

X. Creating a Climate for Creativity in the Entrepreneurial Classroom

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“You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have.” Maya Angelou

We have been working together for the last 6 years; we met at the ISBE (Institute of Small Business and Entrepreneurship) conference in 2015 in Glasgow, UK. We just ‘clicked’ and started developing research projects together and then later Stefania joined Charlotte to co-chair the ISBE Creative Industries Entrepreneurship conference track. Both of us teach in the areas of Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Marketing within British business schools.

This chapter is the result of an on-going conversation and reflections between the authors. Using an auto-ethnographic approach we captured, in a series of semi-structured interviews between each other, over a period of two months the insights from this approach.

We have discovered something we have in common, through writing this chapter: we both started out in academia as researchers (following careers outside of the sector) and neither of us planned to become educators. It was for both by ‘chance’. In addition, we both had a bad educational experience in tertiary education:

SR: “I hated school! it was boring, it was standardised and it was no fun. However, I loved technical drawing and English (as a foreign language). I loved my English classes, my teacher used to talk about London and I used to imagine the architecture (compared to Italy). I went on to study business but eventually did my PhD about creative industries.”

CC: “My school experience was equally bad. I didn't seem to be academic, struggled with academic subjects, I loved Art and History. I was always called a day-dreamer. Having left school at 15 I went to

art school and following a number of general art and design courses I did a fine art degree and eventually (after a number of years working as a freelancer) a PhD about entrepreneurship within fine art careers.”

We both felt we were not academically able. Nevertheless, both did well in arts subjects. As the quotes above suggest we were both considered ‘daydreamers’ and ‘imagers’? Ironically both are now acknowledged as essential drivers for the creative process.

Our teaching / facilitation philosophy

We have realised that as well as a similar educational experience, our teaching philosophies are closely aligned for example: to facilitate the diversity of learning styles and encourage active participation of students and to build confidence and acknowledge and identify the breadth of where creativity lies. How you get there is through experience, experimentation and play.

CC “I’m not sure it’s a philosophy but it’s an approach and that’s experiential learning, learning by doing, and informed by creative discipline education. I’ve always felt we should teach business in art schools and not to art students I mean that we should use the setting and approach of an art school to teach business. I really benefitted from an art school education and the pedagogical approach I believe it lends itself well to many disciplines”

SR: “That’s a humanistic approach and that’s my philosophy it’s ‘freedom to learn’ and experiential learning is the approach”

Humanism is based on the belief that individuals are free to learn and make their own decisions. In this context, the role of the educator is to facilitate the individual’s discovery of relevant subject matter. For example, Montessori and Summerhill schools (launched at the start of the 20th Century) believed in shifting the emphasis from teacher-centred to student-centred learning (Bates, 2019). While these have been largely ignored by mainstream education in recent years, our sense is that they are being rediscovered by educators and have good fit for transformational learning, particularly given the diversity of the student body.

OUR CONTEXT

We are both working in Higher Education in Business Schools in the UK teaching at UG, PG, PGR and corporate level. CC teaches in a ‘post 92’(an ex-polytechnic) which takes a very applied approach across all disciplines. SR previously worked in a similar type of institution and now works in a higher

ranking and more research focussed institution. In our conversation, we talked about our observations of the two types of universities and that the newer universities tend to offer greater freedom and space for more creative teaching approaches.

SR “Even though the context of where I am working (in a very research-orientated university) I still need colours, post-it notes, large paper and Lego! I bring the tools to enable students to experience creativity and to signal that this is a creative space. In my old university I used to throw balls around to ask students to give examples – it was a game, who had the ball had to speak. Now that we’re working online I ask them to draw, to use Padlet (an online tool to make and share content)”

CC: “I try to create a real-lived experience through simulation/rehearsal, responding to live briefs, group work, drawing upon design approaches and design thinking. Based on my own education there’s a lot about the way art and design is taught that helps students more broadly. Bringing in live clients and doing design tasks to hone ideas and then presenting (pitching) them to peers and lecturers works well in many disciplines and potentially leads to more enterprising behaviours”.

Our ideal graduate

The type of graduate we develop, in terms of knowledge, skills and overall capability would have the following attributes: ethical, enterprising, a self-starter, curious, a problem-solver/solution finder, adaptable, confident but not arrogant, community-orientated, motivated, self-aware, kind/compassionate, generous, passionate and with an open and global mindset. Ultimately creative. These are all attributes, which arguably lead to a more satisfying career. That is not to say just financially rewarding but ethically, emotionally and wellbeing-focussed on a personal, community and global level. Arguably, this is fundamental for building responsible futures.

Why this type of graduate

We are living in dynamic and challenging times but also a time of huge social change and potential opportunity. There is no one formula, way to do things, or individual that can solve these challenges or re-shape the historical legacy of how communities have been built, businesses and industries run. Graduate’s need to be in a position to actively be part of the change without being scared or overwhelmed to participate in the process. Our students are already

technologically skilled and our role is to nurture their talent, draw out and value their creative and design skills, harness their potential and passion so that they can contribute to positive societal and economic change.

When we look to the likes of Steve Jobs as an iconic design-led entrepreneur, Maria Montessori for her work in educational transformation, Maya Angelou for her contribution to writing, poetry and politics or Sir Ken Robinson for articulating the real and vital contribution of the arts, we see examples of individuals whose work has had a profound impact on the world. Their wisdom is arguably underpinned by shifting their negative experience, of the existing education system, into creative approaches, that then shape new visions for the world. We want to instill the confidence in our graduates that might lead them to believe they are able to embrace change and be the change like those iconic role-models. Universities, their culture and environment have the opportunity to be the place of change for graduates to flourish. Arguably, traditional teaching practices hinder this.

Our theories of development

The theoretical basis for our approach could be described as: Transformational, Reflective and Contextualised. Within our teaching, critical thinking is highly encouraged during the workshops or the individual learning activities. In addition, an element of self-reflection, about experiences enable students to link the current situation to future job opportunities while empowering them with techniques to relate to others, via a transformative process and opening up new perspectives (Christie et al., 2015; Mezirow, 2009). As Kolb suggests “The central idea here is that learning and therefore knowing, requires both a grasp or figurative representation of experience and some transformation of that representation” (Kolb,1983:42). Our interpretation of this is that when students enter the classroom they bring with them existing experience and tacit knowledge. Through interacting with peers and educators, they create new meaning to these. What is more, our experience suggests that initially students are inclined to reject new ideas and so reflection is important to capture that transformation.

Within the field of entrepreneurship, considering context has become increasingly important (Welter, 2019). The author’s earlier research into Entrepreneurship Education suggested the need to consider context both in terms of discipline for example creative disciplines (Carey and Naudin, 2006; Carey and Matlay, 2011) and setting for example outside of HE within the community (Hussain and Carey, 2019). This has underpinned our approach.

Arguably, further contextualising and customising education enables us as educators to respect both introvert and extrovert learners (and the spectrum between) for example some might be ‘observers’ within the classroom setting and that’s ok. Our approach includes all. It is a human-centred, design thinking approach insomuch that all stakeholders are considered. The classroom in this context becomes a space for co-creation of knowledge, where the students are not simply passive recipients of knowledge, but active participants.

DEVELOPING ENTERPRISING CREATIVE THINKERS

In terms of approaches and tools that we have deployed, for the most part we avoid the traditional ‘chalk and talk’ style of delivery. While there is an element of introducing topics, and the structure of the session, to orientate the students, the predominant approaches are: experiential learning through rehearsal and role-play; drawing, imagining and play. For example using Lego bricks to create tangible scenarios or settings, to explore ideas.

A core aspect is borrowing from other disciplines. For example, theatre (improvisation and role-play), art and design (design thinking, experimentation and pitch presentations). The experience of play and freedom is vital. We create a space for creativity within the classroom (particularly given the non-descript and often feature-less style of most university classroom settings). It is almost like the creation of temporary or ‘pop-up’ creative space.

In addition some of the other tools we make use of within the classroom (and more recently through online delivery) are:

SR “I use ‘Padlet’ to co-create. For example to give students the opportunity to explore examples of different industries.”

We both make use of case studies and entrepreneurial roles models:

CC “Live case studies have been a really important feature and since working more online videos of interviews with entrepreneurs and creative thinkers. Particularly recent graduates working in our field as they’re more relatable.”

SR “We also make use of well-established entrepreneurs who are ‘Enterprise ambassadors’.

CC: “Social media and the internet as a space to rehearse and play has always been important to me, particularly for digital marketing and enterprise modules, and is especially gratifying when students professionalise and make businesses from their content creation”.

This combination and variety of approaches offers students both the opportunity to explore their own ideas, see themselves as creative and also provides the context of the lived experience and how creativity manifest in entrepreneurship both on and off-line.

Stages of development

Our learners go through various stages. Initially there is often some reluctance and resistance to the idea of participating in a creative type session. Particularly if they are asked to do group work and if there is anxiety about the associated assessment. This might lead to them being stressed and sometimes mute, like they have a ‘fight or flight’ or in this instance mainly ‘freeze’ response. Of course, that will not be everyone and sometimes a more vocal student can be a real driver/role model for others. Their experience and perception of creativity differs. For example:

CC: “I will often talk about creativity and there will be a range of responses and many ‘I can’t draw’ - if I ask students to visualise or illustrate their ideas. I always say ‘you can draw! You just stopped practising at some point in your life and started thinking of yourself as not a creative person’. So there is work to be done in educating on what we mean by creativity and the breadth of it.”

To reduce barriers to their resistance we acknowledge the different stages of their understanding. For example, as SR puts it:

“I put some Italian classical music on in the classroom. I want to give them this quality to connect with their hands, their heart, to stop thinking and turn-off the internal chatter – a sort of mindful activity.”

Through a period of ideation divergent/convergent thinking and market research. Students are required to apply design thinking and Human-centred design approaches to problem-solving and ultimately find that actually they have great and numerous ideas.

Finally, there is a stage where they are encouraged to acknowledge, based on the evidence through the learning experience, their own creativity and increased confidence.

Evaluating outcomes

In terms of evaluating outcomes formative feedback and peer-reviewed feedback is on-going. There are some benefits to working online. For example, using tools like Padlet, you can anonymise the students and they can peer-review each other's work and ideas and benefit from seeing all the feedback for all the students.

We both recognise the value of summative assessment in the learning process:

CC: "I've always borrowed from art and design disciplines in assessing ideas. I went to art school where one's ideas were always assessed and so I feel like that's ingrained in how I assess. Partially I t's about assessing their approach, and their rejection and development of ideas". (See Carey and Matlay, 2010)

SR: "In class verbal feedback is given to individual students to improve their writing, and articulation of ideas, to then provide them a structure or framework to present the utility of their ideas to different audiences. In addition in their appendices I suggest they include all their creative processes."

Our challenges

One of the issues over the years has been internal resistance of the institutions, or rigid thinking in terms of pedagogical approaches from departments or individual colleagues. Similarly to Amabile (1998) who identified the need to offer freedom to create. There is often a good intention to promote creativity but a misunderstanding of what it is, almost like creativity is pigeon-holed into art, music etc., and viewed as something alternative or extra, as opposed to something that should be embedded into all our teaching and learning practices. These attitudes of both staff and students are no doubt amplified in the UK, by the current determination to promote STEM subjects across the education system and minimise the contribution of the creative discipline subjects (Last, 2017). This creates an atmosphere of belittling creative activities more widely.

From our perspective, as chairs of the ISBE Creative Industries Entrepreneurship track, this highlights a paradox within

entrepreneurship/business education, which was explored through our work looking at the way in which creative industries entrepreneurship research is published (Carey, Romano and Penaluna 2017; Romano and Carey, 2018). In 2019 the creative industries, in the UK (and pre-covid), were the fastest growing sector in the UK, employing over 2 million people and contributing £13.5 million pounds per hour to UK Gross Value Added (GVA) (The Creative Industries Federation, 2019) suggesting that creativity and creative pedagogies offer an economic and social value beyond the creative industries.

We have both been fortunate to be able to overcome some of the internal resistance by demonstrating student satisfaction, interest and subsequent module and dissertation topic choices. What has been really rewarding over the years is to follow the careers of alumni via social media e.g. LinkedIn and have them acknowledge the impact of their learning (and our creative methods) on their careers. This evidence base is powerful in making a case for more creative approaches.

SHARED WISDOM

We would like to share with other educators what we have learnt so far:

CC: “I’ve always believed that creative and enterprising methods can be adapted to deliver teaching across any discipline. That how you teach has a bearing on creative and enterprising behaviours, in terms of how students solve problems and potentially leads to more entrepreneurial/intrapreneurial graduates.”

SR: “I always want to cultivate intellectual and collective curiosity. The movement from an individual to collective thinking. It is like a dance. As the educator, you’re the choreographer. I really believe that the classroom is a duplication of the real-world. We can give them the instruments and techniques to practice the challenges of working with the self, with others, to identify and balance individual skills and those of others and let the music play...”

Our development

Reflection has been vital in remaining flexible and adaptable. We might have developed approaches that we feel enable creativity to flourish amongst a diversity of students and cannot assume that what works for one year, one week, one group will still fit the next. Our experience suggests remaining open to your own ability to innovate, experiment and learn through unexpected sources provides you with the tools and techniques and confidence to evolve.

We should be like children, with an open mindset to explore learning in a versatile and organic way allowing the students to shape the learning environment and us to learn from them too.

SR: "For example the other day the students left this message in the chatbox of a remote learning session when my internet connection was intermittent they said: "Robot Stefania. Leave the session and come back☺" What I learned from them was to relax, have fun and to work with the unexpected and the unexpected but kindly nature of the student's communication."

Lessons learned

Experiment, embrace your failures and be open to learn

Not everything will work immediately, but that does not mean you should play it safe. Sometimes we try something new. If it does not quite work out there is a danger that you revert to those existing, more traditional methods (e.g. read a paper and discuss in the seminar...). It might be that the timing is not quite right, the students are not ready or they may be resistant, particularly if they cannot see the relevance of the session to the assessment. We have found being understanding, flexible, ready to adapt approaches and able to clarify the link to their summative assessment helps.

Evidence matters

Having evidence helps when making the case for your approaches to institutional management. For example: student emails (e.g. when they write to acknowledge that your module was the catalyst for getting a job or placement), sign-up for future modules, dissertation topics and ultimately graduate outcomes.

Be reflective and write about your practice

Being a reflective practitioner (Kolb,1983) enables an educator to develop a variety of approaches. According to the learning environment, styles and needs of the students, educators can be selective in choosing the most appropriate methods. Capturing reflections is important for the educator's development, shared institutional wisdom and beyond.

Finally, what if you experiment with your approaches? What if you embrace your own creativity, talent and bring your uniqueness to the learning environment? What you discover might be just be invaluable...

...after all "You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have." Maya Angelou

NOTES

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