

WORKING PAPER 3

Limerick Creatives' Examples of Creativity in Everyday Teaching

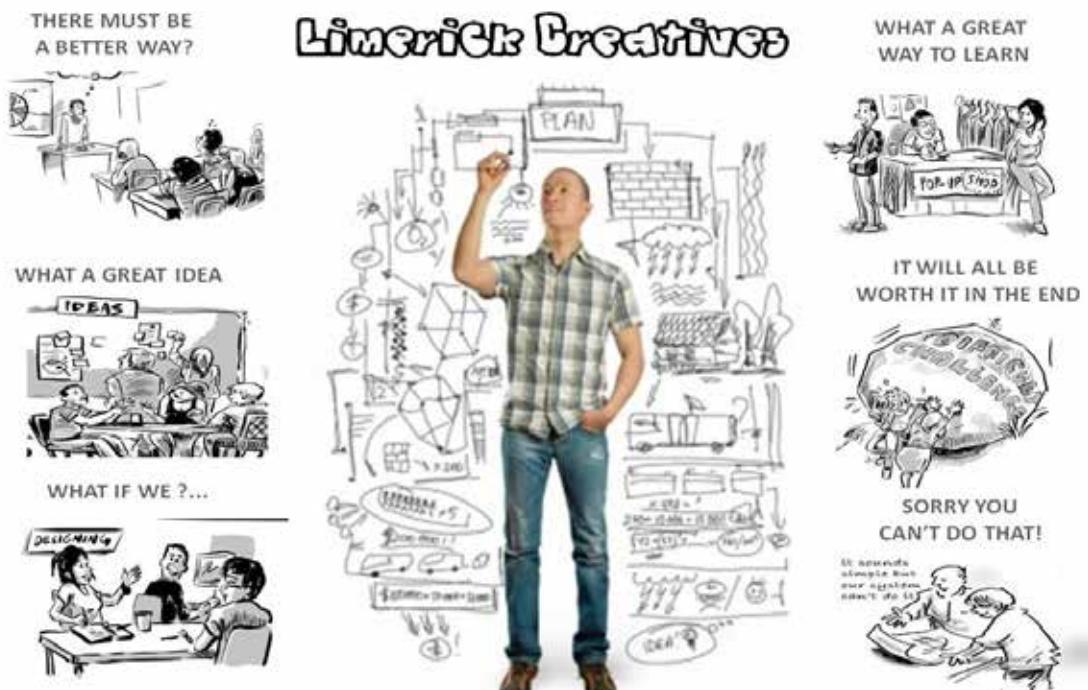
Introduction

This working paper is a collation of narratives provided by participants for the first assignment. Its purpose is to provide examples of higher education teachers using their own creativity in their own practice using a range of disciplines and to illuminate what teachers understand personal creativity to mean in their work contexts.

The challenge was to prepare a 500 word narrative of a teaching/learning situation where creativity has been used. The narrative should briefly describe:

- context (discipline and curriculum area, level, learner group, environment)
- pedagogic approach and why you used the approach - might include the use of tools/technology or resources that you created and/or the use of a particular environment
- what happened - what you did as a teacher and how learners responded
- your understandings of what was creative in this process and/or the outcomes
- any insights or principles this narrative provides about creativity in higher education teaching and learning

By sharing these pedagogic narratives it is hoped that one of the purposes of the module - to enable learners to appreciate creativity in higher education teaching practices will be realised. Furthermore, this co-created product serves the purpose of demonstrating the power of a collaborative learning ecology which the module is attempting to model.



1

"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn"

Benjamin Franklin

The following describes the creativity employed in a 'Film Production' module for 2nd year students of the TV, Radio and New Media degree programme at the Institute of Technology, Tralee. It is a four year honours degree programme within the Creative Media Department graded by continuous assessment. Students were required to produce a 10 minute short film narrative at the end of the second Semester as their major project.

To challenge the group they were given a piece of classical music at the beginning of the term as the stimulus for their narrative, acting effectively as a soundtrack. Each student was given a different audio track to emphasise uniqueness. Also, dialogue, voiceover, inter-titles, sign language and subtitles were all prohibited so that students had to challenge themselves to tell the story visually.

I decided to run this module as an integrated assessment with a colleague who teaches 'Film and Narrative Studies' so that students would benefit from the pedagogical aspects of both film theory and film composition. The creativity process was a fundamental part of the assignment and was documented comprehensively in the form of reflective journals. The project components are described in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1

It was suggested that students listened to the soundtrack in diverse locations to see how it influenced their initial thought process. Journal entries were a place to record:

- Creative processes
- Storyboarding
- Emotional processes
- Thoughts on the narrative process
- Reflections on theories of narrative
- Rationale behind choice of lighting, *mise-en-scène*, choice of shots, camera angles, editing, time relationships etc.
- Difficulties encountered

Reflective journal entries were supported with scheduled critiques. They were found to be useful in terms of creating awareness of one's learning experience and regulation of student behaviour for better performance. Reflective journals were beneficial from a metacognitive perspective and allowed students to extract data from their 'learning ecology' by sharing 'anything which inspired their thought process'. This technique supported 'lifewide learning' by giving students the freedom to express themselves openly thus personalising their learning and creativity. While shared learning was a prominent feature of the classroom environment it was decided to focus on individual projects so that each student had to go through the creative journey for themselves.

A Film screening evening was built into the module on a weekly basis. This was a space where students were required to 'actively watch' a designated film and add commentary to a class blog. Such a technique was utilised to share impressions of various film styles/genres. While this aspect was not graded students felt free to express themselves creatively and engage in constructive analysis in an open manner.

Apple's 'Final Cut Pro' was chosen as the video editing tool mainly because it is intuitive, highly respected within the media industry and useful for the following academic year in particular when students go on work placement. While students were happy with this choice of software as the product does not run on PC some felt restricted by having to use college resources exclusively at editing stage.

In higher education as a whole I think the model described worked successfully as it was balanced in terms of theoretical and practical content. It was however dependent on availability of resources e.g. cameras and equipment. In my experience, students really enjoyed working on this project but often found it difficult to 'settle' on one creative idea at the beginning.

While many ideas were ambitious students needed to be reminded of what was also 'realistic' within the timeframe given.

From a teaching and learning perspective reflective journal entries proved invaluable as a project management tool for the lecturer as they assisted in monitoring progress and providing instant feedback to students. Finally and importantly, the structure of the project assisted students in self management.

2

Context

I am not currently lecturing; however, I do some part-time lecturing on the Graduate Diploma in Health Education and Health Promotion at the University. I deliver a module titled 'The management, meaning and evaluation of change'. This module is covered over five Saturdays during the Autumn Semester. I have delivered this module on three occasions: 2008, 2009 and 2011. The module covers topics such as communication, leadership, organisational culture, change management, reflection and evaluation. There are usually 10-12 students taking this course and they come from a variety of backgrounds including teaching, community and voluntary work, science and administration. Students vary in age and educational levels, ranging from those to have just graduated to those who are returning to education having left the system a number of years previously (some 15-20 years). The sessions are usually held in a classroom which has lots of light and good wall space!

Pedagogic approach

The module uses an experiential learning approach primarily. Health promotion has been referred to as a 'magpie profession' as it draws its underpinning theories and principles from a variety of backgrounds including health, psychology, business and marketing. Each student brings their own subject knowledge, but importantly their own (life) experiences, to the learning environment and this is encouraged and nurtured. The last session of the module looks at evaluation in great detail. Evaluation is covered briefly at the outset of the module (as part of that students are asked to outline their hopes and expectations for the course during group work) so that during the last session we can reflect on how we have all progressed during the module. As part of this process, students are asked to engage in a number of evaluation activities - (a) reflect on their original goals and expectations; (b) outline the knowledge and skills they learned on the course, as well as what they liked (or didn't about it) and (c) think about their overall feelings about the module and what they would tell/advise someone who would be undertaking it the next year. The latter two activities are more creative in that students are invited to visually represent their thoughts and feelings. In activity (b) students are invited to write their thoughts on post-it notes and stick them on a representation of a person with items they liked about the course placed around the heart; skills they learned around the feet/hands; and knowledge they gained around the head. For activity (c) students are invited to create a poster (or a number of them) to place on a 'graffiti wall' at the back of the classroom. They are given various materials such as flipchart paper, coloured paper, markers, crayons, colouring pencils and sometimes even glitter glue. We stand back and look at it all at the end while learners feedback on their thought processes and we take photographs.

What happened?

Students respond really well to these activities (even if some appear daunted at the start as they feel they are not artistic), they like the hands-on approach and really benefit from the experiential aspect of it. I really enjoy it because I see how much they have progressed and observe them as they come to realise this also.

My understandings of what was creative in this process and/or the outcomes

This process was creative on the surface because it allowed students to be creative, however, on a deeper level it was creative because it allowed students to reflect on their learning over the course of the module but also to experience real-life evaluation processes which were participatory - the latter is important in health promotion as often a toolkit of evaluation strategies are needed (among other strategies) to engage different groups on health issues.

Insights or principles about creativity in higher education teaching and learning

As I only have a small amount of experience in higher education teaching I find this difficult to answer. I think perhaps that I may have more room to be creative when teaching on this particular programme compared to others. I myself completed this Graduate Diploma and as well as learning the knowledge required for the course, I was like a sponge observing the teaching strategies used by my very talented teachers. I now impart those, along with other tricks I pick up in my everyday / work life to bring life into what I teach.

3

The learning situation was a module on applied sport psychology practice and it was a "Dragon's Den" type task with Masters level students. They were completing an accredited Masters of Science in Applied Sport and Exercise Psychology at the University of Ulster. As both course director and module coordinator, I devised a task that would stimulate creativity. The students had a broad range of contextual experiences comprising student-athletes, athlete-students (e.g., Pro Rugby Players), professional coaches.

"The Dragon's Den" concept was borrowed from the reality TV show to examine a range of skills (see Appendix A: Marking Scheme) from the students including the following:

- Collaborative learning
- Creativity, originality and innovation
- Evidence-based practice
- Ethically sound practice
- Person-centred practice
- Entrepreneurial cognition
- Use of multi-media technology

The students were provided with a short brief: "Develop and pitch a evidence-based practice intervention with an elite sports team. Your 30 minute boardroom pitch is to be presented to the Team Principal, their chief sport-scientist and top performer."

Our course team provided support for the learners by giving tutorials in video-editing, Prezi © and other multi-media platforms. Rapidly the students showed their repertoire of skills and we as "teachers" became "students" too. For example, one of the coaches was skilled in videoediting and this enhanced all our abilities, both student and staff alike. The three groups displayed a high degree of autonomy and were only provided with three tutorials which included "campfire" meetings with course staff. This enabled the students to be self-determined and carve their own course. Intrinsic motivation to master the task was heightened by enabling them to choose the sports in which the intervention would be set (e.g., (F1, Pro Rugby or Americas Cup Sailing) and to develop their own work programme. Barriers between staff and students crumbled as our naivite in the different sport domains was rather quickly demonstrated (e.g., how many people in a pit crew?). It was a fun process!

The outcome was that the students surprised us and our panel experts (we had an expert from each sport on our panel -e.g., FIA event organiser). The "teams" turned up in bespoke clothing (specially branded T-shirts), provided a stimulating video presentation with huge effort but on their group cohesion (they took different roles but developed appropriate "segways" between presenters). By the way they scored highly too, but that was really just an aside.

Interestingly, when we proposed this particular task at "Course Validation" we were told that it was too radical and unstructured for higher education. We persisted with it and developed assessment criteria and a semi-formal structure or *learning ecosystem* around it. Creativity involved risk taking by both module coordinators and students alike. And we were also able to include *originality* and *innovation* as key terms in the marking scheme.

On reflection, we shaped and the students created their own *learning ecosystem* with appropriate knowledge (it was a 2nd semester task), monitoring and reflection and control of the output. It was largely based on the social interactions among the student group and their capacity for risk taking (we never saw a draft presentation). Their creative approach wasn't merely novel or distinctive but useful in this context, aligning closely to the definition by Robert Sternberg. Contextual intelligence was a key component as they had to translate their psychological constructs, concepts and theories to the different sport contexts. Perhaps a case of Pro-C in action. The more humanistic approach to creativity by Rogers may more closely explain the role of positive emotions and personal exploration in the process and the process of self-discovery and self-actualisation which the students explained in a de-brief after the presentation (again campfire mode-and we had left the boardroom at this stage). In sum, we challenged the students to demonstrate contextual intelligence and to reach this aim they engaged in creative processes, and these skills, both soft-skills and intellectual, will serve them well in their pursuit of life-wide learning in the future.

APPENDIX A:

MARKING SCHEME FOR ASSESSMENT OF THE DRAGON'S DEN PRESENTATION

GROUP	<i>Transformers F1 Team support</i>	
Criteria	Content	%
Outline of psychological basis and rationale for the intervention - links to prior research, links to practice & sport relevance	Clear outline of potential of psych. Support in contextually sound way (e.g., wheel change). Concentration and teamship were key and good idea to focus on personnel other than driver-Defined key terms and gave background to theoretical basis.	25/30
Client-centred approach: contextual intelligence, approp. Language, originality & innovation	Sport specific examples provided-(e.g. Senna), traffic light analogy, language appropriate throughout but needed to stick to F1 and motorsport examples only-avoid other sports with clients-could be designed more for stakeholder with purse strings, delivery of service was key!	25/30
Presentation -logical organization, aesthetic appeal, originality.	Highly original with extranormal sequences, very fluid presentation and graphics were excellent-branding very strong. Superb and witty too. Sold team too as well as product-good handover in Q&A time. Voice over was excellent!	18/20
Response to Questions		15/20
What evidence is there to support your intervention? What do you know about the mental demands of the activity? Is the support service sustainable in the long term? Why should we choose your team instead of MENTAL TOUGHNESS Inc. that pitched earlier?	Excellent answers across the group with evidence, sport-related examples and theory. All participants gave clear answers and spoke well-depth of answers was excellent.-FIA expert noted that they worked very well as a team -this is key in real-world task	

4

A couple of years ago, I used to teach my students writing skill. They were beginners in their first year as undergraduate students. One of the pedagogical approaches I focused on was learning through discussion. The effectiveness of that sort of teaching depended on the context factors. For example, the group size and the function of the teacher are core factors. I gave them an exercise to encourage and motivate them to work hard. Therefore, in creating forums in the discussion board, I asked everyone, as the group was small, to write a paragraph and each one would find an error in his peer's paragraph. Then the entire group will comment on the errors. After that, I asked the students to come to the class, and each one should bring a citation to support his claim about specific errors he found in peers' writing. I think what I did was creative for I found the students very enthusiastic to work hard and find any error. They supported their work from the literature review. I believe what I did enabled the learners in my discipline to use and develop their own creativity. In addition, the students communicated and collaborated with each other in a very flexible way. I noticed that there was a lot of interaction involved in that process of learning.

What I experienced is answered in the following questions: *Did that kind of activity add something to teaching/learning strategy? In addition, did that sort of teaching have any insight of creativity?*

I strongly believe that when I did such an activity; I could create my own pedagogical approach with my own important elements.

Doing that kind of exercise with the students, took a great deal of creative effort to bring out the most creative thinking in my class. This was notable when the students did their best to interact and found the errors to move to the second task, which was supporting their claims from the references. I best encouraged the learners to communicate. Such an experience taught me that most learners become more challenged, motivated, and inspired if they can create something of value. In addition, what is fundamental and practical in learning and teaching is that if the students feel what they do and how they do it reflect who they are. The same concept is applicable to the teacher himself.

That kind of pedagogical approaches (learning through discussion) was more varied and more enjoyable to allow individual talents, ideas and thoughts. It opened room for creative tasks from both the teacher as an instructor and the learner. Moreover, that kind of teaching allows learners to make use of creative thinking as an important skill, and it is really a vital tool behind personal growth. I believe that creativity is important in matching the needs of a particular group in a particular field of education.

I, as I teacher, always learn something new and of value if I employ creativity how to develop effective methods of teaching at the highest level.

5

My class, that I taught, was a level 5 reading class at Murray state University. It was September 10, 2009. The class was arranged in circular shape where students can see each other and have discussions together. I was standing in the middle of class, so every student can hear her voice clearly. Sometimes, I went to front of the room in order to write and explain some difficult points on the whiteboard. The atmosphere of the class was motivating. Every student wants to be an active part of discussion.

The objectives of the lesson was as following:

1. The teacher will teach students two new vocabulary words from an authentic text.
2. The students will identify the main idea from an authentic reading.

I demonstrated my first objective from the lesson by choosing a teaching approach called "Whole Language". According to Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers in "Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching", the first principle of whole language method is that "The instructor need to use authentic literature rather than artificial, specially prepared texts and exercises designed to practice individual reading skills and the passage of the reading have to focus on real natural events rather than on specially written stories that do not relate to students' experiences". In other words, teachers are required to choose an authentic text such as real newspaper articles or a piece of literature that discusses current issues in order to give them the power understanding of their world. This principle was applied exactly in the class that I taught. I gave out an article to every student at the start of class. The article is called " Joe Wilson Shouts to Obama during Speech:" You lie"". Then I began explanation by asking, "did any one watch Obama's speech last night?" "Did you see a guy who stands up and says you lie?" These questions motivated students to speak up and express their opinions. For example, a Chinese student says: yes, I watched this guy and this was very embarrassing. On other hand, a Saudi girl said:" No, I do not watch this speech. Please, I want to know what happen". As a result, I asked them to read the article that discusses a hot political subject in America. My action when I asked my students to read shows the next principle of the whole language approach, and that is the student needs to read with the desire of comprehension.

This principle lead my students to ask "why was republican Joe so angry?". Therefore, I can check my students' understanding of the political story. For instant, some students said that it's because he is a republican and he hates the democratic government. Others said it is because he believes that Obama will give illegal immigrants free healthcare. The positive point here is that students talked about the issues that are related to topic but do not mention in the article. They have conversation about the differences between republican and democratic government. Also, they talked about the struggles that illegal immigrants face in America. For example, one student mentioned that he watched a movie called "Under the same moon" that was about difficulties that face a Mexican woman who enters America illegally and left her family behind. In this stage, I accepted all students' answers although some of them were wrong. My acceptance of my students' replies shows the third principle of whole language method that is to consider mistakes as evidence of learning rather than of failure (Jack C. Richards & Theodore S. Rodgers). The next goal from this lesson is that I wants my students understand the use of two new vocabularies from the article .Therefore, I asked students to guess the meaning of "Condemned" and "outburst". The interesting thing is that all of the students collaborated to guess the meaning of outburst. One said it means crying, but another student said it means yelling. After this long discussion of the words'

meanings, I asked them to put these words in their own sentences. Sure enough, I was creative in choosing the topic and the materials that motivate students to speak and make them improve their knowledge about the real events that happens around them .Also, this way helps students become actively involved in using the vocabulary they study. The class materials make students willing to engage and share their opinions and connecting the article w **TL5051**

6

The main goal of my teaching is to stimulate my students to become responsible, conscious and helpful members of our society. Through my courses, I expect to:

- A. Improve the knowledge and understanding of students.
- B. Improve their communication skills.
- C. Assist them in becoming mature and confident with knowledge base. Develop positive thinking but at the same time critical consumers of information.
- D. Creating safety culture in their work practice.

A: Chemical engineering is an applied field where students constantly apply the fundamental concepts and theory learned in the physics, mathematics and biology classrooms and other disciplines. Good engineers should have the ability to solve problems or develop solutions for new developments based on sound theoretical principles. As a tutor of engineering I teach how to integrate theory with practical applications. I realized that integration between theory and realistic problems can be difficult for many students, but enabling them to apply the connections is my main aim.

B: The engineering skills are equally important as interpersonal skills. Currents students in the future will work in various surroundings, culture and with different individuals. Understanding and tolerate other habits and managing interpersonal relations and problems can be equally important as engineering skills to be successful professional engineer.

C: I encourage and remind students to examine and question each concept and methodology that I am imparting at every possible occasion: is it possible? why? how? Instead of assuming the tutor/instructor/expert is always right I inspire learners to satisfy their curiosity. It is crucial to encourage students to develop analytical reasoning and independent thinking to improve their problem solving skills. Students need to understand how the material I present to them offers just one potential solution to a problem. I want to enable them to apply this critical analysis to problems outside the classroom. I encourage students to critically select appropriate sources of information rather than relying on what is most readily available.

D: Everyone needs an in-depth knowledge of work safety at work. Students should acquire safety knowledge during the educational process, through continuous emphasis on safety. Demonstrating safety practices through personal examples and recognizing positive safety behaviours are important ways to promote safety. I build this into my laboratory classes by asking students to report and make recommendations.

When I collect a material for a lecture and when I am standing in a classroom, I have two questions constantly in mind: Am I engaging the students in the subject? Am I communicating in a lucid manner? These questions help me focus on increasing a student's knowledge of a subject and improving my skills as a teacher.

Students need to know that you are personally interested in their learning. On this basis I try to be totally involved with the class, dedicated to students and prepare to devote time and energy for them. Within reason I try to personalize the needs of the students, particularly shy or international students with their knowledge about immigrations and political life.

7

During the autumn term of 2013 I was asked by the head of department to participate in a module entitled "Introduction to Biochemistry". The module is aimed at 1st year biochemists and there is no formal course layout. Instead the module consists of 3 lecturers, each lecturing for a period of 3 weeks on an area of biology that interests them. As I already lecture and conduct much of my research in the field of bio-materials I decided to choose regenerative medicine as my topic. As there was no formal syllabus in place the head of department allowed me total freedom in terms of how I taught the module thereby providing me with an ideal opportunity to test some alternative learning methods that I had been preparing to implement in some of my other modules but had not yet the opportunity to do so.

In teaching this module I had a number of goals.

- Ø To impress upon the students the significant impact that regenerative medicine is currently having on the field of medicine and how this may affect them in the future.
- Ø To clarify misconceptions surrounding controversial issues by highlighting scientific fact i.e. current controversy surround use of stem cells etc.
- Ø To engage students in class discussion and to enable them to express their personal opinion on aspects of science.

My approach involved first establishing the background of the field. This was done in a traditional lecture format. Once a sufficient level of background information had been established I introduced the potential pro and cons of regenerative medicine. The pro side was highlighted by a recent TED talk by a surgeon named Anthony Atala whose research group have pioneered the field of regenerative medicine and grown active human organs such as skin and liver within a laboratory setting. The potential disadvantages were highlighted with statistics in terms of increasing healthcare costs and the posing of questions such as; if this technology keeps advancing where will it stop? Will this technology only be reserved for the rich in society? To encourage engagement students were asked their opinion and actively encouraged to elaborate on their first comments. Overall the students responded very well to the module and approximately 75% of the actively engaged in class conversations and expressed their personal opinions. Many of whom thanked me afterwards and highlighted how much they had enjoyed the course.

In terms of creativity I believe that my teaching of this module was significant within the context of scientific lectures. Due to the nature of course material the opportunity to discuss the impact of science for an extended period of time doesn't arise that often and opportunities to express one's own creativity in teaching arise even less so. With this module I felt as if I could have a bit of fun with the subject area and I believe that this transferred onto the students themselves.

In my view the reaction from the students to the format of the lecture series was mostly surprise as many were expecting a one way delivery of information in a typical lecture fashion. This is possibly an indication that creativity in scientific teaching methods is somewhat lacking in the Irish higher educational system.

Context

I teach Physical Education in the Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences. This semester I am teaching a 'Philosophy of Physical Education and Sport' module to 4th year students. This is the first time I am teaching them because they were on teaching practice in the autumn, which was my first semester at the University of Limerick. I have been co-teaching with another lecturer and only started teaching the module in week 7 of the semester. Therefore I have had a hard time connecting with this group of students ($N = 70$) - something that is important in a module of this nature. The module is taught in a very awkward lecture theatre that prevents me from interacting effectively with individual students. After a couple weeks of so-so lectures I decided that this week I had to do things a little differently - which will be the focus of this narrative.

Pedagogical Approach

This week the topic was 'Morals and Values' and I intended to connect this to the students' philosophies and discuss the impact this would have on their future students. I wanted to engage my students in meaningful small group discussions that would allow them to explore their morals and values by answering a variety of questions like 'Name five reasons you are happy to be alive' and 'If you could cheat knowing that you wouldn't get caught would you do it?' I decided that in order for me to connect with my students, and for them to engage in meaningful learning/discussions we had to get out of the lecture hall. Luckily the weather cooperated so we went outside. In groups of 5 with a bowl full of questions, they were to have one person start by drawing a question which the person to their right would answer, then pass to the right and repeat the process until there were no more questions. The only rule was that they couldn't answer a question with 'I don't know...'

What Happened?

I was delighted with their engagement with the activity. I have to admit that small group discussions are not something new or overly creative, but within the constraints of the lecture hall the students are limited to interacting with the people directly around them and I feel that this often results in similar responses being shared over and over again. Taking them out of the room and using bowls of questions resulted in higher engagement and by my perception more learning.

My Understanding of the Creative Process & Outcomes

The use of small groups to engage with questions while standing in a circle outside could be seen as creative. Several people walked by and wondered what we were doing which was interesting. The result of the activity was increased engagement and more meaningful learning/connection to the content.

Insights Relative to Creativity in Higher Education

The lecture hall can be quite stifling and can discourage interaction with and between students. Finding ways to "beat" the lecture hall can be challenging but we should try different methods and ideas if we want students to be engaged and to achieve meaningful outcomes.

Context

In June of last year I launched a Management Development Programme (NFQ Level 6) to a group of twenty experience managers in a large Multinational Pharmaceutical manufacturing organisation off-campus in their R & D facility in Co Tipperary.

Pedagogic Approach

This one-year distance Management Development skills-based programme was delivered primarily through an interactive workshop based format and supported by bespoke Distance Learning teaching materials and individual coaching by programme lecturers. While based on essential academic theories, concepts and techniques there was also significant focus afforded to individual personal development allied with the practical application of learning within the workplace.

What Happened?

I had spent six months developing the material and embedding the cultural and strategic objectives of the organisation into workshop content; case studies; teaching material; and programme assessments. The programme was launched by the organisations CEO who passionately endorsed the programme; the partnership with the teaching team & Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick.

Just after the CEO left the room and I was about to begin when the students informed me that they had no interest in the programme and were forced to do it or they would lose their recent promotions!

How did I Respond Creatively?

I almost panicked and walked out of the room! And despite the workshop schedule and the significant work I had done in relation to developing the programme; I stopped everything and ordered coffee for the group; we sat down to discuss the situation. It became evident from our discussion that 'fear' and 'lack of confidence' were the key driving forces for their resistance; not the possibility of losing their promotions. It had been a number of years since the majority of the group had attended a formal teaching / university programme.

After coffee I rearranged my teaching style and delivery to better leverage both their experience and expertise. I encouraged them to tell stories about and convey operational experiences. We then mapped these stories and experiences to the relevant theories, concepts and techniques of the first module. This led to the creation of an 'experience repository' which we used and added to for each module over the duration of the programme - critically I listened to them, responded to them, involved them and gave them ownership of their learning.

Outcome

All twenty managers will graduate this August. Seven of them have applied to progress to further Management programmes with Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick.

Creativity Insights

Reflecting on the above narrative and creativity; I have realised that your students can be an enormous implicit source of creativity and one of your best teaching resources. Flexibility around co-creating knowledge when faced with unfamiliar problems and opportunities is essential. It is this flexibility that is often missed or not recognised within a higher education context.

We build and develop explicit programmes from our perspective, often with little consideration to the perspective of students and supporting their creativity, because that's what we have always done!

'The current crisis in today's universities is real, and much of it is of the universities' own making. In the spirit of honouring tradition, universities hang on to past practices to the point of imperilling their futures'

Christensen & Eyring (2011) 'The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education from the Inside Out'

10

I teach family law which is the only subject I teach that reflects my personal research interests. Thus, it is my opportunity to express my creativity by engaging in research-led teaching. This year, having taught the module previously, I had already prepared the 'meat' of the module (i.e. the law and the reading lists). This allowed me to think about how I could make the module more enjoyable and engaging. First, I 'upgraded' all of my lecture materials, adding images and considering how I could better summarise main points to make the topics more accessible. I also was very anxious to ground the students' learning in the real world. Thus, I found statistics on divorce, custody etc to show them how the law they were learning applied everyday life. I also sourced relevant video-clips and media commentary which made them think more critically about issues like fathers' rights or domestic violence. Thus, rather than merely learning the (at times rather stale) legal principles, they could start to think about what this law means to real people and how it advances or hinders their interests. I also arranged for a guest speaker, Dr. Geoffrey Shannon, to come and speak to the class. He gave a fantastic talk on law reform and, as one of the leading experts in Irish family law, he copper-fastened their learning experience by reinforcing and encouraging the ideas they had. Finally, I sought to encourage them to develop their own views on family law by setting them a take-home assignment which allowed them to critically think about a specific aspect of family law. To enable them to do this successfully, I gave essay workshops where I shared my own experiences of writing and correcting assignments, thereby helping them to improve their writing skills whilst also learning about family law.

The approach I took worked rather well. Students were at times reluctant to engage in class discussions but it is clear from teaching evaluations that they found my approach helpful and enjoyed the class. I found it useful to put extra material on SULIS (links to documentaries, websites, newspaper articles etc) as students could decide themselves whether they wanted to engage more critically with the material but it wasn't forced upon them. What I felt was creative in my approach was to bring my socio-legal approach to research into my teaching. This allowed me to share more of my own views and insights than if I had merely taught the law in the traditional doctrinal way. I also reconfigured the course to focus on topical issues such as children's rights or fathers' rights at the beginning to grab their attention and demonstrate the current nature of the subject-matter. This worked very well and I would do this again in other modules if I could. Generally, the best insight I have gained is that a little extra effort can yield dividends in enhancing the student experience and that bringing some of your own personality and expertise to bear on your teaching can positively impact on the way in which your message is received by the students, creating a more enjoyable and constructive learning environment.

11

Context

This is my second semester teaching Strategic HRM to 4th Year Business Students. The focus of this module is very much a strategic application of their 4 years HRM studies. Having completed the module last year I felt that Students' ability to apply their learnings required some 'vehicle' to guide them through the module.

Creative Solution

I devised a 50% team-based assignment which was the development of a Strategic HRM Plan for a Virtual Business where, week on week, key theoretical learnings from Lectures could be translated into a real plan for a business.

Pedagogical Approach

This was multi-faceted but the core elements were:

- o The provision of a Business Planning Template which would act as a guide for each stage of the Strategic Plan - it was laid out in line with the lesson plan so that each week a new element of the plan was explored theoretically and via some real case studies and then each Lecture closed with a discussion on how this could be applied to their Virtual Organisation.
- o Establishing the weekly tutorials with a new Tutor who had business experience and would use each tutorial to embed the learnings from the Lecture into the plan so that in-class time was spent each week developing the plan and sharing experiences across project teams.
- o The provision up-front of some key business planning articles from the Harvard Business Review - kind of like an 'everything you wanted to know about Strategic Planning but was too afraid to ask'. This would provide some information for some self-directed learning on business strategy and planning in general.
- o Weekly Lectures incorporated many media-clips from both academics and business leaders on the core elements of HR and business planning.
- o Weekly Lectures incorporated case studies on businesses and how their HRM plans responded to their Business Strategies.
- o A guest lecture was arranged with a leading HR Director who shared her experiences of SHRM across a range of different business contexts throughout her career.
- o Constant referencing of the project during lectures, every theory and case study and media clip used was always directly linked back to how it would apply in the virtual organisations the Students were working on.
- o Gave total creative freedom to Students to design their Virtual Organisation any way they wished once it was based on a realistic context and supported with relevant business research e.g. A Nursing Home should reflect issues/regulations etc. for that sector.

Progress/Insights to Date

It was a learning curve for me, the Tutor and the Students but it is playing out very well thus far. Students were initially very hesitant and wanted more guidelines and more rules and seemed uncomfortable with the 'virtual' nature of the organisation (they are used to getting fully detailed case studies) and simple template to guide them. We had to establish regular communications between myself and the Tutor e.g. What were the issues/feedback in the

tutorials this week - how can I now address them in next week's Lecture. We had to provide additional 'clinics' for some Students who requested more support. BUT the projects have really brought the Lectures to life and being able to apply my own business experience and use this assignment as the vehicle for providing the context has been hugely beneficial to each Lecture. Though Students were initially unsure and even over-complicated things for themselves, with extra support they are now seeing the light and though projects have yet to be submitted drafts viewed to date are good.

What was creative about this process?

Everything! It was new for me, the Tutor and the Students. I have usually only seen this type of approach at post-grad level. It required me to think creatively to design it and update and review it in response to the Lectures and the Student feedback. It required Students to be really creative and this really challenged them at the outset - they openly admit they have never done anything like this in their studies to date. By not prescribing an assignment but just leaving them with a business idea and a simple template it has allowed them take their application of the learning in many different directions - uncomfortable for some but enjoyable for most.

Key Outcomes

Applied Learning! Practical experience these soon-to-be-graduates can take into their new workplaces. Real understanding of how theory is applied and how practice will differ as needed. Real creativity at work in a theoretical environment!

Principles/Insights for HE

Need to take an applied learning approach sooner. Very useful tool to fully leverage the Tutorials. Adds value in many different ways through generating student creativity and applied learning across modules. Had to work against the infrastructure though to make it happen - 'support clinics' outside of set times etc. Very time consuming for myself and Tutor but very rewarding and enjoyable. Personally felt that learning was being generated rather than consumed in the class and really saw the group grow as the module progressed. Feel quite proud of all involved!

12

As part of a Counselling Diploma at a University College in the Northern of England I was invited to deliver a series of lectures over a two week period introducing final year students to the theory and practice of existential counselling. My aim in this session was to introduce students experientially to the role wonder plays in existential therapy.

I invited students to bring in any artefact which inspired wonder in them: music, art, photograph, literature or film extract. My objective was to invite a personal relationship to the subject and stimulate curiosity. I started the session by introducing an artefact of my own and a short account of how wonder has been an important mood in my life. At this point I didn't define my idea of wonder- I wanted that definition to emerge from the group.

Dividing into small groups they shared what was wonderous about their artefact. My aim was to immerse ourselves in an attitude of wonder and develop out of the dialogue a shared understanding of how we might describe wonder. Each group collaboratively prepared a poster with some of their images/text/descriptive words. Presenting these posters to each other and working as a whole group they created a collective understanding and emergent definition of wonder. What was particularly interesting for the group was the realisation that they had not thought about wonder before and how it had been experienced in their lives in so many different ways.

At this point I introduced a quote from existential psychotherapist Emmy van Deurzen (2008) who argues:

There has to be complete openness to the individual situation and an attitude of wonder that will allow the specific circumstances and experiences to unfold in their own right.

I related this quotation to the theoretical principal of "bracketing" therapist assumptions. Inviting students to return to small groups, they looked again at how their ideas on wonder might relate to their work with clients.

A final exercise involved role play with students, in pairs, becoming "therapist" and "client". The task was for the "therapist" to try to attune themselves to the attitude of wonder and hear the "client's" story.

Feedback was focussed on whether it is possible to attune ourselves consciously to an attitude of wonder and if so, what difference did it bring to our perception of our client?

There were multiple opportunities for creativity in this session:

- Improvisation necessitated risk taking and "thinking-on-their-feet".
- Creating posters enabled the representation of ideas to gain new perspectives.
- Collaborative work generated new thinking about a previously unexamined topic.
- By synthesizing emotional and cognitive responses to their various artefacts students, created a working definition of wonder which was then applied to the different context of therapy.

By immersing the group in an initial experience of wonder I believe I facilitated the conditions for creativity. In particular, I invited curiosity and by stressing that wonder is inherently a step into the unknown I encouraged risk taking in discussion, role play and presentations.

Reference

van Deurzen, E. (2008) Existential Therapy. Retrieved April 3rd 2014 from http://www.existentialanalysis.org.uk/assets/articles/Existentialism_and_Existential_Psychotherapy_Emmy_van_Deurzen.pdf

13

Last year, within the School of Computer Science at the University of Limerick, I taught on a module called '*Ethics in Software Engineering*'. The class comprised of a total of 90 fourth year students. My general impression of them was that they were largely concerned with technological issues such as programming, project development and exam revision - typical "black and white" learning practices. I quickly realised that the concept of "ethics" was considered a soft issue amongst the majority of students - one of which did not have any "real world" application. This allowed me to appreciate an unfamiliar context and an unfamiliar problem which encouraged me to become creative and make a contribution towards the learning process.

As part of my teaching activities, I was also involved in delivering tutorials for smaller groups (30 students per class). While I was scheduled for three double classes (two hours back-to-back) I decided to devise an interactive environment to teach the material. I decided to embrace a little more creativity and interactivity for the module. I believed that this would provide an improved learning environment since the group appeared to be a little hostile towards ethics and did not seem convinced that this was an important subject. To support my approach for this class, I employed a "*learning by discussion and debate*" pedagogy. This pedagogy comprised of both face-to-face and online discussion and debate using discussion boards on Moodle.

The learning by discussion and debate pedagogy worked really well for this class because of a number of factors including the small group size, the subject scope, and the dual role I played as a teacher and a facilitator. Within the class, I typically presented the theoretical material using PowerPoint presentations and apply the theory to recent news events. This allowed students to identify the relevance of ethical issues in software engineering, for example, working conditions, exploitation of global workforce, coding errors in healthcare software, etc. I linked the theory to Webpages and encourage the students to consider the "for and against" argument for specific issues in the technology news articles and debate these topics using theoretical arguments. I also employed a role-play strategy where I had setup the classroom in a courtroom-like setting. I allowed students to volunteer or I would select students to argue for or against a particular statement. I acted as the judge of a courtroom and I would hear a number of arguments from a small group of students (typically four 'for' and four 'against' a statement). The remaining students acted as a jury panel and provided a decision on the outcome of the arguments from the student debate. The roles would change week-on-week but I would remain as judge to facilitate the flow of the debate. For example, I would project a statement on a large screen such as: "*Government should have access to all of our data in order to maintain a safe society in Ireland*". These discussions and debates were also continued within an online environment which I created using Moodle. Each week I would place the topic in a discussion board and students would argue their individual points and also provided additional sources of references to justify their argument. As part of the assessment process, students were divided into groups of five and were given a general topic to debate and present evidence using PowerPoint slides. Some student wore t-shirts with slogans to emphasise their points during their presentation and they became increasingly consumed by the topic and really engaged in the desire to debate their points of view. What was once considered to be a relatively boring subject became a fun and interactive one.

This creative exercise proved to be a valuable lesson for myself as a teacher and the students. For me, I was encouraged to consider methods (metacognitive process) to be more creative in how I teach students. For students, it encouraged them to be more open-minded on the potential benefits of learning new topics outside of their field and to learn about the importance ethics and debates can play in their everyday lives. In essence, creative teaching and learning instils some enhanced capabilities towards intellectual enquiry. It provides both teachers and students with an engaged productivity environment to co-create value in the learning experience. The students responded well to the creativity of this module and I received very positive feedback from a student evaluation survey I conducted towards the end of the module. While this was initially an unfamiliar problem and context, I wanted to sustain this environment in my teaching practice. More importantly, I felt that adding creativity to my teaching practice provides a more meaningful experience and keeps it fresh and exciting for all involved and create an improved learning ecology to go beyond the traditional learning environment.

14

I recently had the opportunity to design a new module for students undertaking the Masters of Business Association (MBA) in the University of Limerick. Although I was provided with a very broad outline on being assigned the task, I was essentially free to choose what material to cover with the students and how to design their assessment. It presented me with a wonderful opportunity to be creative and to design a bespoke module, tailored to the needs of my student cohort.

For the purposes of this assignment, I am going to focus on the creativity I showed in terms of designing the assessment for the module. First, in order to encourage students to make an effort to grasp the basic principles of law covered in the first block of the delivery, I required them to complete an online, open book, multiple choice quiz through the learning management system used on campus (SULIS) which was worth 20%. Although multiple choice quizzes are rarely availed of in law, I felt that it was a positive addition to the assessment of the module and encouraged students to focus on understanding the core fundamentals thereby allowing us to engage in more critical analysis as the semester progressed.

Second, recognising the need for life-wide learning, I asked the students to research and critique one aspect of an area of law (the duty of care in tort) as it pertained to their business or line of work (worth 20%). In this way I was able to facilitate students engaging in research and learning in an area of law with specific importance to them and presented a platform for them to engage in self-directed research. It gave students a great opportunity to be creative and synthesise their learning with the environment in which they work on a daily basis.

Third, throughout the semester I provided students with problem questions based on their area of business (broadly defined) and required them to discuss the legal issues arising and the advice they would give to the parties involved drawing on their newfound knowledge of the law and the legal system. Having allowed the students 5-10mins to review the problem, I then encouraged them to critically evaluate the situations amongst themselves before addressing any issues they had not raised or adequately dealt with. The feedback to these problem questions was very positive as the students felt it brought the law from the abstract to the real in an effective manner and allowed them to better synthesise their knowledge. Problem questions were then also included in the final, closed book exam.

The overall feedback I received from the students for this approach to assessment was very positive and would encourage me to use such techniques again in the future. The use of the self-directed research and multiple choice quiz was particularly innovative and worked very well.