EXPLORING THE ROLE OF OFSTED IN DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVITY SKILLS ON VOCATIONAL BUSINESS STUDIES COURSES IN FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES

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Abstract

What is the role of Ofsted, as a major stakeholder and gatekeeper for maintaining standards of quality in education, in promoting the development of creativity skills in vocational business studies courses for young learners aged 16 to 19 in Further Education Colleges?

Using an exploratory, illustrative case study design (Thomas, 2011) with a systems thinking conceptual framework (Capra and Luisi, 2014), I am using qualitative data from interviews, published Ofsted reports, the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework (2012), and *Times Educational Supplement* articles, to build my case study. I am also using feedback from my public engagement activities on social media and at conferences to inform my ideas within a broad, systems view of education where we consider the whole rather than drawing conclusions from an analysis of its parts.

This paper explains the importance of a clear and shared definition of creativity, focusing on the 'creative person' within a multi-faceted concept of creativity which includes various other essential elements such as process, product, place, pressures, permanence and persuasion.

Introduction

In this paper I will explain the importance for teachers and their students to have a clear and shared definition of creativity in order to recognise, reward and promote development of creativity skills in the business curriculum.

The importance of a clear definition of creativity

One of the first things I realised when I started my research into how well we develop creativity skills (Mahil, 2013) is that teachers and students need to have a clear and shared definition of the concept of creativity to avoid disappointment or frustration in their efforts in demonstrating creativity. When I used to ask my students to express creativity in their work, they were very happy to present me with text decorated with pictures that they had copied and pasted from the internet and colourful titles (Mahil, 2014). Unfortunately, that was often the extent to which they were willing to be creative. When I asked them how their work was creative, they would proudly point to the pictures and colours. It was obvious to me that creativity was not limited to inclusion of pictures and colourful titles in assignments, but clearly this insight was not shared by my students. Even though I was a fully qualified and highly experienced teacher, I felt disappointed when, perhaps due to inadequate training, I was unable to successfully inspire and motivate my students to express originality independently, without having to tell them specifically how to do this.

In fact, although I flattered myself on being a very creative business studies teacher, through my research, I discovered that I did not have a clear definition of the concept of creativity in the context of the business curriculum.

As I began my research, I took my starting point to be that:

"Academics, policy-makers and arts educators deploy a range of claims about creativity which emerge from different theories of learning, different contexts, different artistic traditions, different academic or quasi-academic traditions, and different policy contexts." (Banaji and Burn, 2010: 10)

One of these academics was someone I had never previously heard of; Sir Ken Robinson, an ex-Professor from the University of Warwick who chaired a government commissioned report called *All our Futures* (National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural, 1999).I learnt that he is one of the leading advocates for development of creativity skills in formal education. His YouTube video entitled "Do Schools Kill Creativity?" has already attracted over 9 million views in nine years (from January 2007 to January 2016) (Robinson, 2007). Defining creativity as "the process of having original ideas that add value" (Robinson, 2011, Robinson, 2009, Education, 1999) he claims that creativity is as important as literacy (Robinson, 2011).

Most academic definitions of creativity are similar in that they highlight the importance of originality and value although the actual words they use may be different, for example, originality may be expressed as new, surprising or unexpected and value may be expressed as appropriate, effective or useful. For example, In his introduction to *The International Handbook of Creativity* which compiled research into the subject of creativity conducted across the world since 1950, Sternberg (2006: 2) concludes that "Some generalisations about creativity seem to be internationally agreed" and gives the example of a generalisation about creativity being that it "involves thinking that is aimed at producing ideas or products that are relatively novel and that are, in some respect, compelling."

As my research enabled me to clearly grasp the key concepts of creativity, I began to better understand why I was disappointed with the level of creativity in my students' work. The colours and pictures they used in their work were just not surprising or original and moreover, they did not add value.
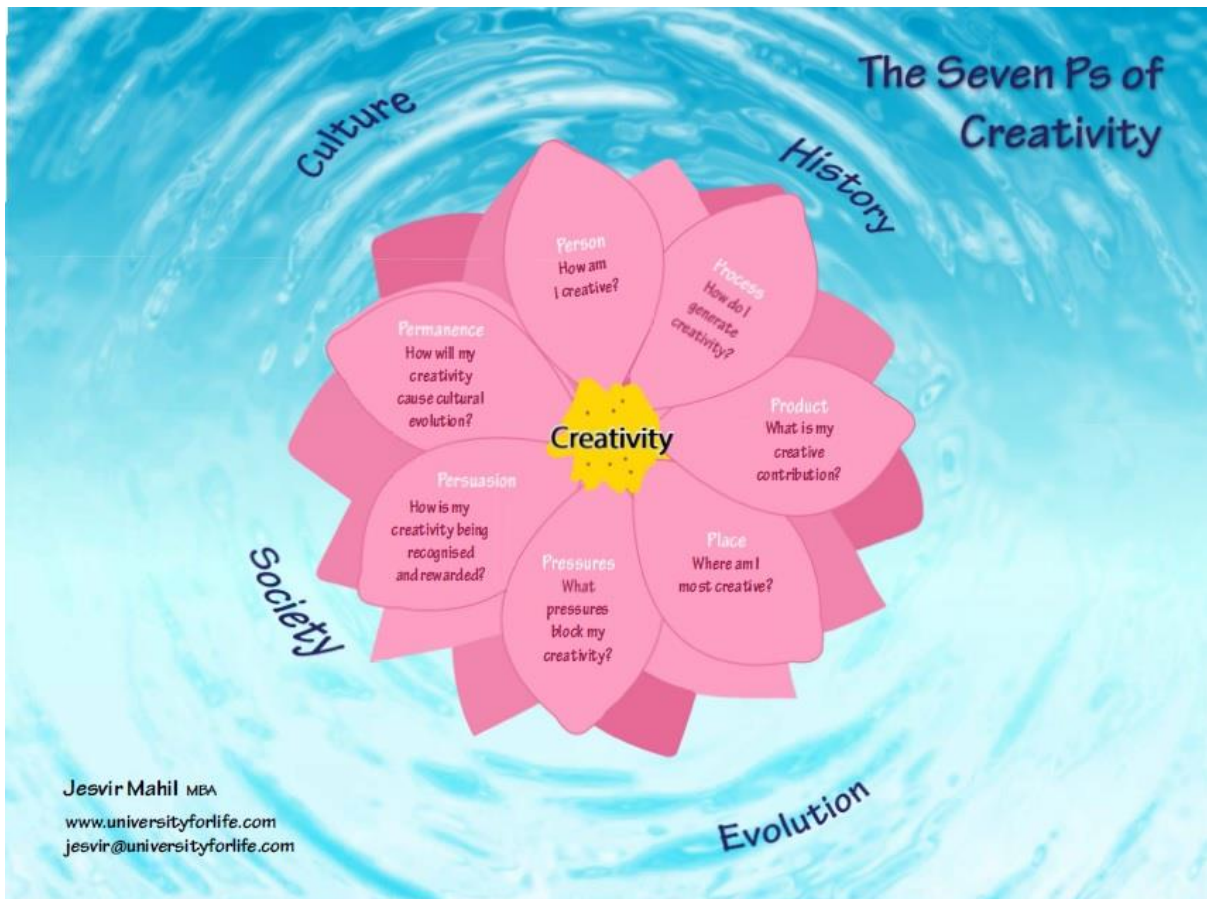
Sir Ken Robinson argues that development of creativity skills is as important as literacy and numeracy. At this point in my research, I would go one step further and argue that creativity is even more important than literacy because literacy would be useless without our capacity to use it in creative ways. In other words, based on the most common definitions of creativity emphasising the importance of adding value, we need to be creative in using literacy to improve our lives in some unique way. Unless there is a persuasive rationale for developing literacy and numeracy skills that can be seen to creatively improve their lives, the large percentage of young learners on vocational business studies courses who leave school without an adequate level of literacy and numeracy skills, will continue to struggle to see the benefit of additional functional skills lessons which they are obliged to attend. to enable them to rapidly catch up on the skills they failed to master during their decade

in school. I believe that creativity skills need to be developed before literacy and numeracy so that the latter are learnt in a creative way, empowering all learners to improve their own lives and creatively add value to their society and culture. Teachers who have heard their students protest "Why do we have to learn this?!" may well sympathise.

A definition of creativity based on a systems thinking perspective

Robinson's definition of creativity draws upon a process culminating in a product that is both original and adds value in some way. Lubart (1999) makes the cultural distinction between Eastern and Western definitions of creativity, explaining that, "According to the Western view, creativity must be defined and recognised in its relationship to an observable outcome. The Eastern view of creativity, however, is far less focused on products or other tangible evidence of "work" produced. Instead, creativity is seen to involve personal fulfilment or the expression of an inner essence or ultimate reality." In contrast, Dowd (1989: 233) emphasises the Western view that "Unless one produces something, one cannot be creative. Thus, pure mental activity without a resulting product is not creativity. This distinction is important, because people often assume that thought is in itself creative and are willing to pay large sums of money for think tanks from which the product is often minimal." Tardif and Sternberg (1988: 437) echo the Western importance given to the creative product which they state must be novel; not imitations nor mass-produced. They add that creative products need to be powerful, generalizable, exhibit parsimony, cause irreversible changes in the human environment and that they are valuable and useful to society.

However, the product is only one aspect of creativity and based on a systems thinking perspective, I have synthesised my research into the various aspects of creativity to create seven broad strands, which I call the 7 Ps of creativity (Mahil, 2016). These seven Ps are: Person, Product, Process, Place, Persuasion, Pressures and Permanence, illustrated in the poster below:

The Seven Ps of Creativity

Culture

History

Society

Evolution

Creativity

Person — How am I creative?

Process — How do I generate creativity?

Product — What is my creative contribution?

Place — Where am I most creative?

Pressures — What pressures block my creativity?

Persuasion — How is my creativity being recognised and rewarded?

Permanence — How will my creativity cause cultural evolution?

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The creative person within a broad definition of creativity

One of the seven strands of creativity (7Ps) is the "person" and our definition of creativity based on this aspect may derive from questions such as "How am I creative?" or "Who is creative?"

This is the strand that looks at the characteristics of creative people; their personalities; their character traits; the way they think and their motives (Tardif and Sternberg, 1988, Martindale, 1989, Dowd, 1989, Kneller, 1965, Storr, 1972). For example, creative people tend to be internally motivated rather than externally motivated (Amabile, 1996).

Moreover, Hennessey (2004: 210) reports that:

"Investigations focused on the impact of evaluation reveal that the expectation that one's work will be judged may well be the most deleterious extrinsic constraint of all. Perhaps because situations of evaluation often combine aspects of each of the other 'killers' of motivation and creativity, the promise of an evaluation has been shown to severely undermine the task interest and performance of persons across the entire age span. Persons from all walks of life, pre-schoolers to seasoned professionals whose very livelihood depends upon the creativity of their work, have been shown to be adversely affected."

Research reported by Martindale (1989: 227) shows that extrinsic reward decreases creativity, and that surveillance and externally imposed deadlines are detrimental to

creativity. Choe (2006: 405) agrees that "Intrinsic motivation can be considered as the single most powerful force in creative achievement." Creative people need to be self-motivated and external rewards only serve to decrease their level of motivation. The offer of incentives may be perceived as pressure rather than support, causing the creative person to feel blocked or inhibited.

Although the distinctions between intelligence and creativity are not clearly demarcated, Barron (1969: 125) illustrated that "especially creative but relatively less intelligent, though still quite bright, pupils were less popular with teachers, and less in line with both teacher and peer value systems, than pupils whose IQs were relatively high as compared with their creativity." Although the research demonstrating this finding took place almost fifty years ago and pedagogical values, attitudes and approaches may have changed since then, it seems that teachers prefer students who score highly on intelligence tests compared to students who score highly on creativity tests, partly because the former tend to be more adaptive whereas the latter tend to be adversarial and non-conformist. The implications and impact of this teacher bias against creative students has been discussed by Genovard et al. (2006: 71) who, reviewing research on creativity in Spain, highlighted one of Martorell's (1968) conclusions, that "students who show convergent thinking receive higher marks from teachers, obtaining better academic grades than divergent thinkers."

Can everyone be creative?

In a business context, the notion that creativity is ubiquitous is supported by Craft (2001) cited in Banaji and Burn (2010: 29) who states that in education, the definitions of creativity that have had most purchase in the last 50 years have been those that marry creativity and imagination, and take an inclusive approach by suggesting that everyone has the potential for creativity as it is a fundamental aspect of human nature." Craft has a very broad concept of creativity which she calls "the ability to cope effectively with changing life in the 21st century. She distinguishes this clearly from creativity in the arts and from the paradigm shifting creativity of 'great' figures."

Arguments against this ubiquitous concept of creativity, such as those put forward by Thomson and Hall (2006) cited in Banaji and Burn (2010: 30) rejecting the notion of 'vulgar creativity which everyone is supposed to possess in equal measures' seem pertinent to creativity in arts and culture rather than a business curriculum. For example, it is clear that not everyone can aspire to become a 'creative genius', which is one of the rhetorics of creativity described by Banaji and Burn (2010: 15) .

Due to the nature of a global business environment, the business curriculum tends to be inclusive rather than exclusive and does not normally suffer from the "vulgar elitism', rejected by Thomson and Hall (2006) and also Willis (1990) who complains that:

"The institutions and practices, genres and terms of high art are currently categories of exclusion more than of inclusion. They have no connection with most young people and their lives. They may encourage some artistic specialisations but they

certainly discourage much wider and more symbolic creativity … (Willis 1990: 1 cited in Banaji and Burn (2010: 21)

Even though it is tempting to accept Craft's broad brush concept of ubiquitous creativity, where 'it is possible for every person, child or adult, to learn to make choices about their lives which are creative or not creative', Negus and Pickering, cited in Banaji and Burn (2010: 30) argue that:

"….we cannot collapse creativity into everyday life, as if they are indistinguishable ….

To say that all our everyday actions are in some way creative might have a certain polemical appeal, but that is all. What we're arguing for instead are the intrinsic connections between creative practice and everyday life, for it's important that we don't forget how the heightened moments of creativity are always linked to routine and the daily round, and how a particular artwork or cultural product may catch us within the midst of ordinary habitual life. (2004: 44-45)

In a business class, both these viewpoints are relevant. On the one hand, we can assume, as Craft agrees, that everyone is **capable** of being creative and generating new ideas that have value, but on the other hand, as Negus and Pickering highlight, not all the ideas they generate will be new and not all of them will have value.

The question remains however, who decides what is creative and what is not; and how do we measure the value of a new idea and therefore, how creative it is?

Is creativity individual or collective?

We began with a simple pragmatic definition of creativity, taken from Robinson (2011) stating that creativity is the process of generating original ideas that have value and took into consideration Csikszentmihalyi's (2013: 27) concern that the value of these original ideas has to be judged by experts in the field and within the "domain which consists of a set of symbolic rules and procedures". In Csikszentmihalyi's view, the individual person is merely the third component of the creative system (the first being the domain and the second being the field). Robinson (2011) agrees that "Creativity is about making connections and is usually driven more by collaboration than by solo efforts." (Robinson, 2011: 211)

Therefore, in a business curriculum, it seems fair to assume that creativity is collective rather than individual. An idea may seem highly original and valuable to the individual who generated it but in a business environment, the value of an idea is judged by those willing to buy it in some shape or form.

How important is the context in defining creativity?

An idea may be creative because it has value in one context, but in a different context, the same idea may have no value at all and therefore it would lack creativity (defined as a new idea that has value). For example, the price people are willing to pay for an idea, at any point in time, is an indication of its value, although the value may increase or decrease over time. So, the simple definition of creativity being the

process of generating original ideas that have value needs to be understood within the various dynamics of collaboration that create the context in which the idea emerges. An idea cannot be said to be of value unless someone, within a particular context in time, evaluates it as having value.

Summary

A clear definition of the concept of creativity in a business context is necessary to enable teachers and students on vocational business studies courses to communicate more effectively, with a shared understanding of what is expected as an expression of creativity skills.

Although the most popular definitions of creativity include the concepts of originality and value, a systems thinking perspective takes a much broader view and defines creativity within a range of contextual factors including the characteristics and motivation of the creative person; the creative process, the creative product and the capacity of these elements to persuade the gatekeepers in our society to recognise the creativity. Csikszentmihalyi (2013) argues that if it is not recognised as being creative, can we really say that creativity occurred?

A definition of creativity based on the concepts of originality and value is a useful starting point. However, 'what is original?' and 'what is valuable?' are relative to the culture and context in which creativity is expressed. This paper has focused solely on one aspect within the definition of creativity; the creative person. There are various other aspects for example the creative process, the creative product and the capacity to persuade gatekeepers that must also be taken into consideration, in order to formulate a definition of creativity that is useful within a holistic, systems thinking way of seeing the world as proposed by Capra and Luisi (2014)

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Biography

Jesvir Mahil taught for over thirty years, in London, Spain, Italy and the USA, with a large proportion of this career being in Further Education Colleges in the UK, teaching on vocational business studies courses for 16 to 19 year olds. She has inspected over 30 Further Education Colleges and Training Providers as part of the official Ofsted inspection process. www.jesvir.com