely through the use of various digital technologies and therefore potential for meaningful physical interactions are further diminished.

THE SHADOW OF NEGATIVITY

Arguably we live in an age of uncertainty, economic pressure, threat of extremist ideology, and general “doom and gloom”. Unlike the post-war hope of modernism in the 1950s; the freedom and Psychedelia of the 1960s; the disco dance floor of the 1970s; the love of life and pop music in the 1980s yet contrasted with tragedy of the AIDS epidemic, assassinations and attempted assassinations of numerous of the world’s most public figures; grunge and the new technological age of the 1990s; we now endure the economic crisis, terrorism and the war on terrorism, the rise of social media and the “it’s-all-about-me” generation. Although a simplistic summary of the last 70 years, it serves as a reminder how the popular psyche has changed.

It may not be a surprise that humans have a general bias towards negativity, based on both predisposition and experience (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Negativity is a stronger force than positivity, i.e. punishment is more powerful than reward and it has a contagion. This relative power of negative contamination is embedded in an age-old Russian adage: “A spoonful of tar can spoil



a barrel of honey, but a spoonful of honey does nothing for a barrel of tar” (Rozin & Royzman, 2001, p. 296).

Although much has changed in higher education since the 1950s, the one observable feature is the growing negative bias within the higher education sector. In his recent book *The Toxic University: Zombie Leadership, Academic Rock Stars, and Neoliberal Ideology*, John Smyth (2017) describes the pernicious effect of fears peddled by politicians, policy elites and of course the “zombie leaders,” as he puts it, of our universities. He accuses them of slavishly adopting consumerist systems of rankings, metrics and reporting systems in order to demonstrate global competitiveness and thereby achieve reputational gain. Smyth firmly blames economically driven neoliberalism and government educational policy. Both these factors have been attributed to the May 2017 announcement by the University of Manchester in the UK to attempt to prematurely terminate 140 academic careers which was a clearly stressful time for academics and also allowed “the emergence of informal performance criteria at Imperial College London that were allegedly implicated in the suicide of toxicologist Stefan Grimm in 2014 – a tragic story retold in some detail in this book” (Wheeler, 2017).

Commentaries such as *The Toxic University* challenge current thinking with a counter narrative – there is surely more to be considered than consumer-driven financial capitalism that dominates political discourse and institutional governance, including our universities. The mental health of both staff and students cannot be sacrificed in this current climate and we need to return higher education to places full of the love of learning replete with academic rigor.

FINDING HOPE IN COMMUNITAS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

There is a philosophy of working that may serve education well and this is encapsulated in the term *communitas*, which can simply be defined as inspired fellowship. In her book *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*, the late Edith Turner (2012), the wife of the late Victor Turner, provides a largely convincing case for the fundamental importance of *communitas* to human personal, spiritual and social well-being. *Communitas* is evidenced in a group’s pleasure in sharing common experiences; being “in the zone” as it might be understood – as in the arts, sport, and work; “the sense felt by a group when their life together takes on full meaning” (Turner, 2012, p. 1). Moments of purpose and elation can be entirely spontaneous. *Communitas* is a group’s pleasure in sharing

common experiences with one's fellows (Turner, 2012, p. 2). *Communitas* can be found in church, festivals, in music, in times of stress and disaster, in revolution, in the workplace and in awe of nature itself.

Victor Turner, in "Betwixt and Between" (1964) and his book *The Ritual Process* (1969), makes the insightful connection between what he saw as the joy of *communitas* and rites of passage. Edith Turner in 2012 builds upon this, stating: "When *communitas* appears, one is conscious that it overrides psychological and sociological constructs" (Turner, 2012, p. 3). An important feature is that:

[...] in *communitas* there is a loss of ego. One's pride in oneself becomes irrelevant. In the group, all are in unity, seamless unity, so that even joshing is cause for delight and there is a lot of laughter. The benefits of *communitas* are quick understanding, easy mutual help, and long term ties with others. (Turner, 2012, p. 3)

This paper proposes a way forward by employing art-led *communitas* in higher education where students may develop that sense of unity and pleasure in creatively sharing with each other. Rather than universities perpetuating those inflexible silos of education, there could be a greater focus of coming together, breaking rigid discipline boundaries and exploring creative processes to foster a sense of communal and personal well-being. How we structure the curriculum needs proper attention in this, where tasks and processes can adopt particular approaches frequently used within the arts. Collective problem-solving and creation, negotiation and collaboration, unity of purpose informed by both individual and negotiated creativity are some of the key tenants of art-led *communitas*. Even the opportunities for students to engage in extra-curricular activities are vitally important to developing *communitas* and universities should take this more seriously.

Leading art-based researcher and expressive arts therapist Shaun McNiff has long advocated for the strengthening of the integrated use of art for individual and societal health. In discussing the transformational environment created through the integration of the arts, McNiff (2009) states: "New ideas and expressions spring from the "communal conversation" of creativity that offers much more than an individual mind working alone" (p. 29). But how do we know that applying the arts to improve health and well-being actually works?



ART AS MEDICINE

In his book *Art as Medicine*, McNiff (1992) explores a range of techniques whereby art is used in therapy to improve health. This particular relationship that art can have to personal healing shifts perception that art is simply decorative or an artist's expression alone. Rather than assuming art is simply static, "seeing art as a process, in which understanding is constructed and co-constructed with others" (Prior, 2018, p. 11) is the dynamic at play. Art is a particular act of expressing feelings, thoughts and observations. Therefore, the learning potential in art is "powerful as it leads us to the deepest places of human feeling, provides enlightenment and raises the human spirit" (Prior, 2017, p. 266) and as such, art has become recognized widely as a process of therapy and healing.

With the growing emergence of a global interest and positive results in using art to heal, in 2009 the *Journal of Applied Arts and Health* was established, published by Intellect in Bristol. Three issues per year for nine years, the journal has published quality peer-reviewed research documenting the use of the art-based practices in a range of contexts. Over the course of this time more than 220 articles have been published. The *Journal of Applied Arts and Health* has been committed to serving the larger arts in health community around the world, publishing some of the most groundbreaking research and indicators of what is happening in the field today, yet many educators may be unaware of its existence as it lies outside of their own more narrow discipline.

As a recent participant at the House of Lords at Westminster, this author was asked to comment on a comprehensive commissioned report by the *UK All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) inquiry on Arts, Health and Wellbeing* (2017). This very comprehensive 180-page report covers a wide range of topics including defining arts and health, well-being, health policy, evidence-based research, funding and the many various programmes serving a variety of populations including arts in marginalized communities, and programmes from birth to hospice care. In addition it reviews much of the current research that points to strong evidence that creative and cultural activities can have a positive impact on health and well-being including monetary savings in health service and social care facilities.

These conclusions came from a broad array of constituents including ministers in the Departments of Health and Culture, Media and Sport, the Chief Medical Officer with NHS England, Public Health England, the Care Quality Commission, the Cabinet Office, the What Works Centre for

Wellbeing, Arts Council England, the Local Government Association and input from service users, carers, clinicians, artists, academics, commissioners and philanthropic funders. The overall conclusion of this comprehensive report is that the arts play a vital aspect in the health and well-being of communities across the spectrum (All Party Parliamentary Group, 2017). The report goes on to state:

The arts can be enlisted to assist in addressing a number of difficult and pressing policy challenges: strengthening preventative strategies to maintain health for all; helping frail and older people stay healthy and independent; enabling patients to take a more active role in their own health and care; improving recovery from illness; enhancing mental healthcare; improving social care; mitigating social isolation and loneliness, strengthening local services and promoting more cohesive communities; enabling more cost-effective use of resources within the NHS; relieving pressure on GP services; increasing well-being among stays in health and social care; creating a more humane and positive existence for prisoners; enhancing the quality of the built environment; and ensuring more equitable distribution of arts resources and better access to the arts for people who are socially or economically disadvantaged. (5) (All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), 2017)

Unfortunately, the current undervaluing of art education by many governments around the world places an unnecessary impediment in the way of many potentially positive initiatives and practices. Yet, art-based practices offers a great deal of opportunity for students to develop mental well-being, know themselves and learn to be part of a community, which is an investment in itself. As Carter et al. (2017) succinctly suggest:

It also makes smart economic sense to respond with early intervention and avoid costs “downstream”. This is an investment in the wealth and prosperity of the nation and is a call for all to be involved as mental health in higher education is “everyone’s business”. (p. 18)

WHAT ART-LED COMMUNITAS LOOKS LIKE

There are many ways of introducing art-based practices into the higher education experience. It is not too long ago when there was an active campus life in most universities with sporting and arts activities in abundance. Most undergraduates belonged to at least one club or society and this became an opportunity to socialise and express one’s self, frequently and creatively in groups. In these social spaces Turner’s benefits of communitas, of “quick understanding, easy mutual help,

and long term ties with others” (Turner, 2012, p. 3) is easily evident. With increasing university costs many students now find themselves spending a minimal amount of time on campus and frequently take up employment even though they are full-time students. Where one can still see sporting and creative social engagement on campus the difference is palpable – there is laughter in the air, friendly banter, loss of ego and a spirit of togetherness.

In proposing this idea of “togetherness” it is useful to draw out one example of art-led *communitas* explored during the Second Australasian Mental Health and Higher Education Conference in Townsville, Australia in 2018. The workshop, delivered by this author, aimed to explore what “togetherness” might mean. A group of participants experienced art-based strategies that could be employed across higher education curricula and also used to inform the non-curricula in developing a sense of togetherness. This inclusive and interactive workshop used the medium of drawing using crayons on paper. Each participant had their own piece of A3 paper and access to a range of coloured crayons. The instruction was to “not over-think what would be drawn and begin with free flowing movements across the paper, allowing the crayon to touch down whenever it felt right”. Emphasis was placed on the fluidity of movement to prevent creative blocking.

Participants were encouraged to represent a moment, an experience or feeling and to be as abstract as they wished to avoid literal representations and to overcome fears of “not being able to draw”. The group was encouraged to think of a song or piece of music that was meaningful to them and to hear it in their head and repeat it over and over (they could change the arrangement whenever they chose) whilst they built up their image. Drawing lasted around 15 minutes. The group then paired off and each person explained what they felt they were representing when they drew, and with the listener taking great care to absorb all that was said to them. The group came back as one and then in turn each pair reported on their drawings with the partner of each artist to describe his or her partner’s image. The act of sharing and listening rapidly brought the group together with sensitivity laughter and some tears. Within only 90 minutes, the group had formed a strong supportive bond with loss of individual ego.

The group were also introduced to other practices such as “imaginal dialogue” developed by Shaun McNiff as an arts therapy technique. McNiff (1992) describes the use of “imaginal dialogue” as involving a shift from speaking *about* the figures of imagination to talking *with* them. Beyond the scope of this paper to comprehensively describe this therapeutic process, suffice to mention that:

[...] the core premise for using imaginal dialogue within expressive arts therapy is its ability to expand our resources for expression and understanding [...] it challenges the limits of conventional reality, image dialogue calls attention to the wisdom and transformative powers of the creative imagination [...] provides opportunities to perceive and shape our lives in ways that are informed by creative intelligence that can do so much to heal and enhance the world. (McNiff, 2009, pp. 243–244)

The group now found that their images could speak to them and tell them things they had not initially imagined that they could openly share or even admit to themselves. Once again, the process brought both laughter and tears but as a group everyone was experiencing a strong sense of togetherness. We had discovered *communitas*.

Finding opportunities in the curriculum to have students interact together, find joy and be fully human is important. Equally, more attention needs to be given by universities to ensuring that the development of the whole person is considered. Creating physical spaces where it becomes easy for a range of communal activities to take place is not an added luxury but essential. Equally, universities might consider programming tutorial sessions where more pastorally focussed activities take place with art providing an ideal vehicle. Given the proven success of singing on well-being (Clift et al., 2009), staff and students' extra-curricular choirs provide one constructive answer to facilitating art-led *communitas*.

CONCLUSION

The current concerns about mental health in higher education and contemporary society in general, calls for quite radical departures from existing practices and assumptions in how we conduct ways of working. The pressures of accountability, competition, time, exposure to social media opinion, and digital distractions are concerns for both students and academics. We are living in an increasingly fragmentary and pluralistic society that is contributing to a loss of community identity. All of these pressures do not only seem to cause stress and mental illness but they have a way of isolating individuals.

The use of art both within the curriculum and as extra curricula participatory activity in our places of higher education offers possibilities to realign learning and teaching, allowing academics to focus on the very human interaction of being a learner. The arts provide approaches for enabling



people to express themselves and collaborate together. The notion of developing *communitas* through the arts is rich with possibilities in higher education, yet this will not happen without a considerable re-thinking of how we might see the learning and teaching environment.

Those in positions of power or influence might consider radical changes and reject the growing number of metrics-based judgements, realizing that anything of real intrinsic human worth to the soul cannot actually be measured. Placing value on what is important but cannot be measured needs to become the focus of administrators and policy-makers if we are to change anything. Academic research too can break free of scientific and social science methodologies where they are not always useful and develop a confidence in using art as research. There is no one approach and as educators it is important that we remain open to multiple modes of working. Whilst feeling the need to respond to an overwhelming number of behavioural well-doing agendas we can be inadvertently overlooking the experiential well-being of our students. There is opportunity for collaborative meaning-making rather than simplistic economically driven knowledge-taking, to weave *communitas* into the fabric of higher education life, as a bright and unifying common thread. Importantly it is our duty of care to develop healthy students who can further improve society and not become victims of it.

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