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Submission Track 2 - Title **- Creativity: The Whole or the Hole in the Business Curriculum**

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Introduction and Background

This paper explores the view that a 'hole' exists in Business Education where creativity should be. Jackson (2008) Creativity has many definitions but is defined simply by the author as a unique and novel approach or outcome. Creativity is omnipresent and exists in every discipline (Jackson 2008). The idea that creativity is a 'good thing' is not radical or new. However its true value and contribution within business community is only just starting to be recognised. Livingstone (2010) believes that all *'Humans are inherently creative'* and suggests we should not try to teach it, but rather understand, harvest and generate a motivation to embrace it. Whilst the author is not asserting here that all people are inherently highly creative, she believes that what creativity does exist can be built upon and developed, but developing a motivation and self-efficacy to do so must be encouraged.

Cardoso De Sousa's research in 2007 found that in the classroom creativity was seen as the outcome of a successful communication between teacher and student, where each was allowed to express themselves fully in the course of their tasks. Neither accepted responsibility for good outcomes rather they tended to attribute to each other why the outcome product resulted well from their interaction. Cardoso De Sousa suggests that; *'creativity lies not in the teacher, nor in the student, but in the interaction between the two'* (pg 21).   He believes that there is little agreement on what sits within the construct and Woodman and Schoenfeld (1990) state it can be seen as a social concept, expressed by peoples' implicit theories, or as a theoretical construct as developed by field researchers. Csikszentmihalyi (1991) concurs and on a similar theme believing; *'creativity is located in neither the creator nor the creative product but rather in the interaction between the creator and the fields' gatekeeper who selectively retains or rejects original products'*.

In 'A whole New Mind' the seminal book by Daniel Pink, he states that in a twenty first century workplace, 'collaborative thinking and interacting' are considered essential skills. He refers to young students of creativity as 'informational omnivores' that can be prepared to seek challenging situations that require change and creative unique solutions. Bandura (1991a), postulated the benefits of self efficacy and synergy in collaborative decision making. Livingston (2010) believes that every student should participate in team problem solving games and then from there develop the key skill of collaborative learning. Teachers must work out not how to 'teach' creativity but how to understand, harvest and build up the creativity that every student possess'.

Recent years have seen Business Schools' increasing their focus on 'employability skills' as a core part of their business curriculum.(Bridgestock 2009) This coupled with the notion that 'creative graduate' is essential in Business today, has led the author to explore why creativity is so often all but missing in the Business Curriculum. (Jackson 2008) Yet while creativity is recognised as an essential 'graduate attribute' in an increasingly competitive market. (Foresights 2030 Report) However, in reality creativity appears to be all but absent in most mainstream university curriculum, the reason reported by Jackson in 2014 is that University executives fail to see its importance.

Creativity flourishes in an open and free environment. Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). The whole notion of creativity is it grows, develops and flourishes without boundaries. This in itself is problematic as the UK education system is characterised by boundaries (normally in the business curriculum under the guise of highly prescriptive Programme Learning outcomes). Banaji and Burn, (2007) this is a contradiction in its self as when an individual is creative they are searching for a new, unique non prescribed outcome. However the stringent requirements of agencies such as the QAA who need to oversee the achievement of prescribed learning outcomes find creative programmes awkward and problematic. Jackson and Shaw (2006, 2015) It is hardly a surprise therefore to discover creativity is not an expressed criteria within the Business subject benchmarks believes that until creativity is expressed as an essential business skill, there is unlikely to be any significant change. (QAA subject benchmarks)

Simmons and Thompson, (2008) have described the current system of quality assurance in UK Universities as a 'machinery of targets, measurement and control which minimises creativity' As a result they believe that any attempts to achieve a creative pedagogy is doomed. Banaji and Burn, (2007) concur and add that the potential for creativity in the classroom is killed by standardization and stringent performance targets.

This research stemmed from the author teaching an undergraduate Creativity module. Following studying the module several students reported anecdotally that the module appeared to have positively influenced the way that they viewed and interpreted workplace scenarios and problems. They reported a change in their thoughts and actions and the students were attributing this to the creativity module. They reported both thinking and acting differently at work directly as a result of studying creative thinking, and had solved problems that had existed for some time. The author was curious about this and wished to discover whether or not this was a spurious occurrence.

The Research & the Creativity Intervention

This research focuses on tracking 3 cohort groups of Post Graduate Business students from a North Eastern UK university. The course offered is optional and in addition to the mainstream post graduate curriculum. The study captures the student experiences (thoughts, and feelings) through and beyond a creativity intervention and ascertains any potential influences/ changes that are evident back into the workplace in a longitudinal study which could in part be attributable to the course. The study aims to discover whether students perceive that attending the creativity intervention has impacted on their thoughts and actions once they are back at work. If so this would then provide some support for previously reported anecdotal evidence of students experiencing and reporting changes in their actions and behaviours at work following attending a creativity intervention. If this is the case it would suggest that the changes evident could at least in part be attributable to the creativity intervention. This study is based upon the collection of gathering rich qualitative data (Leavy 2015) at several points of the students' creative journey..

The creativity module examined is 4/5 days in length taught as a single block followed by an assessment, which requires students to design a creative unique 30 minute learning session which they then pilot on the peers and then can modify as a result of peer feedback. The idea behind the assessment is that the students experience a variety of different creative learning sessions and experience a wide range of creative scenarios and also have the opportunity to facilitate one of them.

The programme begins with a general introduction into what is creativity and why it may be an important skill both for the individual and also for business. It developed from the premise that all individuals have the capacity to be creative (Livingston 2010) however by the time students have

progressed through a traditional route of education, an adults creative capacity can be reduced to as low as 2% of its potential. (Robinson 2005)

The programme begins by exploring the definition and traditional problem solving. Followed by an opportunity to explore and experience Creative Problem Solving techniques, starting at the most basic, classic Brainstorming, before trying out variants such as Round Robin (in the participant group students follow one another to give an idea in order), Stop Start, (Brainstorm for 5 minutes then have 2 minutes silent thought) Brain Writing (a silent brainstorm where all ideas are written on post –it notes and made visible to the group) and Gordon Little variation. A variety of Human Resource, Business and Financial workplace scenarios are used as a focus topic in all exercises.

The next session is Attribute Listing - this requires students to break down everyday items into their component parts. For example a Torch, made of metal case, switch, battery, lighting device, glass front etc. Then students start thinking about how this could be modified, adapted and changed to be different, not only regular identifiable products, but radical and new outcomes are encouraged. Morphological analysis is then introduced and practice exercises undertaken.

Pictures, imaging, perception and metaphors are the next focus of study and how we perceive and view things and how this is unique to each individual. Students define themselves metaphorically based on the characteristics, nature and disposition. Images are then used as Force Fit Triggers, students then brainstorm and list all the ideas and characteristics of a given picture, its features, its function(s), the thoughts, and emotions generated by the images. The students are then given an unrelated problem to solve with their list of words, at this point wildest idea variant is encouraged.

Story telling (Polkinghorne 1995) as a creative technique is then introduced and practiced and the use of digital media combining images and music is explored to communicate key messages and emotions. The use of imaging and music are powerful tools and can be really effective as creative communication media by which to portray important messages. The use of colour and theming are all explored as it the use of shock and unpleasant images are sometimes used to create emotional responses. The use of unexpected and surprise media is encouraged and supported. Several creative play exercises are developed here. The emotions theme is further developed by introducing the creative technique of Synectics.

Synectics is a technique where inanimate objects can be 'brought to life' and by attributing them with human qualities we can observe and so we can analyse their characteristics. For example if a bottle of red wine is placed on a table in front of students; they are asked to initially describe and record their thoughts on the bottle of wine, they are encouraged to think about its features and attribute, and its positive and negative characteristics and associations etc. After this is recorded students are then they are asked to 'personify' it. The facilitator then says something like, 'If you were that bottle of wine, how would you feel sitting there?' Students then discuss and record their personified images and emotions. Several exercises of this nature are then undertaken before students are finally introduced to a synectic excursions, In the use of synectic excursions students are required to envisage and hypothetically 'go and experience another reality' describing and recoding their thoughts, feelings and emotions while in their realities. The 'reality' is usually another world such as 'hot sunny beach, perhaps on the moon, or in the arctic circle. Students then describe and record the imaginary environment that they are in. They are encouraged to record what the environment looks and feels like, what attributes if any it has or are associated with it, and also to record their feelings emotions whilst in their imaginary reality. This stage can last up to about 40 minutes in my experience, and whilst brainstorming the students should be left to work undisturbed. After which time when all the brainstorming ideas have been recorded, the facilitator will introduce an unrelated work problem that

they can address using the descriptions and language they have recorded.   This is the most advanced out of all the techniques use in the module and students need to be appropriately briefed and prepared for it. The extent of immersion will vary group to group but when these techniques are effectively facilitated the participation and extent of complete immersion in the task is both fascinating and enlightening to observe. Students must be carefully debriefed and given the opportunity to withdraw from any excursion at any point should they feel uncomfortable or vulnerable.

A session on the importance of the environment Csikszentmihalyi, M. 1996) and its influence and in creating an environment that is conducive to creativity and the creation of a creative culture is of prime importance, as without a supportive safe environment and the freedom to take risks creativity will fail. It is essential that students know that in the classroom trying anything new which is legal an non offensive to others is acceptable even if it is not a recognised practice. Finally the students are given instruction on how to design and deliver a short training session. Things such as aims and outcomes are covered, structure, participation and ARCS model (Keller 2008) are used to prompt students to the audience motivation etc. Finally the evaluation and feedback of the pilot session are considered and students are asked to design a training evaluation form (based on the Kirkpatrick (Kirkpatrick 1994) evaluation model or similar) which they will use to gain feedback on their individual sessions. The assessment is usually carried out a week after the end of the course giving students time to consider what they have learned and time to create a new learning session for which they will have communicated their learning aims and objectives.

The whole course is extremely interactive and practical, theoretical academic underpinning is included but as a secondary to the main purpose of participating in as many different creative sections as possible and experiencing as many of the creative techniques as possible.

Methods - Data Collection &Analysis

The research is Interpretive in nature, (Crotty1998) meaning that the context of the research is subjective and based on an individual's perception of their reality. The approach used is one of social construction which enables the creation of a safe learning environment to enhance creative potential. This environment will vary dependant on the nature of the participant individuals, their context, task and interactions. The method adopted in the research is phenomenological, this was chosen as it allows the author to observe and understand the social interactions present and record the students experience, both acknowledging and considering their thoughts and feelings. Data is collected before, during and after the intervention. Phenomenology allows the author to consider other factors that may impact on human thoughts and behaviours such as the environment, the exercises undertaken and the teaching aids that are utilised during the course. This is an important consideration in the research. Phenomenology has been widely used by other authors observing similar scenarios in the literature. (Klienman 2008, Jackson 2008, 2014).

A key consideration in this type of research is the role of the author/facilitator, and the influence of author in the research. Wertz (2011) believes it is important to evaluate the effects of the researchers' values, emotions and experiences and acknowledge their impact on the participant outcomes. He goes on to say that where the experience/ intervention (in this case) intends to change the status quo and is doing so is using an unequal balance of power and resource, (ie knowledge and techniques and exercises are provided and taught by the researcher) and where it is central to change it is termed 'radically relational' based research. Ponterotto (2005) acknowledges that often the researcher is key in bringing about that shift. The author believes that the students are subject to the influence her own passion and a belief that Creativity is a massively overlooked area in business and one that is largely omitted from mainstream curricular. The ethical concept of University staff using students for

research whilst not unusual is worthy of consideration. All research in this case is voluntary and additional to their Postgraduate programme of study. All research participants had given their consent and the research was conducted in line with ethical standards. (Ethical research guidelines, University of Sunderland)

The knowledge acquired in this type of research is socially constructed rather than objectively determined (Carson et al., 2001, p.5) and comes from the thoughts and observations of both the researcher and the participants. (Hirschman, 1985, Berger and Luckman, 1967, p. 3: in Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Its key characteristic is that it is based upon an individuals' 'social reality,' which results in it being highly subjective and takes many forms (multiples). Therefore any social reality experiment is affected by those students who participate in the research and or those such as facilitators that can manipulate the research in any way. This type of research involves uses an 'interpretive understanding' of the social phenomena it represents (Collis and Hussey 2014). Therefore the act of investigating a social reality is receptive to capturing the meanings of social interactions' not just the interaction itself (Black 2006). This requires the researcher to make sense of what is perceived not just what is obviously visible and apparent, including the researcher's perceptions and views of the reality.

Data has been collected in the first instance via, a series of qualitative questions put to student participants as an open questionnaire. The questions selected were open ended and space was left to encourage respondents to provide detailed, rich data responses. The questionnaire addressed the key areas of interest in the research such as 'what did they understand by the term creativity' Did they believe they were creative? Had they studied creativity before? Did they believe creativity was inherent or taught? Is creativity important in Business? If so how and Why? And did they believe that creativity should be in the mainstream business curriculum or as an additional option to add on?

In line with our University Code of Ethics, the above questions were put to the students before commencing the course along with and written explanation of the research, a University ethical consent form and the author discussed the ethical considerations of the research fully prior to engagement. Participation as stated above was voluntary and in no way connected with the current Masters study Programme. Home contact details were also sought along with their private email address as the final longitudinal stage of the research is undertaken at least 6 months after they have returned to the workplace. In addition to this daily feedback evaluation forms asking about the specific creative techniques used during that day were used, names were supplied so that all responses could be tracked for specific students from beginning to end. At the end of the intervention another questionnaire was issued that asked similar questions to the initial pre-course questionnaire to track any shifts or changes in opinion as a result in their participation in the course.

Initial Findings

Currently the author has recently undertaken initial thematic analysis on the 3 cohorts of data in line with the research aims. Initial results are suggesting that students are reporting a shift in their attitudes towards creativity. Several reported prior to the course that they initially didn't believe it was necessary for creativity to be part of a mainstream business curriculum, however having undertaken the experience majority said it should definitely be part of the mainstream business curriculum. Only 1 student out of the final cohort believed it should be an optional bolt on extra-curricular activity. Others said they did not believe they were creative but had discovered that with the right supportive environment that they could be creative. The full and final conclusions will not really

be known until after the author does the workplace follow up interviews later this summer. However if it finds support for the proposition that creativity should be part of the mainstream curriculum it will add support to several other key writers who are coming to the same conclusions.

Despite being a relatively small-scale single university study, the research will provide rich details of the experience of a creativity intervention on business students. To the authors knowledge no other longitudinal study of this nature exists and it is anticipated that this will constitute a small contribution to existing knowledge. This is the novel element evaluating the longitudinal impacts of the intervention if such effects exist. If as the author suspects, the results do provide support for added value in the workplace and the inclusion of creativity in mainstream business. The study can then join the growing list of authors who writing is calling for creativity to become a mainstream element in the curriculum (Foresights 2015).

Key words – Creativity, Higher Education, Business Curriculum, Personal Creativity, Organisational Creativity

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