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Developing creativity in higher education for 21st century learners: A protocol for a scoping review



Arlene Egan^{a,*}, Rebecca Maguire^a, Lauren Christophers^b, Brendan Rooney^b

^a CRILT, National College of Ireland, IFSC, Dublin 1, Ireland

^b School of Psychology, UCD, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland

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ABSTRACT

There is an abundance of literature highlighting the need to focus on enhancing students' creativity in higher education. However, currently there is a gap in awareness of evidence-based initiatives being employed in institutions to address this need. The debate on how to best characterise creativity has not yet reach consensus therefore, we present a protocol for a new review that will identify the characteristics of the frameworks as well as the tools being used by educators to formally develop students' creativity in higher education. It will also provide insight into how these educators are defining creativity. This knowledge will enhance understanding of how creativity, a necessary skill for 21st century learners is being harvested, valued, and described in higher education.

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1. Introduction

Creativity has been regarded as one of the crucial skills in the toolkit of the 21st century learner and indeed key to effective learning in higher education and beyond (Jahnke, Haertel, & Wildt, 2015; Nissim, Weissblueth, Scott-Webber, & Amar, 2016; Rampersad & Patel, 2014). It has even been described as 'the cultural capital of the twenty-first century' (Sheridan-Rabideau, 2010, p. 54). While creativity has been noted as a significant skill across the life-span, Livingston (2010) reported that creativity is an essential skill for students to harvest in higher education as it has a direct link to the development of "content knowledge and skills in a culture infused at new levels by investigation, cooperation, connection, integration and synthesis" (p. 59). Given the high level of agreement on its importance, the question remains; what are higher education institutions, and the educators within doing to foster, nurture and develop student's levels of creativity. On one hand, there is the positive idea stated by Tosey (2006), who commented that higher education institutions cannot avoid creativity, as they harbour individuals 'who are constantly using their ingenuity in interaction with others' (p. 33). There is also evidence that creativity is a specific requirement in terms of day-to-day teaching practice where the intention of learning is to:

"generate ideas and possibilities, invent ways of exploring problems, complex situations and systems [or] combine ideas and things in novel ways" (Jackson & Shaw, 2005, p.105).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: arlene.egan@ncirl.ie (A. Egan), Rebecca.maguire@ncirl.ie (R. Maguire), laurenchristophers@gmail.com (L. Christophers), Brendan.rooney@ucd.ie (B. Rooney).

These ideas imply that creativity could be considered part of the fabric of higher education. However, the challenges associated with enhancing students' creativity in higher education have been widely acknowledged in the literature. These range from the rigid management practices in higher education which stifle creativity (MacLaren, 2012) to designing assessment strategies that can reliably assess creativity (Cowan, 2006). Of course decisions concerning assessment depend primarily on whether the educator takes the position that creativity is fundamentally product oriented (Amabile, 1983; Elliott, 1995) or process oriented (Johnson-Laird, 1987) and lack of consensus on this matter adds to the challenge. Kleiman (2008, p. 212) has commented that if experiences of teaching creativity could be placed on one continuum, fulfilment-focus would sit at the upper end while constraint-focused would sit at the lower, which reflects the negative perceptions of some academics teaching creativity in higher education. This negativity has been associated with the fact that creativity and the creative processes can challenge established teaching and learning strategies, as well as the institutional ethos.

1.1. Understanding creativity

Creativity has long been a topic of interest within psychology and its cognate disciplines, with particular attention paid to this concept in the latter half of the twentieth century, especially in relation generating theories of creativity (for example; Kris, 1952; Mendelsohn, 1976; Mendick, 1962). Today, the term creativity is employed in many different contexts with an increasing recognition of its value in numerous domains including technology, business and entrepreneurship (e.g., Cooper, 2000; Zimmerman & Scarborough, 2008). This emphasis has been extended to higher education with many studies recognising its value within third level institutions (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Contemporary work is regularly championing creativity, citing it as a crucial skill for the 21st century (Greiff, Niepel, & Wustenberg, 2015). Links have been made between levels of creativity and other valued skills including critical thinking (Dwyer, Hogan, & Stewart, 2014), as well as communication and innovation (Kratzer et al., 2004).

However, since the turn of the 21st century, creativity has become more pervasive as a construct, there are many inconsistencies in the definitions adopted (Batey, 2012; Meusbürger, Funke, & Wunder, 2009). Creativity has been described as 'maligned, neglected and misunderstood' (Azzam, 2009, p. 22). This is reflected in a diversity of intuitive conceptions of creativity, with individuals adopting different views as to what is meant by creativity (Gluck, Ernst, & Unger, 2002). Within higher education, much debate has surrounded whether creativity can be taught (Livingston, 2010; Jackson, Oliver, Shaw, & Wisdom, 2006). Smith (2006) suggests that while society has a view of creativity as a talent, shown by some, other research is suggesting that creativity is perhaps developed through a teachable process and

'... colleges and universities can work to create curricula, pedagogies, cocurricular programming and a general institutional environment to support creative development' (p. 24).

The lack of agreement on whether creativity can be taught or not shows confusion in the field which is compounded by the lack of consensus of what creativity involves and how this might be influenced by contextual factors.

Attempts have been made to establish what academics themselves understand as creativity. For example Jackson and Shaw (2005) report certain themes in definitions including originality, innovation, transfer and adaptation of ideas. Using qualitative analysis Kleiman (2008) observed five categories of views of the creative experience: that which is constraint focused, process focused, product focused, transformation focused and fulfilment focussed. Rather than trying to reach consensus on how to define creativity, it may be more advantageous to examine themes or characteristics associated with how it is understood in different contexts. Efforts to identifying approaches that will enhance student's levels of creativity have been made (e.g., Jeffrey & Craft, 2004, Loveless, Burton, & Turvey, 2006) however, as of yet there has been no one method espoused for its effectiveness in increasing students' levels of creativity in higher education. This again relates to the idea that creativity practiced in higher education is deeply situated. Given the contextual and ecological influences on teacher's approaches, strategies, environment and thinking, identifying principles to aid effective design would be considered a worthwhile exercise.

1.2. Why conduct a review on creativity

Through the review, frameworks being used by educators and practitioners in higher education will be identified, examined and deconstructed in order to generate a clearer understanding of those tools, frameworks and their associated characteristics. Loveless et al. (2006, p. 4) refer to Craft (2000) in their description of a useful theoretical framework for recognising and developing creativity as 'an interaction between characteristics in people and communities, creative processes, subject domains and wider social and cultural contexts'. By examining these frameworks we can inform evidence-based practice in higher education. Scoping studies are used extensively in health research to build bodies of knowledge based on practice and evidence. Education should follow suit, as these types of studies can have implications for practice at individual, institutional and global levels.

The increase in multidisciplinary approaches and methodologies stemming from cognitive science can shed new light on the meaning of creativity which is why an analysis of contemporary research is merited. Gaspar and Mabic (2015, p. 599–600) remind us of the prominence of creativity in the majority of European strategic reports on higher education, including; EUROPE 2020 (European Commission, 2010). Publications Office of the European Union. and, EUA (2011). Smart People for

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