Teaching Creativity in the Context of a Business School

Andrew Jackson

1 Introduction

Whilst it is acknowledged that creativity is a fundamental element of business success [1, 2] the partnerships between employees in creative roles and business planners and strategists is often uneasy [3]. The mutual suspicion engendered by the differences in attitude embodied by these roles frequently extends into Higher Education, and can act as a barrier in the sharing of experiences between academics working in different disciplines. This is a challenge that has been tackled with mixed success. Whilst there are number of high profile examples of business schools embracing concepts such as "design thinking" (for example the Stanford *d.school*, or "design school" which the *New York Times* described as one of the most highly sought after destinations at Stanford [4]) most business schools, and indeed business students, struggle to get to grips with the teaching of creativity. In response to this problem, this paper demonstrates how teaching practices that deal with creativity can be successfully transferred from the art and design educational environment into a business school context.

My teaching career has been spent teaching students both in a "studio" situation, and in the more conventional university setting of the lecture theatre and seminar room. I have primarily taught in the areas of design, design history, cultural studies and marketing. This followed an 8 year career working as designer with my own practice. In this paper, I want to show how I have used this varied experience to develop my teaching of creative skills to students who are primarily based within the discipline of business and management. I will first review the way that students have been conventionally taught in the "art school" system in the UK, expanding on

A. Jackson (✉)
Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, UK
e-mail: andrew.jackson@canterbury.ac.uk

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the theoretical frameworks that underpin this approach. I will then contrast this with the conventional academic approach found in Business Schools, and describe how I have developed a module that bridges this gap. I will explain how the module is taught, and reflect on the experiences of the staff and students who take part in the module.

2 Pedagogy and Andragogy

The call for papers for this conference asked how we might teach creativity to students by moving from a pedagogic approach to andragogy. Pedagogy is defined simply as the study and theory of the methods of teaching, but also implies the teaching of children, the word deriving from the Greek *pedo*, or relating to children. Andragogy refers more specifically to "adult learning", and suggests a learner-centric approach to education. Knowles [5] developed four andragogic assumptions, stating that for adults to be successful learners they should be encouraged to move from dependency to self-directedness and draw upon their reservoir of experience for learning. They tend to be ready to learn when they assume new roles and want to solve problems and apply new knowledge immediately.

However, the distinction between the two words also implies striving for a less didactic teacher-centred approach to education, and a move towards student centred learning. This is a problem for traditional universities who tend to base their approach on the lecture/seminar method of teaching—delivering a predetermined, set curriculum to students who are then examined to test whether they have remembered and understand what they have been taught. Biggs [6] has argued against this surface learning approach asserting that education is about conceptual change, not just the acquisition of information in other words, "deep learning". He believes that deep learning takes place when:

1. It is clear to students (and teachers) what is "appropriate", what the objectives are, where all can see where they are supposed to be going, and where these objectives are buried in the assessment tasks.
2. Students experience the felt need to get there. The art of good teaching is to communicate that need where it is initially lacking. "Motivation" is a product of good teaching, not its prerequisite.
3. Students feel free to focus on the task, not on watching their backs. Often, attempts to create a felt need to learn, particularly through ill-conceived and urgent assessments, are counter-productive. The game then becomes a matter of dealing with the test, not with engaging the task deeply.
4. Students can work collaboratively and in dialogue with others, both peers and teachers. Good dialogue elicits those activities that shape, elaborate, and deepen understanding ([6], pp. 60–61).

In order to see this approach in action, I now want to turn to the practice of art and design education.

3 Art Schools in the UK

Until the end of the twentieth century (in the UK at least) creative education was primarily carried out not in universities, but in art schools, and was tackled in a quite different way to conventional academic subjects. So why should we take note of the way teaching in art colleges in the UK has been developed? Name any one of the UK's most famous designers, musicians or artists, and they are likely to have studied at an art school at one time or other. One of the most celebrated art school graduates (in the business world, at least) is Sir Jonathan Ive. Ive, who is currently Chief Design Officer at Apple studied industrial design at Newcastle Polytechnic, graduating in 1989. Ive's contribution to Apple has been a key part of its rise to become one the most powerful brands in the world [7]. Looking at the kind of education Ive would have received at Newcastle gives us some insight into why British art schools have had such a strong track record in training creatives.

The art and design faculty at Newcastle Polytechnic (now Northumbria University) began life as an archetypal art school, being founded in 1844 as one of the original Government Schools of Design [8]. By the beginning of the 20th century, almost every region in the UK had its own art school provision, with counties such as Kent having as many as five, each serving their local area [9]. Today, most of these unique institutions have now either closed or have been absorbed into larger universities. In many cases, however, the educational approach inherited by art and design faculties remains unchanged, offering a sharp contrast with the pedagogy employed by the wider universities within which they are now housed.

Art school teaching is founded on the belief that learning is a dynamic process that consists of making sense and meaning out of new information and connecting it to what is already known. To learn well and deeply, students need to be active participants in that process. This typically involves doing something—for example, thinking, reading, discussing, problem-solving, or reflecting ([10], p. 94).The key to the art school system is the "atelier" method. An atelier is an artist's or musician's workshop that is led by a "master" or, in modern parlance, a tutor. In art and design faculties the chief learning spaces frequently follow this model. Within this space, which is designed to replicate a professional design studio, students are required to work independently on briefs that have been set by their tutors; they are autonomously engaged in self-directed problem-solving. Weaver describes this process in the context of architectural education:

> The reason for learning through problem solving is that this activity 'thinking like an architect' can only be learnt through experience; that is, learning to solve problems through the experience of solving problems. It is not for the teacher to tell the student everything, as if knowledge went from one head into another [. . .] so the essential task in teaching consists of organising the situation so students will have necessary experience [11].

As Belluigi states, "the atelier method places teaching and learning within one-to-one 'studio conversations' between supervisor and student. The espoused theory of this model involves offering constructive criticism on ideas and proposals, and helping the students realise their ideas" ([12], p. 23).

4 Problem-Based Learning

This is an example of "problem-based learning"—although in my experience this term is rarely, if ever used in the art and design faculty. Here, tutors inherit teaching methods from their forebears without naming or necessarily analysing them; the method is regarded as self-evidently the best way to teach. Problem-based learning encourages active participation, student independence and deep engagement. With regard to three-dimensional design and engineering education, Green and Bonollo [13] note: "The teaching of industrial design and product design is usually conducted in an industrial design studio, a place that has developed traditions of learning-by-doing within the traditions of project-based and problem-based education" ([13], p. 269). The objective of problem-based learning is to get students to solve problems they will meet in their professional career. The method is to present them with problems to solve; the assessment is based on how well they solve them. The method is genuinely student centred and tutors guide the students rather than "teach", with new knowledge obtained through self-directed learning. Students frequently work in groups, with a problem forming the basis of their organisational focus, thus stimulating learning, problem solving skills and the cognitive process.

5 Creativity in a Business School

I now want to describe how these methods can be transposed into a business school context by using the example of the Christ Church Business School Creative Campaign development module, which I wrote and have been delivering since 2011. This module is core for students studying BSc Advertising in the Christ Church Business School. The advertising industry places great store by its creative capacity, and is classified by the UK Government as one of the "creative industries". The creativity of advertising agency teams is the key point of difference that separates them from client-side marketing departments [14].

In the UK, advertising courses tend to take one of three distinctive approaches: those based in business schools encompass the wider strategic aspects of advertising and incorporate elements of the general marketing curriculum and management theory; those based in schools of media and cultural studies tend to approach the topic from the perspective of critical cultural theory and sociology; finally those based in departments that were once a part of an art college take an almost exclusively creative standpoint on the subject. The advertising course at Christ Church Business School is modelled on the first type, incorporating many other aspects of management theory—although a small number of students take advertising as single honours course, most combine advertising with either marketing or business studies, and their programme is typically made of general business models that follow a pedagogic format. By the time students reach the third year their primary goal has

become transactional, and is to achieve good grades. Their understanding is that this is achieved by producing assignments that demonstrating the recall of a given curriculum and the ability to cite text book marketing theory and business models (examples include the “Boston Matrix”, “Porters Five Forces”, and the “Marketing Mix”). However, at the beginning of their third-year Advertising students are faced with a very different proposition—they are asked to independently develop creative ideas for advertising campaigns that answer set briefs, and do not explicitly reference theory. They must arrive at answers for themselves, and these answers are not known in advance by the tutor; the work comes entirely from them. For some students who have been used to rote learning this is an alarming prospect. For most it is a pleasurable release from the routine of lecture/seminar/assignment.

Within constraints of the University rooming allocation, the module resembles a simplified form of the atelier system outline earlier in this paper. The course runs for 11 weeks, and is delivered across four hours on a single day. It is effectively the students’ sole focus for an entire day, and they work together in a room with computer access presentation facilities and meeting tables. This very different to a typical module in the business school, which runs over 22 weeks, with a single one-hour lecture and single one-hour seminar each week, often delivered on different days. Like many other academic university courses, the focus of these “long thin” modules is on passing the exam or course work, and accumulating grades. In other words, most students are extrinsically motivated by the need to pass. As a result, weekly attendance at lectures and is poor, with some modules achieving as little as 10% attendance, with occasional students never attending and simply submitting assignments to be marked. In contrast attendance on the Creative Campaign Development module rarely falls below 80%.

In the first four weeks of the module students are introduced to theories of creativity, with strong focus on methods that can be utilised in order solve a set of given problems. These include then concepts of brainstorming [15], lateral thinking [16], concept fans [17], mind mapping [18], and method prompt cards [19, 20]. These are supplemented with educational videos that clearly illustrate advertising creatives at work, showing their techniques and processes [21]. Interestingly, research has shown that very few advertising creatives consciously use creative theory in their work, and there is a well-documented divide between academic and practitioner theory [22], and I return to this issue later in this paper. Initially, students embark on a series of short projects ranging from 1 week to 3 weeks in duration, preferably working with one other partner to generate ideas. This mirrors the advertising agency convention of creative teams working in pairs, where one partner is a copywriter and the other an art director [23]. The final half of the module, typically around five weeks in duration, is spent working on a single larger scale project, normally to an external creative brief available as a national student competition by D&AD (the UK professional body representing designers and art directors). These briefs are given to the D&AD by real organisations who have a problem to solve, and this helps to set the students’ academic work in a strong professional context.

Throughout the module, the emphasis is always on process rather than outcome, and students are required to keep a logbook that records their progress. This contains visual research, notes and ideas and records of brainstorming sessions. Students are encouraged not to be precious about these books, and to regard them as tools that help them to externalise and record ideas—the more spontaneous the better, even if this means the books are scrappy and messy (in fact, the messier the better). This is a direct mirror of the sketchbook that all art and design students are encouraged to keep as core part of their creative development. For some students, this approach is hard to adopt; they see the logbook as an "assessable item" rather than a tool for creativity. As a result, they labour over presentation and endeavour to avoid "mistakes". Other challenges include a reluctance to move beyond the first idea, overly literal interpretation of problems and solutions, and an inability to generate a large quantity of possible solutions. Tutorial support and theoretical examination of the nature of creative blocks [24] aims overcome these barriers, whilst always encouraging students themselves to arrive at, and evaluate their ideas.

The module culminates in a pitch that as far as possible replicates the professional pitching situation encountered by advertising creatives, designers, and architects in their day-to-day work. In addition to the pitch, students also have submit a reflective essay that records and critiques the creative process they have used, and refers back to the literature on creativity that they have encountered over the course of the module.

Successful students gradually move from a deductive, convergent approach to more inductive, divergent thinking. For some students, this is a challenge, and the skills of the tutor who, in the atelier system, needs to be an experienced practitioner, are essential in coaching students towards this goal. In planning the module, we have made a point of employing practicing advertising and design creatives who give a day a week from their practice to teach. Interestingly, although these tutors play an essential role in delivering the teaching, it is very rare for any of them to have consciously engaged with the theory that underpins their professional practice, and these lecture-based components of the module are generally delivered by staff who are part of the faculty. The question remains about whether this part of the module is strictly necessary in order for students to achieve the learning outcomes, and there is potential for further research into both this, and the wider academic practitioner divide in the creative industries [22].

6 Conclusion

The atelier style situation combined with the problem-based learning approach creates a situation where most students become intrinsically motivated [25]. In module evaluation feedback students frequently tell us that this was their favourite module and they enjoy being challenged to "think outside the box". The direct connection with "real world" industry briefs is also highly valued by students as preparation for employment.

This meets both Knowles requirements of an andragogic education, and Biggs' formula for deep learning. Students are encouraged to move from dependency to self-directedness, to draw upon their reservoir of experience for learning, and to solve problems and apply new knowledge immediately. Importantly, in ways that the conventional transactional approach to business education finds hard to achieve, this method can develop in students' creative habits such as a tolerance for ambiguity, analogic thinking, or a resistance to closure.

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