Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice

Volume 12
Issue 4 *TL Forum 2015: Teaching and learning uncapped*

Article 3

2015

Disembodied creativity: The role of action research in moderating educator expectations of marketing and public relations students

Helen Fordham
The University of Notre Dame

Recommended Citation

Fordham, H. (2015). Disembodied creativity: The role of action research in moderating educator expectations of marketing and public relations students. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 12*(4). https://doi.org/10.53761/1.12.4.3

Disembodied creativity: The role of action research in moderating educator expectations of marketing and public relations students

Abstract

This paper explores the experience of a communications educator who instigated an action research project in a third year marketing and public relations cohort, to investigate levels of engagement with higher order critical thinking and behaviours associated with creativity. A qualitative methodology was used to 1) identify the key attributes, skills and behaviours of creativity in learning and working environments; 2) invite students to critically reflect upon and assess their own creative abilities; and 3) analyse the implications of the questionnaire data for students, teaching practice and curriculum design. The action research project exposed divergent views of creativity between the students and the educator and this perception gap offers insight into McCorkle et al's (2007) conclusion that students' individual creative abilities are inadequately developed for the workplace.

Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice

Volume 12
Issue 4 *TL Forum 2015: Teaching and learning uncapped*

Article 3

2015

Disembodied creativity: The role of action research in moderating educator expectations of marketing and public relations students

Helen Fordham
The University of Notre Dame

Disembodied creativity: The role of action research in moderating educator expectations of marketing and public relations students

Abstract

This paper explores the experience of a communications educator who instigated an action research project in a third year marketing and public relations cohort, to investigate levels of engagement with higher order critical thinking and behaviours associated with creativity. A qualitative methodology was used to 1) identify the key attributes, skills and behaviours of creativity in learning and working environments; 2) invite students to critically reflect upon and assess their own creative abilities; and 3) analyse the implications of the questionnaire data for students, teaching practice and curriculum design. The action research project exposed divergent views of creativity between the students and the educator and this perception gap offers insight into McCorkle et al's (2007) conclusion that students' individual creative abilities are inadequately developed for the workplace.

Introduction

Creativity is an important mindset in business graduates for two reasons. First, a significant body of research links global business survival and profitability, leadership, and employee innovation to creativity (Amabile 1996; Driver 2001; McIntyre, Hite, Rickard 2004; Shalley, Zhou & Oldham 2004; Zhou, Shin & Cannella 2008; Diliello, Houghton & Dawley 2011; Schlee & Harich 2014). Second, creativity is an important life skill and it has been associated with personal characteristics like adaptability and robustness which, according to Palmer (2000), are "critical success factor[s] for students entering an increasingly diverse, rapidly changing, multi-national workplace" (Driver, 2001, p. 29). Yet, despite this ample research indicating creativity is valuable in creating a competitive advantage and enabling individual success in the global knowledge economy, there are still industry concerns about how adequately individual student's creative abilities are developed for the workplace (McCorkle, Payan, Reardon & Kling, 2007).

In considering how well teaching practices can strengthen creative performances in classrooms, this paper details an action research project that investigates creative and critical thinking among an undergraduate cohort of marketing and public relations students in the School of Business, The University of Notre Dame Australia. In particular this study: 1) considers how business students understand creativity; 2) examines whether the performance of creativity can be enhanced through individual critical reflection on the nature and value of creativity; and 3) analyses how student's self-assessment data can extend teaching practice and improve curriculum design so business students can better meet industry expectations of creative skills.

Literature review

Inherent in the challenges of teaching or strengthening creativity among business students is the permeability of the term creativity, which is linked to a complex array of concepts, ideas and contexts. In the arts, creativity is understood as original, novel or imaginative performances in a range of mediums. In education is it is associated with the ability to "question, analyse, debate, evaluate, interpret, synthesize, compare evidence and communicate" (Humphreys, 2014, p. 64). Psychology understands creativity as a more generalised life skill that helps people to innovate and problem-solve in daily life and it is considered a part of the personal resilience that is expressed in Maslow's (1970) theorisation that the "creative individual is a fulfilled one; and one whose life is characterized by 'agency' – the capacity to take control and make something of it" (Craft 2003, p. 114). In a business context, the idea of creativity has been grounded in cognitive and psychological factors, including critical thinking (Driver, 2001; Schlee & Harich, 2014), power (Gervais, Guinote, Allen & Slabu, 2012), problem-solving (Titus 2007; McCorkle et al., 2007; Fontenot 1992); competition (De Tienne & Chandler, 2004), and innovation and invention (Amabile, 1997; Shalley, Zou & Oldham 2004).

Diliello, Houghton and Dawley (2011) — summarising a range of theorists — defined creativity as "the process of forming novel, useful and appropriate ideas". This conceptualisation of creativity as a process — rather than an intuitive act of genius or as a specific outcome — is useful because it identifies the attributes, behaviours and skills required for creative performance, and positions creativity as a learned skill that can be amplified or reduced by training, education and environment (McCorkle et al., 2007; McWilliam & Dawson, 2008; Amabile & Pillemer, 2012; Schlee & Harich, 2014). The idea of creativity as a learned practice has also seen the development of models which identify the constituent skills and mindsets associated with creativity. The *Torrance Test of Creative Thinking* (TTCT) defined creativity as a problem-solving activity and listed four dimensions that enable divergent thinking, including 1) elaboration, 2) flexibility, 3)

fluency and 4) originality (McCorkle et al., 2007, p. 257). Miller's (2009) *Cognitive Processes Associated with Creativity* (CPAC) model also links creativity to analogical reasoning, brainstorming, flow, imagery, incubation and perspective-taking. Titus' (2007) *Creative Marketing Breakthrough* (CMB) model lists cognitive flexibility and disciplinary knowledge as central to creative breakthroughs and the ability to develop new ideas.

Understanding creativity as a learned process does not preclude conceptualisations of creativity connected to personal characteristics and intrinsic motivations. Zhou, Shin and Cannella (2008) found curiosity, interest and motivation are central to the performance of creativity. Amabile (1997, p. 43) recognised, that to some extent, degrees of creativity rely on personality characteristics "related to independence, self-discipline, orientation towards risk-taking, tolerance for ambiguity, perseverance in the face of frustration, and a relative lack of concern for social approval".

External factors and extrinsic motivators also shape creativity. Driver (2001) concluded that "environments that welcome creative ideas without exerting control or that encourage risk-taking and questioning of assumptions" invite creativity (p. 29). Amabile (1997) also noted that "reward and recognition for creative ideas, clearly defined overall project goals and frequent constructive feedback" enables creativity (p. 45). Challenging goals, "structured group interaction; autonomy; and a supportive environment", also foster creativity and innovation in groups (Paulus, 2000, p. 253), and creativity can be affected by job design, relationships with colleagues and supervisors, anticipated evaluation, and reward systems.

Methodology

Action research enables reflection upon real world problems in order to devise contextualised and customised solutions that empower the educator. According to Hine and Lavery (2014), action research facilitates the development of a systematic inquiry into an educator's practice through the process of observe, reflect, act, as well as affecting "positive change" in teaching (p. 1-2). Action research generates new knowledge and can create more effective learning environments. It does, however, have a number of disadvantages including the time it takes to conduct research as well as issues of objectivity. Hine and Lavery (2014) noted that even with the iterative process of action research, unexamined or unconscious assumptions may infect the research.

Central to constructing this action research project was the goal of helping third year students to understand industry expectations of creativity. The project sought to explore and explain a perceived absence of creative and critical thinking in a selected cohort of students enrolled in marketing and public relations. By considering student views on creativity and comparing them to educator expectations, it was anticipated that the resulting data would produce insights into teaching practice and curriculum design.

Student attitudes and views about creativity were identified through the administration of a baseline questionnaire. The questionnaire was followed by a classroom presentation, which outlined the different types of creativity and the characteristics and mindsets associated with creativity. The *Torrance Test of Creative Thinking* (TTCT) model and the *5 + 1 Behaviors of Innovative Thinking* proposed by Miller and Wedell-Wedellsborg (2013) were used to demonstrate that creativity could be a learned process, and that it was associated with specific forms of critical and reflective thinking and problem-solving that could be replicated.

Study participants were then asked to apply these behaviours and thinking patterns in a group activity that involved devising a social media campaign for a company. The group activity was based upon the unit's key assessment item and it thereby enabled students to consciously apply to a real outcome the processes and attributes of creativity presented in the project lecture. At the conclusion of the group work, the students completed a second questionnaire, in which they were invited to reconsider their initial self-assessment, as well as provide feedback on the ways in which the attributes of creativity generally could be strengthened in a learning environment.

As an action research study, the problem definition and data collection was shaped by the researcher's epistemological position. In this case, the educator had considerable media and communications experience, which had led to the view that creativity was a skill set grounded in research, critical thinking, applied problem-solving, and the ability to adapt concepts, ideas and outcomes in different contexts. For the educator, these skills implicitly required students to be intellectually curious enough to read extensively in order to gather and associate ideas and generate options. It was also expected that students needed to be sufficiently motivated to engage in a process of critically rethinking how ideas can be re-versioned or reformatted for different contexts or problems. Anecdotally, the educator had noticed an absence of associative, critical and speculative thinking in the marketing and PR students. This study, therefore, provided a useful opportunity to interrogate the educator's teaching practice, assumptions and expectations about the degree and nature of student's creative performance.

A qualitative approach was adopted to data collection. It was anticipated that student comments and observations would produce a richer data set and make visible the degree of divergence or correlation between teacher and student expectations of creativity. It was also anticipated that open ended questions would encourage students to consider their own assumptions and ideas about creativity as a first step towards more consciously embodying those skills and attributes. A combination of closed and open ended questions was developed and the first question of the pre-questionnaire invited students to consider what they understood the term creativity to mean. Diagram 1 summarises the responses.

Diagram 1: Pre-question: What do you think creativity means?

Develop ideas
Solve problems
Think outside the box
Go against the norm
Surprise people with fresh ideas
Express yourself
Innate sense of freedom of thinking, viewing and expressing
Able to think for yourself
Use imagination
Be inventive
Create something out of nothing that has meaning
Think laterally
Be outgoing
Produce art, music that draws on emption and provides meaning and interprets ideas
Build a different product
Find or look at something in a way that has not been thought of before
Express imagination in an unusual or unique way
Ability to create something, art, poem, song, business venture

Originality Come up with unique ideas and processes Explore outside your comfort zone Ingenuity Different, untold, exciting, wonderful, colourful something to share

Students were also asked if they identified as creative and below is a summary of the pre-question responses.

Diagram 2: Pre-questions on identifying as creative

Pre-question	Yes	No	Sometimes
Do you think you are creative?	14	1	4
Do you think creativity is important to your career?	19	--	--
In what way is creativity important?			
Why did you choose to enroll in a business degree?			

A summary of the post-question responses below make it evident that students did not significantly change their minds about creativity as a result of the research project, although respondents were divided over whether consciously reflecting upon creativity as a process served to strengthen the skills and mindsets associated with creativity.

Diagram 3: Post-question responses

Post-question	Yes	No	Sometimes	No response
Do you think you are creative?	15	1	2	1
Do you think working in a group makes you more creative?	18	1		
Do you think consciously considering the attributes of creative mindsets has improved your sense of your own creativity?	11	7	1	

Students were also asked for suggestions on how the classroom environment could be more supportive of student creativity. The responses are summarized below and indicate a wide variety of factors.

Diagram 4: Ways learning environments could be made more supportive

What are some of the ways learning environments could be made more supportive of the attributes of creativity discussed in the class today?	More group work Less group work Open class discussions Remove florescent lights Flexibility Encourage physical movement between work spaces Self-belief Change the composition of the groups Role playing Go outside Do things in your own time Remove restrictions (deadlines or to show mastery of knowledge.)

This research had three hypotheses. Research by McIntyre et al. (2003) and McCorkle et al. (2007) indicate that while Marketing students generally consider themselves more creative than their Accounting and Management peers, their scores, in fact, are not very different. It was, therefore, anticipated that the students in the Marketing and Public Relations Class would think of themselves as creative.

Amabile (1997; 2012) also asserted that training and education strengthened creativity in students. It was therefore expected that critical reflection by students upon the attributes of creativity would constitute a form of training, so it was anticipated that the students would consider themselves the same or more creative at the end of the presentation and activity.

Finally it was anticipated that the students would find the classroom environment insufficiently supportive of creative output, primarily because studies by McCorkle et al. (2007) found that students did not believe that creativity was rewarded in assessment items.

Findings

The baseline questionnaire demonstrates that students define creativity broadly, including as a process and an outcome, as well as intrinsically related to ways of thinking and personal temperament, and extrinsically to rewards. Some students defined creativity as producing a "poem, a game, a song, a business venture" while others described it as "thinking outside of the box" or going "against the norm" or "think[ing] differently." The term was repeatedly described as meaning original, novelty, freedom, personal expression and the idea of making meaning.

Terms like imagination, innovation and social change were also used. One student explicitly stated that creativity was about solving problems and another linked creativity to power, noting that she/he would be more empowered by creativity to make meaning of his/her life. Just over 63 percent of the respondents identified themselves as creative or somewhat creative in the pre-lecture questions and this did not change with the lecture and group discussion, although they acknowledged that critically reflecting upon the attributes of creativity strengthened their own sense that they were creative. Indeed, one respondent observed that the lecture and group work had made "me consider more elements as creativity, not just arts and music." The 21 percent who did not think of themselves as creative in the baseline questionnaire also noted that the critical reflection enabled by the research activity had not led them to change their minds in their assessment of their own capabilities. The three respondents who expressed ambivalence and uncertainty in the initial questionnaire about their creativity also did not change their minds. One student did not think creativity could be learned, preferring to see it as an innate and intrinsic characteristic. The same student noted, however, that the lecture and group work had made him/her think about the attributes of creativity. Another respondent felt that he/she was creative but "not in the way as presented in the slides." Thinking about creativity was not helpful for everyone. One participant wrote that consciously considering the attributes of creativity "ruins the natural process by over-analysing it" and another indicated that thinking about creativity "just made things more difficult."

Consistent with the research by McCorkle et al. (2007), all respondents acknowledged that the disciplines of marketing and public relations require creativity. Specifically in a work context, the students understood creativity as providing solutions, interpreting information, finding unique ideas and being divergent from others – which they associated with providing a competitive edge. In this sense, creativity is clearly seen as a cognitive and innovating process, which is consistent

with the educator's expectations of creativity. Other students, however, understood creativity as an intrinsic attribute or way of viewing the world that is valuable because it will make their life and work more interesting and meaningful.

The majority of the project respondents were enrolled in a business degree majoring in marketing and public relations, and they indicated that they saw a business degree as a useful qualification that would broaden their career options. Indeed, for some respondents their business degree would enable them to monetise the things that they really like to do, or to turn creative hobbies into profitable businesses. One respondent indicated that he/she was not "creative enough to do something like fashion design so instead would like to work in the business side of fashion."

In considering the extrinsic motivations and conditions that enable creativity in classrooms, 15 of the respondents indicated that working in groups helped to make them feel more creative. Brainstorming ideas was considered the most valuable aspect of group work. Four respondents, however, made a distinction between good and bad groups and that a bad, "ungenerous" and closed group could equally stifle creativity.

Respondents made several suggestions about ways learning environments could be made more supportive of creativity. Twelve respondents saw talking through issues in small groups as an enabler of creativity. By contrast, however, one respondent wanted less group work and more general class discussion and an opportunity to rotate group members. Three respondents talked about flexibility and doing "things" in their own time and being able to move around or go outside. One respondent noted learning environments could be made more supportive of creativity "by keeping things open ended, not too restrictive or too put on the spot/rigid." Another respondent who identified as creative indicated that he/she "felt pushed to the edge" by the assessment items and that deadlines stifled his/her creativity.

Discussion

In reviewing the findings it is evident that the term creativity has become ubiquitous and that there are widely divergent expectations of what constitutes creativity. The students' definition of creativity is broad and can be seen to support Kerry Unsworth's (2001) argument that creativity cannot be spoken about in a universalised way. Most of the definitions provided by the study's participants identified aspects of cognitive, educative, intrinsic, process and output creativity, and the students clearly recognise its value in generating ideas. Many of the students also linked creativity to life skills.

There were some interesting paradoxes, however, in the findings. Some of the students saw creativity as intrinsic to personality and a part of expressing themselves, yet they did not enumerate personal attributes like "independence, self-discipline, orientation towards risk-taking, tolerance for ambiguity, perseverance in the face of frustration, and a relative lack of concern for social approval" which Amabile (1997, p. 43) has associated with creativity. Further, while some of the students consciously linked creativity to thinking and problem-solving, the educator noted that students did not consistently display the cognitive behaviors generally affiliated with higher-order thinking skills in the classroom. Smith (2014, p. 386) defined these skills as the "deliberative, reflective cognitive activities we undertake to achieve our goals" which rely on "perception, attention, memory, and affect", and are linked to critical thinking, intelligence, reasoning, judgment, problem-solving, and design.

The absence of these behaviours in the classroom was puzzling particularly since the unit content had been reviewed to introduce assessments and activities that strengthened problem-solving and analytical and interpretative skills, which the CCT model identified as central to creative performance. These adaptations to the curriculum included collaborative group assignments, which require the sharing and discussion of ideas; individual class presentations of readings, in an effort to get students to engage with and compare and contrast ideas; and the use of problem-solving scenarios to promote adaptable thinking. Classroom behaviours indicate that these adaptations to the curriculum achieved only limited success.

Of particular concern was the lack of engagement with the course readings by the relevant dates, which significantly impacted upon the vibrancy and usefulness of class discussions in meeting unit outcomes. The educator, as a practitioner scholar, found this worrisome since a primary function for marketing and PR practitioners is the creation of connections across different domains of knowledge — particularly culture — to produce original, novel ideas or innovate in the application of ideas. It is class discussions that facilitate the sharing and communication of ideas and make visible the divergent perspectives essential to creativity. Indeed, according to research by Rudsberg, Ohman and Ostman (2013, p. 394), classroom discussions are crucial to learning because they make visible student learning processes and force them to specify the conditions for their assertions, as well as find "new solutions". The authors argue that classroom discussions demonstrate how well students respond to, or incorporate the views of others into their arguments, and since creativity is increasingly seen as a collaborative and dialogic process, classroom participation can clearly be identified as one important indicator of creative behaviours.

Research indicates engagement with classroom discussions is important in assessing creativity for several reasons. Bustillo (2010) saw student discussions as indications of active learning, which produces more engaged students ready for the knowledge economy. Bustillo notes that "… active learning makes the student carry out an individual intellectual effort that permits a better learning of a particular subject, beyond the simple activity consisting in absorbing information dealt by the classroom instructor" (p. 2). Burch (1999) also linked participation and engagement in class discussions to reflective thinking, which is essential to critical thinking and creative thought. Burch concluded, however, that some students resist classroom engagement for a variety of complex reasons including distrust of the teacher or other students. Aboudan (2011) has also suggested that students become disengaged and non-participatory in classroom conversations because they are bored with the content.

Not all students in the cohort demonstrated behaviours that indicated a lack of engagement with the unit content. However, the lack of critical and associative thinking was visible in many of the participants. In considering the absence of the attitudes, behaviours and higher-order thinking skills associated with the performance of creativity, it is important to acknowledge that there are a variety of factors, beyond the classroom, that may also shape this cohort's approach to learning and responses to the study. These include outcomes-focused secondary education, which can encourage a procedural and perhaps uncritical approach to learning; varying levels of individual commitment to the student's choice of degree; student employment workloads in excess of 25 hours a week; and a growing expectation of customised learning, which enables students to study and engage with content at their own convenience. These factors can drive a particularly individual, instrumental and utilitarian – rather than reflective – approach to learning. Moreover, it is possible that since the study was administered early in the semester the behaviours in the classroom were also shaped by the fact that some students may not have known each other and were therefore more cautious about speaking up in class. The students may also not have been clear at this stage of the semester about the unit content or what was expected of them, particularly

since there tends to be high levels of absenteeism in the first few weeks of semester as students finalise their enrolments.

In observing the absence of behaviours associated with creativity, even as the data shows that students clearly think of themselves as creative, it is worth considering the nature of the student demographic within the School of Business. There is a diversity of attitudes and capabilities, but anecdotally there is ample evidence to suggest that the Business degree draws students who, while unsure of their career direction, seek to study something that will enhance their employment opportunities. This assessment is supported by Bennett's 2004 study which identified "financial and tangible" benefits as the primary reason students enrolled in Business degrees. It is also supported by a 2008 study by Heath, Rothon and Kilpi, who concluded that studying applied subjects like business is a 'sign of "risk-aversion"' (quoted by Pasztor, 2011, p. 710). They also noted that the preference for a more vocational degree like business may be driven by the "discriminatory practices . . . young people face at entry into the labour market" (p. 710). It is, therefore, possible to conclude that while creativity requires risk-taking and adaptable mind-sets, the students undertaking a business degree, in fact, may be somewhat risk adverse and procedural in their approach, in comparison to other disciplines, even those students in marketing and public relations.

Observations of the group interactions during the action research class activity tend to support the view that some students have an uncritical view of creativity. The project participants, rather than applying the Miller Wedell-Wedellsborg behaviours of innovation to brainstorm ideas about the social media campaign, instead focused upon issues like: group formation, selection of client projects and the difficulties of finding mutually convenient meeting times. In a follow-up conversation with the class it emerged that three of the six groups had not finalised their client project. These groups had not met with their client or completed any detailed research on the digital presence of the company. Given that the assignment is an exercise in situated creativity and applied critical thinking to a particular problem, this would have significantly impeded the ability of the research groups to apply the behaviours and stages of innovation in order to consider their options. Students were required to have finalised their projects by week four and this is the reason the research questions were administered in this week. It was also the time that was deemed late enough in the semester for students to have engaged with the core ideas and to have selected the group project, but not so late that that the research project interfered with preparations for the mid-semester test or when students had become overwhelmed with their work loads.

Despite the consideration given to timing the project to achieve the most representative outcome, student reception to the proposed action research project was unenthusiastic. Overall, while 19 of the 25 eligible students enrolled in the unit agreed to participate in the study, the response to the request for participation could be described, at best, as disinterested compliance. Moreover, in observing the students during the administration of the questionnaire the educator reported that many participants continued conversations with each other about unrelated issues while filling in the questions, and one student "googled" the term creativity in order to complete the questionnaire. The extent of the disinterest in the research project is probably best exemplified by the fact that none of the students sought further details about the research outcomes.

Zuber-Skerritt (2002) identified reluctance to participate as one of the several risks associated with action research, and he suggests that this reluctance is based upon a perception by students that involvement involves additional work. Efforts were made to mitigate this risk by incorporating the lecture on creativity into the unit curriculum. Regardless of whether students agreed to fill in the

pre-and post-lecture questionnaires, they were still required to listen to the lecture because it would provide them with some insights into how to approach their group assessment item.

While this research demonstrates that critical reflection upon the attributes of creativity strengthened some participants' perception of themselves as creative — which is clearly important in fostering creative confidence in individuals — it can be concluded that the students only narrowly and mechanistically engaged with the term "creative." They did not identify the characteristics and cognitive skills associated with the higher-order thinking that is integral to creativity — even after the lecture and activity — but rather defined it as simply divergent thinking or as many of them noted "thinking outside of the box." Another possibility for the narrow engagement with the research project and its reflections on creativity is that without past experiences to develop and refine an appreciation of the role and nature of creativity, the students only engaged with the idea of being creative in a generalised or decontextualised way; seeing it as an aspirational identity or abstract thing to know rather than as an embodied skill set. This may explain the perception gap between students seeing themselves as creative, yet simultaneously unable to demonstrate the behaviours or higher-order thinking skills that are associated with creativity.

This gap in how creativity is spoken about and how it is enacted in a classroom is potentially a part of broader conversations in higher education about how well business schools prepare students for the real world (Muff, 2015; Tanyel, Mitchel & McAlum, 1999; Raymond, 1993). Muff noted "that a Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC) survey reveals that graduating students see little connection between what is important to succeed in business and what is taught in business schools" (p. 1). Ford (2013, p. 404) argued that business schools do not sufficiently emphasise thinking skills because they have become too "skills centric" in the process of making students work-ready. In similar research, Culkin and Mallik (2011) also argued that business schools seek to supply work-ready graduates but they are not helping students to be entrepreneurial. Central to entrepreneurship is critical and creative thinking and the authors argue that in a global dynamic business environment, businesses are placing pressure on business schools to produce more "flexible, creative, opportunity seeking, achievement orientated" workers (p. 356).

The results of this research project affirmed the three hypotheses proposed for this study. Students in marketing and public relations consider themselves creative, and the process of reflecting upon the attributes of creativity strengthened the students' own sense that they were creative. Students also felt that the classroom and assessment items did not support a creative environment. Indeed, it is clear from the feedback that some of the students do not see the assessment items as learning opportunities to develop their critical skills, but rather as impediments to creativity.

Cumulatively this research shows that students' generalised understanding of the term creativity shapes the nature of their engagement with both the curriculum content and the classroom environment. The data suggests that students in this small cohort may have had a disembodied or decontextualised sense of creativity that positions creativity as an inherent or intrinsic identity, or as an abstracted idea. These results may help to explain the assessment by McCorkle, Payan, Reardon and Kling (2007) who argued that while marketing students believe that creativity is important, they did not appear to be more "creative than other business students or non-business students" (p. 254). Similarly Titus (2000), McIntyre, Hite and Rickard (2003), and Wang, Peck and Chern (2010) found that marketing students thought of themselves as more creative than other business disciplines, even though they scored lower in the dimensions of creativity, and in particular in attributes like fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration.

Conclusion

This study has several limitations. The small cohort size and single research site means the findings cannot be seen as widely indicative, and the practical difficulties students experienced in obtaining a client by the deadline clearly shaped their creative performance during this research activity. However, as a piece of qualitative phenomenological research into an educator's expectations and experiences, some meaningful observations may still be made. This action research project has made evident that the absence of observable higher-order thinking and creative skills in the classroom doesn't mean that the students do not possess these abilities. Indeed, it is evident that the students think of themselves as creative, understand that it is linked to critical thinking and theoretically know that creativity is important to their careers.

However, they have not as yet embodied these behaviours and mindsets. Embodied learning occurs when students engage with knowledge in order to discover for themselves what is documented by others. The process of "observing and fine tuning" their own perceptions introduces focus, intention and motivation to the process of learning, and this grounds a student's knowledge in their own experience and context. Embodied learning is process that connects the student to the emotion that enables a genuine shift in perceptions (Gieser, 2008, p. 299). Since the process of embodiment occurs as individuals apply knowledge and ground learning in concrete experiences, it is not unreasonable that students demonstrate a generalised or decontextualised sense of the term. This action research finding therefore suggests that practitioner/educators need to carefully negotiate the gap between industry expectations of creativity and the student performance of creativity in a classroom setting, and that developing a curriculum that makes explicit the links between class room activities and higher-order thinking skills, creative performance and industry expectations is one way to reconcile these differences.

Acknowledgements

Helen Fordham lectures in Media and Communications at the University of Western Australia and is an Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Notre Dame Australia's School of Arts and Sciences. She can be contacted on helen.fordham@uwa.edu.au. She would like to acknowledge the assistance of Dr Ainslie Robinson, Professor Chris Doepel, Professor Greg Moore and Professor Barbara Milech in the preparation of this article.

References

Aboudan, R. 2011. Engage them, don't enrage them - student voices and what it takes to participate. *English Language Teaching*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 128-134. http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/elt/article/viewFile/9673/6921

Amabile, T M 1997. Motivating creativity in organisations: On doing what you love and loving what you do. *California Management Review*, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 39-58. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41165921

Amabile, T M & Pillemer, J 2012. Perspectives on the social psychology of creativity. *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 3-15. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/jocb.001

Bennett, R 2004. Students' motives for enrolling on business degrees in a post-1992 university. *The International Journal of Educational Management,* vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 25-36. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09513540410512127

Bodell, L 2014. Soft skills for the future. *Global HRD Regional Newsletter,* 8 March, pp. 35-38. https://www.td.org/Publications/Newsletters/Global-HRD-Newsletter-Middle-East/Soft-Skills-for-the-Future

Burch, B C 1999. When students (who are preservice teachers) don't want to engage. *Journal of Teacher Education,* vol. 50, no. 3, pp. 165-172. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/002248719905000302

Bustillo, R. 2010. Strategies to enhance discussion and cooperative learning among economics and business undergraduate students. *Social Science Research Network*, 15 July. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1676881

Clapham, M D 1997. Ideational skills training: A key element in creativity training programs. *Creativity Research Journal*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 33-44. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15326934crj1001_4

Craft, A 2003. The limits to creativity in education: Dilemmas for the educator. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, vol. 51, no. 2 June, pp. 113-127. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-8527.t01-1-00229

Culkin, N & Mallick, S 2011. Producing work-ready graduates: The role of the entrepreneurial university. *International Journal of Market Research*, vol. 53, no. 3, pp. 347-368. https://www.mrs.org.uk/ijmr_article/article/94370

Diliello, T C, Houghton, J D & Dawley, D 2011. Narrowing the creativity gap: The moderating effects of perceived support for creativity. *The Journal of Psychology*, vol. 145, no. 3, pp. 151-172. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2010.548412

Dineen, R, Samuel, E & Livesey, K 2005. The promotion of creativity in learners: Theory and practice. *Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education,* vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 155-172. http://dx.doi.org/155-172. 10.1386/adch.4.3.155/1

Driver, M 2001. Fostering creativity in business education: Developing creative classroom environments to provide students with critical workplace competencies. *Journal of Education for Business*, vol 77, no. 1, pp. 28-33. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08832320109599667

Ewers, J E 2007. No ideas? You're not alone. *U.S. News and World Report*, 18 June, p. 50-52. http://www.creativeclass.com/_v3/article_library/media/113_-_no_ideas__you__re_not_alone.pdf

Ford, G F 2013. Assessing business student thinking skills. *Journal of Management Education*, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 384-411. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1052562913489028

Fontenot, N 1992. Effects of training in creativity and creative problem finding upon business people. *The Journal of Social Psychology,* vol. 133, no. 1, pp. 11-22. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00224545.1993.9712114

Gervais, S J, Guinote, A, Allen, J. & Slabu, L 2013. Power increases situated creativity. *Social Influence*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 294-311. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15534510.2012.742457

Gieser, T 2008. Embodiment, emotion and empathy: A phenomenological approach to apprenticeship learning. *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp 299-318. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1463499608093816

Hine, G S C & Lavery, S D 2014. The importance of action research in teacher education programs: Three testimonies. In *Transformative, Innovative and Engaging*. Proceedings of the 23rd Annual Teaching Learning Forum, 30-31 January. Perth: The University of Western Australia. http://ctl.curtin.edu.au/professional_development/conferences/tlf/tlf2014/refereed/hine.pdf

Hughes, G D 2003. Add creativity to your decision making processes. *Journal for Quality and Participation*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 5-13. http://asq.org/pub/jqp/past/2003/summer/jqpSM03ughes.pdf

Humphreys, D 2014. Employment outcomes in the four year sector: The value of liberal arts degrees. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, vol. 46, no. 3. pp. 64-66. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2014.910056

Koshy, V 2010. *Action research for improving educational practice: A step-by-step guide*. London: SAGE.

Massey, A 2005. Developing creativity for the world of work: A case study. *Art, Design, Communication in Higher Education*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 17-30. http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/adch.4.1.17/1

McCorkle, D E, Payan, J M, Reardon, J & Kling, N D 2007. Perceptions and reality: Creativity in the marketing classroom. *Journal of Marketing Education,* vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 254-261. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0273475307306892

McIntyre, F S, Hite, R E & Rickard, M K 2003. Individual characteristics and creativity in the marketing classroom: Exploratory insights. *Journal of Marketing Education,* vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 143-149. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0273475303254014

McWilliam, E & Dawson, S 2008. Teaching for creativity: Towards sustainable and replicable pedagogical practice. *Higher Education*, vol. 56, no. 6, pp. 633-643. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10734-008-9115-7

Miller, P & Wedell-Wedellsborg, T 2013. *Innovation: Business as usual*. Boston MA: Harvard Business Review Press.

Muff, K 2012. Are business schools doing their job? *The Journal of Management Development*, vol. 31, no. 7, pp. 648- 662. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02621711211243854

Pasztor, A 2011. Imagined futures: Why business studies dominate the higher education choices of second-generation Turks in the Netherlands. *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 704-717. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.589521

Paulus, P B 2000. Groups, teams and creativity: The creative potential of idea-generating groups. *Applied Psychology,* vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 237-262. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1464-0597.00013

Quast, L 2011. Workers of the future will need different skills than in the past. Are you ready? *Forbes*, 12 December. http://www.forbes.com/sites/lisaquast/2011/12/12/workers-of-the-future-will-need-different-skills-than-in-the-past-are-you-ready/

Raymond, M A, McNabb, D E & Matthaei, C F 1993. Preparing graduates for the workforce: The role of business education. *Journal of Education For Business*, vol. 68, no. 4, pp. 202-206. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08832323.1993.10117613

Rudsberg, K, Öhman J & Östman, L 2013. Analyzing students' learning in classroom discussions about socioscientific issues. *Science Education*, vol. 97, no. 4, pp. 594-620. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/sce.21065

Shalley, C E, Zou, J & Oldham, G R 2004. The effects of personal and contextual characteristics on creativity: Where should we go from here? *Journal of Management,* vol. 30, no 6, pp. 933-958. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jm.2004.06.007

Schlee, R P & Harich, K R 2014. Teaching creativity to business students: How well are we doing? *Journal of Education for Business*, vol. 89, no. 3, pp. 133-141. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08832323.2013.781987

Smith, G F 2014. Assessing business student thinking skills. *Journal of Management Education*, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 384-411. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1052562913489028

Tanyel, F & Mitchell, M 1999. The skill set for success of new business school graduates: Do prospective employers and university faculty agree? *Journal of Education For Business*, vol. 75, no. 1, pp. 33-37. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08832329909598987

Titus, P A 2007. Applied creativity: The creative marketing breakthrough model. *Journal of Marketing Education*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 262-272. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0273475307307600

Unsworth, K 2001. Unpacking creativity. *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 289-297. http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2001.4378025

Zhou, J, Shin, S J & Cannella, A A 2008. Employee self-perceived creativity after mergers and acquisitions: Interactive effects of threat – opportunity perception, access to resources and support for creativity. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science,* vol. 44, no. 4, pp. 397-421. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0021886308328010

Zuber-Skerritt, O 2002. A model for designing action learning and action research programs. *The Learning Organisation*, vol. 9, no. 4, pp. 143-149. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09696470210428868