

CREATIVITY IN EDUCATION

This essay explores the importance of creativity in education and draws on my own experience of the application of creative approaches to teaching and learning in a Community Development Project. The use of creative approaches to counteract the psychological effects of negative experiences in education is explored. The role in which education can play in encouraging creativity in students is examined. However caution is expressed regarding the implications of encouraging creativity without wisdom. It is argued that the role that education can play in fostering creativity and innovation is one that serves the 'common good', rather than individualised concepts of creativity. Therefore in parallel with my own experience, this essay also takes a macro view of creativity as it is argued that in education we should avoid narrow views of creativity that may be driven by individual needs rather than the 'common good'. Positive and negative concepts of creativity are briefly interrogated within the confines of the scope of this essay. Through exploring the writings of Craft (2008, 2001) the influence of western democracy is examined as it is seen to dominate the discourse around creativity in education. There is no apparent consensus on a definition of creativity however Berkley (2004) offers ten typologies of creativities which are useful in an educational context, however it is not within the scope of this essay to explore here (pp.468-473). This essay explores creativity in education through a critical and reflective perspective.

My work is in a Community Development Project which is gender specific to women. I coordinate the early development and FETAC courses, and tutor on the HETAC courses in the organisation. I have multiple roles which also involve the supervision and training of facilitators and being part of an advisory group on the HETAC course for community workers. For the purpose of this essay I will mainly concentrate on the further education element of the work. The work is informed by the principles and practices of Community Development, and has an anti-poverty and equality focus. My own creativity is actively engaged in juggling and integrating the multiple roles in my job description. Donnelly (2004) suggest that 'human beings use cognition creatively, by continually modifying and using concepts to try to deal with everyday life problems' (p.156).

The target groups in my work environment have not completed upper secondary level and many have no formal educational qualifications. Participants can progress to a more structured programme, where FETAC accreditation is offered but not compulsory. My work also involves fostering an environment that may reignite the creativity in women who have left the formal education system with damaged confidence and often lacking self-esteem. Craft (2001) suggests that due to the way socialisation of young people takes place in western society, 'their creativity is stifled from early childhood' (p.28). This is particularly apparent in adult learners who have left the formal education system with feelings of failure. Consequently before significant progress can be made, an unlearning has to happen around their perception of self or self worth regarding the participant's perceived capacity. Therefore in the Community sector creative approaches to learning are often used to combat the perceived self construct as failure. Creative approaches to learning helps to engage and maintain the participation of our learners, consequently participants' perception shifts from a place of "I can't" to "I can" learn.

From my own experience in Community Education I realise that many students who return to education have an element of fear with regard to their expectations. Most of our learners are from working class backgrounds and often their experience in education was not positive. It is apparent from evaluations that one reason for negative experience in education is that our learners may not have the cultural capital to survive the system. Lynch (1999) writes extensively on equality in education and it is not within the scope of this essay to fully explore here. However the connection is that because of early negative experiences in education, my organisation has always used creative approaches in order to combat the multiple barriers to participation. The focus is on collective learning rather than individual attainment and there is an emphasis on creative approaches.

The learning strategies that are used include discussion, debate, role play, small group work, teamwork, improvisation, art, drama and other community arts methods and methodologies. Knowledge and skills are built upon using creative approaches. Hope (2010) suggests that if we want to develop innate creativity in all people and 'encourage productive contributions to society', then we need to consider using creativity together with knowledge and skills (Hope, 2010, p.42). Social analysis runs through all the programmes from early engagement to third level. The facilitators are encouraged to give a macro view of how society is set up and to encourage learners to question, enquire, discuss and debate, which is often contrary to their

conditioning. Hence the initial need for unlearning conditioned responses. Brookfield and Holst (2011, p.11) suggest that 'students learned conservatism often means that they will resist determinedly any teaching that appears different': this could also be true of teachers.

Within the early development programmes, there is reluctance towards participating in a course that involves measuring, capturing, and judging the work for accreditation. This obstacle is overcome by continuing to work creatively with groups using varied learning strategies, and using creative strategies in assessments with a focus on collective learning. It is important that the assessments are constructively aligned, according to Biggs (1999). Evaluations suggest that if participants had encountered more creative and experiential learning strategies in formal education they may have learned more. It is reported that they may have even left the system with their self-esteem intact.

However it is necessary to take a critical view as there are significant limitations when it comes to progression outside the project. Having encountered a more accessible learning environment within the project, participants who progress to further education with traditional approaches often encounter difficulties. Past participants have come back after leaving formal courses to suggest "I can learn but only if it is facilitated like it is here". It could be argued that we have created an artificial environment which can lead to a dependency where participants are reluctant to move on. Some may argue that it would serve participants better if we also focused on study skills and prepared participants to articulate their thinking in the written word. Particularly since progression routes from the Centre are locked into more traditional and formal types of learning, which do not cater for multiple learning styles. The participants who moved on to formal further education initiatives encountered learning environments with traditional teacher centred approaches, and often old feelings of inadequacy resurfaced. They also experienced rote learning with less emphasis on learning for understanding.

Many formal institutions are now changing and adjusting to new and creative learning approaches, however progress is slow. I have witnessed that many formal educational institutions have embraced creative and varied approaches to learning. However they mostly revert back to traditional assessment techniques and often the assessment is not constructively aligned. Therefore I contend that creativity in education with regards to learning approaches

will not progress significantly unless creative assessment techniques are fully developed, and stand up to academic rigour.

It could be argued that creativity is largely neglected in higher and further educational levels. Donnelly (2004, p.156) suggests that:

....many attribute the neglect of creativity to a number of reasons: the Platonic notion that creativity is a mystical phenomenon, the persistent belief that creativity is a spiritual process that does not lend itself to scholarly scrutiny...

A third reason for the neglect of creativity in education could be because the schools of psychology in early twentieth century 'largely ignored creativity' (Donnelly 2004, p.156). My own perception of creativity is that everyone has an innate ability to be creative.

Livingston (2010) suggests that in higher education an 'institutional intervention' is needed to establish an 'experiential paradigm centred on cultivating creativity' (p.59). He also suggests that that little room is left for new experiences or 'nurturing the act of creativity' if we cling to traditional pedagogies (p.59). Therefore it could be argued that if higher education institutions are serious about fostering creative approaches and innovations, then no less than a structural analysis is called for. If creativity and innovation is to be encouraged within higher and further education, then the conditions need to be set to foster such approaches. Can creativity and innovation be squeezed into existing structures and cultures in our educational systems? Perhaps a shift from scholarly scrutiny towards educational enquiry is called for. Livingston (2010, p.60) recognises how graduates face a world of 'ever more perplexing change', and suggests,

If we can transform our educational institutions to make change part of every topic we study rather than the daunting future we face, creativity becomes our most powerful tool. Inventive people relish challenges, surprises, and even impediments (Livingston 2010, p.60).

Livingstone (2010) suggests that by embracing the new technologies and integrating the internet with the existing curriculum, we can make room for creativity in education. Csikszentmihalyi also recognises that 'periods of struggling to overcome challenges are what people find the most enjoyable times of their lives' (2002, p.6). This is also researched by Csikszentmihalyi (2002) when discussing the concept of 'flow'. He describes flow as 'the

way people describe their state of mind when consciousness is harmoniously ordered', and when people pursue an activity for 'its own sake' (p.6). Perhaps education should be pursued for 'its own sake' rather than being so highly influenced by the economic market and capitalism.

There is no doubt that our higher institutions have many creative and inventive teachers, who are successful in setting up learning environments that foster creativity and innovation. Many practitioners see the importance of allowing time for reflection and discussion within the classroom. Reflective practitioners are essential towards providing an environment which fosters creativity (Schön 1987). However conditioning is powerful and from a young age many students are conditioned to be uncritical and unreflective, and as Craft (2001) suggests creativity is stifled at a young age in formal education. Therefore I argue that to expect students to engage in critical reflection and creativity in third level is challenging for many students. It can be challenging for some teachers also as they become familiar with the conditioned responses to education. Consequently it could be argued an unlearning is also called for with regards to conditioned responses in higher education. Therefore until these skills are developed from a young age I argue that it is necessary for a transition period which reflects the time it takes to combat conditioned responses. I argue that creativity with wisdom takes time, and to foster creativity within the confines of some curricula can be challenging for students and teachers alike.

There are both constructivist and behaviourist aspects to the work in my organisation. The behaviourist aspects involve the fact that the accredited courses have predetermined goals and the learning is captured and measured with regards for accreditation. The constructivist aspects involve keeping the learning as close to the lived experience of the learners as possible, and using constructivist methodologies. However it is necessary to reflect on the uses and abuses of constructivism. I agree with Gordon (2009) that constructivism can be abused, as some teachers believe that it is not necessary to have a large body of knowledge to work constructively. I contend that it *is* necessary to have a large body of knowledge to work in a constructive way that is effective. Constructive methodologies do allow for a more creative approach to teaching, as students opinions are sought and shared. Consequently this type of teaching requires reflective practitioners (Schön 1987) and also requires the teacher to have a high level of self awareness. Rather than the polarisation of behaviourism and constructivism I believe that both approaches have their place in modern education. It is

argued that an eclectic approach which draws on many disciplines is necessary to truly foster creativity in education.

In England the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education suggests that employers now require people who can “adapt, see connections, innovate, communicate and work with others” (NACCCE; 1999 cited in Craft 2008, p.16). This suggests a move towards collective learning and more teamwork approaches to learning. Craft (2008) suggests that employers want young people with the above attributes ‘rather than purely seeking high standards of academic achievement’ (p.16). In Scotland and other countries there is a drive more recently towards engaging more creatively with three to eighteen year olds and fostering creativity (rather than diminishing creativity) earlier on in education (The Cultural Commission Report 2005, cited in Craft 2008).

Craft identifies two blind spots in relation to a market-driven view of creativity, which are ‘environment and ethics’ and ‘cultural context’ (p.17). The market-driven view is based on western individualism which has obsolescence built in to the ‘design stage of many consumer goods’ (p.17). This view of creativity is driven by a world where ‘fashion dictates the need for constant change and updating’ (p.17). Therefore if creativity leads to the exhaustion of our natural resources then this is not a positive aspect of creativity. Craft suggests that creativity should be used with responsibility, and cautions for the wise use of creativity (2008). From a cultural context the western developed world values individual freedoms and encourages difference and uniqueness. Whereas the eastern Confucian communities view children who diverge from the norm as disruptive, and therefore creativity can be seen as disruptive in those cultures (Craft 2008). Consequently Craft contends that as educators we need to be aware of the tensions that may exist from fostering creativity to multicultural groups that perpetuate the dominant market driven view of creativity.

I believe that as educators we have a duty to expose the threat to the ‘common good’ and the environment of such an individualised context of creativity, particularly a creativity that is driven by the ideologies of a western liberal democratic view of democracy. It could be argued that the collapse of the western world economy is due to such individualised short sighted thinking rather than concern for the common good. Craft (2001) suggests that there are ‘socially and environmentally destructive aspects’ to fostering a culture of innovation, with regards to the ‘continual innovation and constant change characteristic of western culture’ (p.28). Therefore I argue that as educators we need to be cautious as to the merits of

an economy-driven view of creativity. (Or indeed an economy-driven view of education is a related issue but the scope does not allow for discussion here.) Otherwise we could contribute to reproducing the same inequalities that already exist, as well as the destruction of the natural environment.

Livingstone (2010) also cautions that creativity that lacks a 'meritorious goal is not automatically a good thing' (p.62). He advocates that in education 'the study and application of creative behaviour'..., '...should also be designed around social justice and objectives that promote the general welfare' (p.62). Therefore as educators I argue that we have a responsibility to foster creativity and innovation that takes the common good into consideration and to illuminate false consciousness.

The boundaries of what is considered creative and where creativity is located have shifted and expanded. I have argued that the drive for creativity in education is welcome. However I have explored that for its effective use it must be also linked to assessments, and be constructively aligned. Also the essay has explored how creativity should be accompanied by wisdom. Many issues regarding creativity in education have been illuminated and some call for further exploration such as:

- Are the interests of the common good served or the interests of a dominant view?
- What are the interests behind the drive for creativity in education: are they honourable and who do they serve?
- Will innovation and creativity driven by western democracy lead to more or less inequality in our society?

Craft (2008), Livingstone (2010) among others are having these conversations and I would like to explore further through a critical perspective. This essay has explored creativity through my own experience and drawing on the experience of others. This essay has explored my experience of creativity at application level, and also examined creativity and explored its role in education at a macro level.

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