



Researchers' Walk at The Victorian College of the Arts

Key Words

philosopher's walk, creativity, peer learning, academic dramaturg

Abstract

This presentation focuses on one aspect of my role as Academic Success Adviser at The Victorian College of the Arts, a role I call academic dramaturg. I see this role in the feedback I offer research students on the storytelling of their ideas. The vast majority of research students at the college are working on practice-led projects and my role in one-on-one sessions is frequently that of listener or reader offering commentary on, or asking questions around, the academic knowledge narrative that is emerging from their artistic practice, a role I see as much like a dramaturg advising on the developing story in a theatrical performance. Starting with this idea of academic dramaturg, I wonder whether a version of this role might be possible in the peer learning space. To facilitate this, I look to the practice of a philosopher's walk, that is, the practice of walking and thinking and talking. These three elements have a long history together with many well-known thinkers including Aristotle, Kant, Hobbes, Beethoven, Nietzsche and more recently creatives such as Steve Jobs, professing to do their best thinking while walking (Gros, 2014). Recent studies agree with these well-known anecdotal experiences, pointing to a clear link between improved thinking and walking (Atchley, Strayer, & Atchley, 2012; Keinanen, 2016), and making the philosopher's walk a potentially suitable tool for developing academic dramaturgy. This short presentation, then, describes the establishment of a regular researchers' walk with students at the college, and looks at how it might be functioning in the peer learning space by giving students the opportunity to both talk through their ideas and improve their skills as academic dramaturgs. It discusses the theory behind the philosopher's walk and how to maximise the benefits through considerations such as speed, amount of talk, manner of questioning, focus and ways of capturing of ideas. It also highlights lessons learnt and tips for setting up your own walk.

References

Atchley, R. A., Strayer, D. L., & Atchley, P. (2012). Creativity in the Wild: Improving Creative Reasoning through Immersion in Natural Settings. *Plos ONE*, (12), doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0051474

Gros, F. (2014). *A philosophy of walking*. London : Verso, 2014.

Keinanen, M. (2016). Taking your mind for a walk: a qualitative investigation of walking and thinking among nine Norwegian academics. *Higher Education*, (4), 593. doi:10.1007/s10734-015-9926-2