

WORKING PAPER 2

PERSPECTIVES ON CREATIVITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Survey of Limerick Creatives 2014

Jenny Willis

CONTENTS

A. Context	2
B. Respondents	2
C. Beliefs about personal creativity	2
D. What creativity means to you in the context of your work as a teacher/educator	7
E. Creativity and students' learning and development	12
F. Factors which discourage students' creative development	27
G. Suggestions for improvement	27

A. CONTEXT

In March 2014, Professor Norman Jackson (Lifewide Education) led an interactive module at the University of Limerick, entitled 'Scholarly Innovation and Creativity'. As part of this module, a questionnaire was designed and all participants were invited to complete it on line, using Lifewide Education's Values Exchange website. The aim was to enable participants to share their perspectives and beliefs about creativity and creativity in higher education. Preliminary findings were fed back through the presentation during the second day of the workshop. This report provides a more considered analysis of the data set (n=16).

B. RESPONDENTS

- 1. There were 16 respondents, of whom 56% (n=9) were female and 44% (n=7) male.
- 2. 19% (n=3) were aged 20-30, 31% (n=5) were between 31 and 40 years old, and 50% (n=8) were aged 41-50. These proportions are congruent with mid-career professional roles.
- 3. 75% (n=12) described their roles as teaching/lecturing; two of these were also (mature) students. The remaining 25% (n=4) were in student support or research roles.
- 4. The departments represented by the respondent group were diverse, including Business (Work & Employment); Chemical and Process Engineering; research into Creativity; Health Promotion; Law; Management development; Media; Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy; Psychology; Psychotherapy; Sociology; Sport Sciences and Teaching English as a Second/Other Language. These disciplines span the arts and sciences.

C. BELIEFS ABOUT PERSONAL CREATIVITY

1. How creative do you feel you are in your work as a teacher, student affairs advisor, manager or administrator? Respondents used the scale 1 = rarely creative to 4 = creative in most aspects of their work, most of the time.

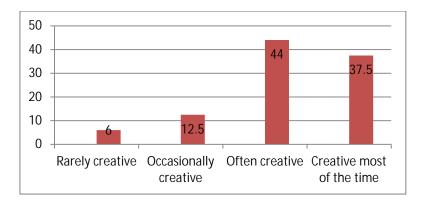


Figure 1 Perceived creativity in professional role (as % of total)

Figure 6 show that only 3 individuals (18.5%) felt they were not creative often or most of the time. There is no pattern in the age, role or discipline of these 3 people.

2. Respondents were next asked to rate their degree of agreement with each of a series of statements, using the scale 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. In each of the graphics below, the numbers appear as a percentages of the group.

2.1 I am not a very creative person

Figure 2 shows that 75% of respondents disagreed with this statement suggesting that creativity is a characteristic of most HE teachers.

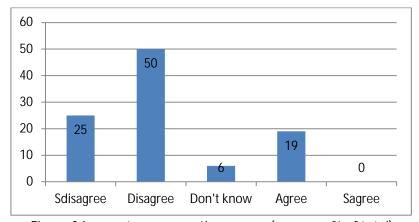


Figure 2 I am not a very creative person (scores as % of total)

2.2 There are opportunities to be creative in most aspects of my life

Only 1 respondent did not agree that there are opportunities in most aspects of their life to be creative (Figure 3), indicating a generally positive disposition to finding creative opportunities in everyday life.

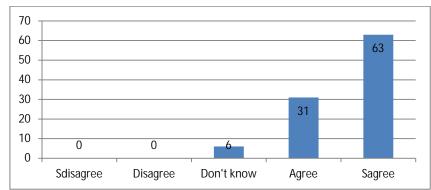


Figure 3 There are opportunities to be creative in most aspects of my life

2.3 Being creative is an essential part of my identity and practice as a teacher or student advisor

As seen in figure 4, respondents were more divided on the degree to which creativity is an essential part of their professional role, though the majority (75%) agreed with the statement.

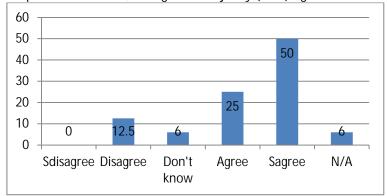


Figure 4 Being creative is an essential part of my identity and practice as a teacher

2.4 Being creative is an essential part of my identity and practice as an academic researcher Creativity is seen to be less essential to the role of researcher, which is perhaps seen more as an analytical/judgemental process.

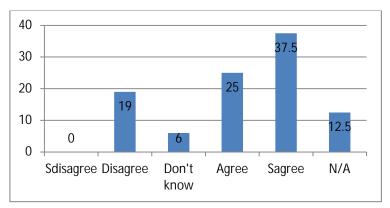


Figure 5 Being creative is an essential part of my identity & practice as an academic researcher

2.5 I don't have much opportunity to be creative in my everyday work

Over 80% of individuals disagreed with this statement with only 3 individuals (19%) agreeing which suggests a very positive endorsement of the opportunities available to exercise personal creativity in work practices.

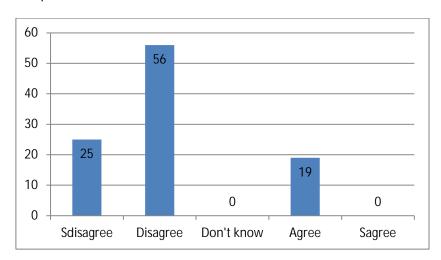


Figure 6 I don't have much opportunity to be creative in my everyday work

2.6 My creativity enables me to accomplish my most significant challenges

75% of respondents agree that their creativity enables them to meet most challenges (figure 7), suggesting that creativity has a practical benefit.

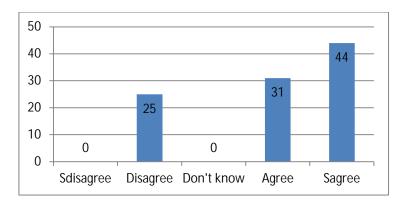


Figure 7 Creativity enables me to accomplish my most significant challenges

2.7 I develop myself through my work – this includes my creative developmentWith a single exception, respondents were unanimous in agreeing that they develop themselves through their work.

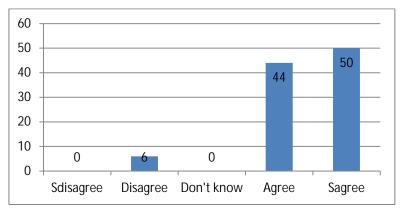


Figure 8 I develop myself through the my work

2.8 I am at my most creative when I am working by myself on things that interest me Respondents indicate diverse personal preferences in working alone or with others. Figure 9 shows that over half (56%) feel they are most creative when working alone on things of interest.

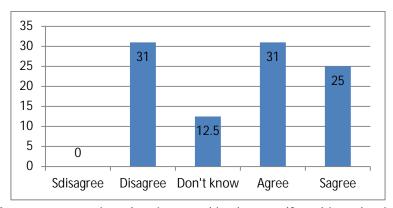


Figure 9 At my most creative when I am working by myself on things that interest me

2.9 I am at my most creative when I am working collaboratively and productively with others In some contradiction of the last answer, 68.5% of respondents say they are most creative when working collaboratively. The discrepancy between answers may indicate that creative people are equally productive when working alone or collaboratively, given the right conditions.

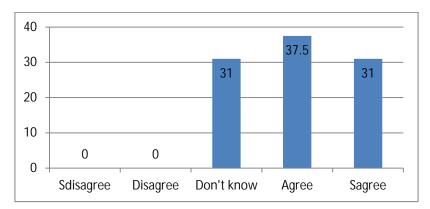


Figure 10 At my most creative when I am working collaboratively/productively with others

2.10 Comparative views on personal creativity

Figure 11 collates the responses for each dimension rated in this question. The issues which received greatest agreement (94%) were 2.2, there are opportunities to be creative in most aspects of life and 2.7, I develop myself through my work.

Greatest disagreement (75%) was with statement 2.1, I am not a very creative person.

Respondents therefore both perceive themselves to be creative and find opportunities to use their creativity in most aspects of their lives.

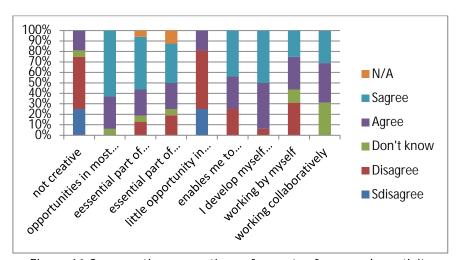


Figure 11 Comparative perceptions of aspects of personal creativity

2.11 Additional comments

A few narrative comments were added by some respondents. They were:

- The attitude of wonder is integral to being creative for phenomenologically oriented psychotherapists- the capacity to bracket off preconceptions, tolerate uncertainty and perceive newness.
- Space and time to be creative within the bureaucratic constraints that exist.
- Self awareness, accepting 'failure' and learning from it to try again.
- Collaborative skills are really important.

- Meta cognitive abilities, mental imagery (visual object imagery and spatial imagery)
- Being resilient and having patience. Space and Time are also crucial.

This points relate to practical constraints (time, space, institutional constraints) and to personal qualities (openness, resilience, patience, wonderment) and to interpersonal skills (working collaboratively)

D. WHAT CREATIVITY MEANS TO YOU IN THE CONTEXT OF YOUR WORK AS A TEACHER/EDUCATOR

For this question, respondents were again asked to rate their level of agreement with each of a series of statements, using the scale 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. As before, the numbers appear as a percentage of the group in the following figures.

1.1 Using my imagination

All respondents were in agreement that their creativity involved using their imagination.

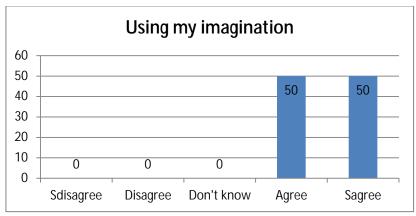


Figure 12 Using my imagination

1.2 Having ideas that are new to me

Only one respondent did not agree that creativity entailed having ideas that were new to them: this person was undecided rather than in disagreement.

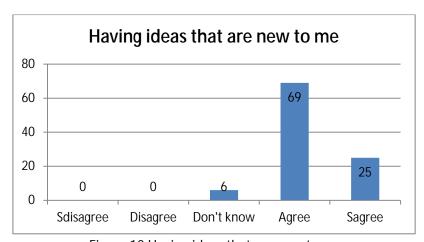


Figure 13 Having ideas that are new to me

1.3 Having ideas that are new to the contexts I am working in

While the general distribution of responses to this question was similar to the previous one, the actual number who strongly agreed was greater this time, indicating that novelty in context is more important to them than absolute novelty.

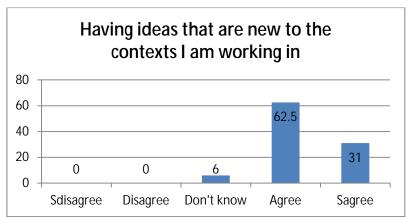


Figure 14 Ideas that are new to the context

1.4 Changing my understanding

The responses to changing personal understanding were slightly less positive, with 19% (3 individuals) either being uncertain or disagreeing with this element. Nevertheless, the pattern of responses indicate that these teachers see strong links between creativity and learning.

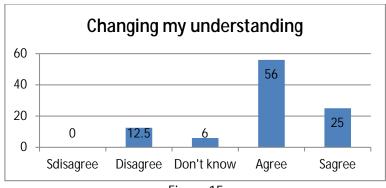


Figure 15

1.5 Adapting existing ideas for the contexts I am working in

Consistent with responses to 1.3, respondents appear happy to adapt ideas to new contexts. Noone disagreed with this notion, and only 2 were neutral.

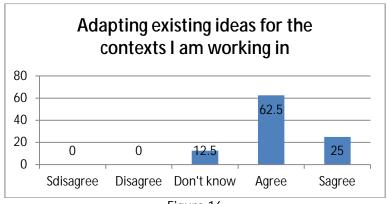


Figure 16

1.6 Doing things differently

For the majority of respondents (81%), creativity involves doing the things they do differently. Only 2 people disagreed with this idea.

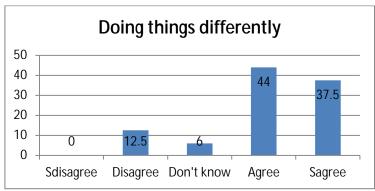


Figure 17

1.7 Making new things

Creativity seems to be less associated with making than it is with conceiving. 75% of respondents agreed with the statement, whilst the remaining 25% were split between disagreement and uncertainty.

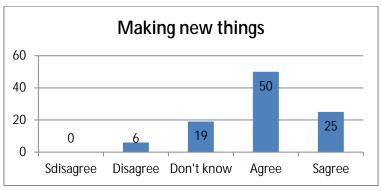


Figure 18

1.8 Making new things happen

Respondents were more concerned with being instrumental in effecting change, with 81% agreeing with this statement. No-one disagreed.

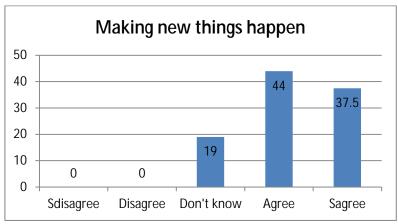
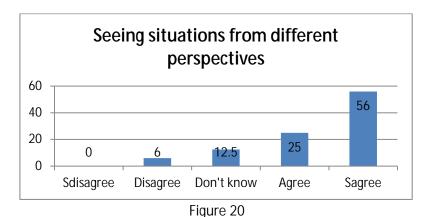


Figure 19

1.9 Seeing situations from different perspectives

For 56% of the group there was very strong agreement that creativity entails seeing things from different perspectives. One person disagreed, though, and 2 were unsure.



1.10 Going beyond what has been done before in a particular context

94% (15 respondents) agreed that creativity means going beyond what has been done previously in a specific context. This is consistent with the views expressed in 1.3 and 1.5.

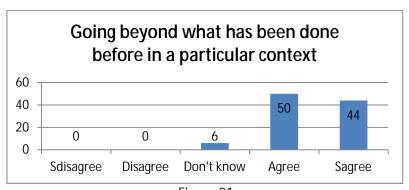


Figure 21

1.11 Being able to look at new concepts and ideas and put them together in different but personally meaningful ways

Complementing responses to the last question, respondents mostly agreed (87%) that their creativity involved adapting new concepts to different contexts in ways that were meaningful to them.

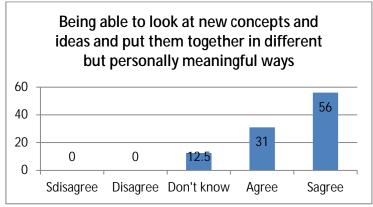


Figure 22

1.12 Generating something new in response to an educational need or aspiration which matters to me

For 87.5% of respondents, creativity is related to meeting a perceived need or aspiration. Noone disagreed with this idea.

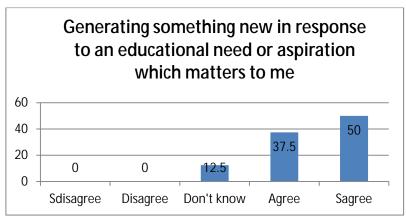


Figure 23

1.13 Solving problems and overcoming barriers

In slight difference with the previous question, respondents were less positive with the association between creativity and problem solving per se. This suggests that the element of personal value is important.

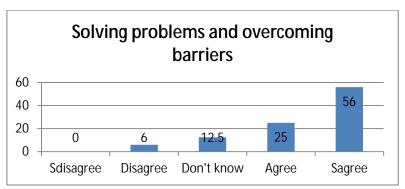


Figure 24

1.14 Improvising when I have to

All respondents were agreed that creativity may entail improvisation. This is consistent with their responses to 1.1, using imagination.

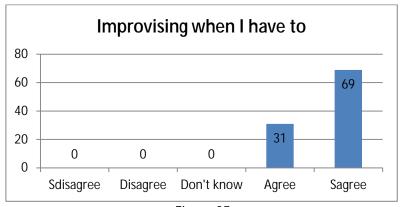


Figure 25

1.15 Transferring an idea or practice from one context to a different context

This question takes up the same issues as 1.3, 1.5 and 1.10. Whilst agreement was consistent at 94%, one person's stance was now negative rather than neutral.

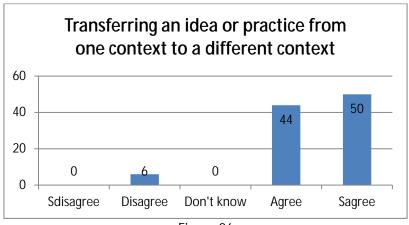


Figure 26

1.16 Comparative perceptions of creativity relating to professional roles

Figure 27 draws together the responses for each of the 15 dimensions. It is immediately apparent that the two most commonly agreed elements are use of imagination and improvisation (both 100%), followed closely by having ideas that are personally new, and going beyond what has been done previously in a given context.

Conversely, the element of least unanimity is making new things. We have already suggested that this implies conceptualisation is more important than practical realisation of ideas.

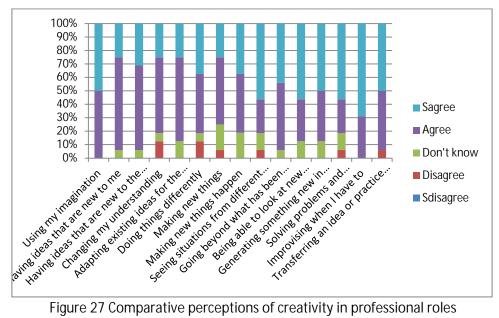


Figure 27 Comparative perceptions of creativity in professional roles

CREATIVITY AND STUDENTS' LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Respondents used the same scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to assess 13 propositions regarding creativity and students' learning/development.

1.1 Creativity is a rare gift which only a few people have

75% of respondents disagreed, suggesting that they see creativity as potentially available to everyone. One person did, however, strongly agree with the proposal.

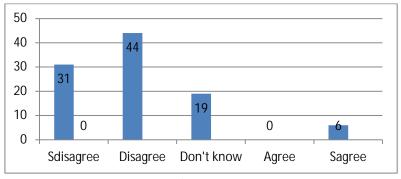


Figure 28

1.2 Some people are naturally more creative than others

In what might appear contradictory to the last response, a large proportion of respondents (68.5%) believed that some people are naturally more creative than others.

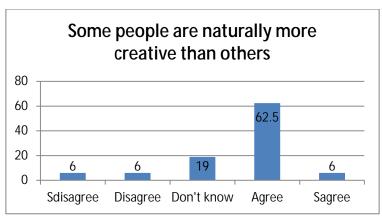


Figure 29

1.3 Most people can develop their creativity if they are given the opportunity to do so Consistent with responses to 1.1, 75% of respondents think creativity is accessible to most people, given the right conditions.

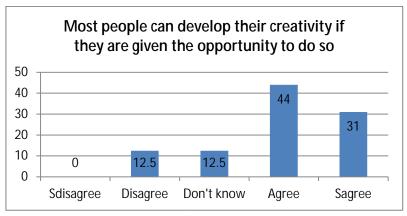


Figure 30

1.4 Cultivating students' creativity is a significant challenge for university teachersDespite believing that creativity is potentially accessible to most people, 92.5% of respondents (all but one) agreed that it is difficult to cultivate creativity in HE students.

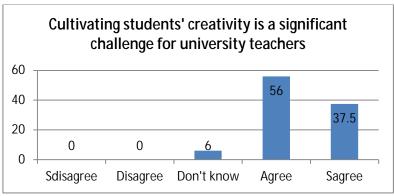


Figure 31

1.5 Developing students' creativity should be an important part of their development while they are at university

Although they acknowledge the difficulty in achieving this aim, respondents were unanimous in believing that creativity should be a significant part of development for university students.

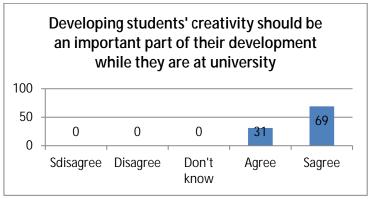


Figure 32

1.6 Students have lots of opportunities to be creative while they are studying at university Respondents' views on the actual opportunities students have to be creative are completely spread, possibly reflecting the differences in institutional practice.

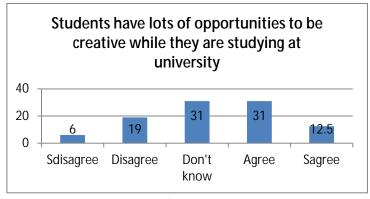


Figure 33

1.7 Students' programmes of study are designed to encourage their creative development Just over half (56.5%) or respondents felt that programmes are not designed to develop student creativity. This is consistent with their scepticism in 1.4.

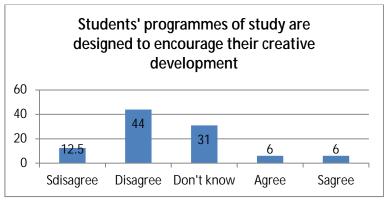
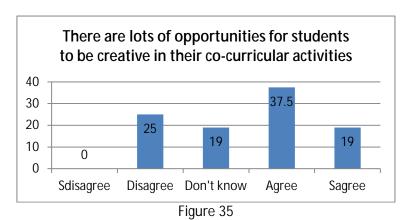


Figure 34

1.8 There are lots of opportunities for students to be creative in their co-curricular activities In contrast to the curriculum, respondents are more positive about the opportunities to be creative in co-curricular activities, with 56.5% agreeing with the proposition.



1.9 Students cannot be creative in their discipline before they have mastered a lot of subject knowledge and skill

81.5% of respondents to not appear to see creativity as being dependent upon mastery of subject knowledge and skill, suggesting that even with relatively little knowledge and competence students have potential to be creative within the discipline.

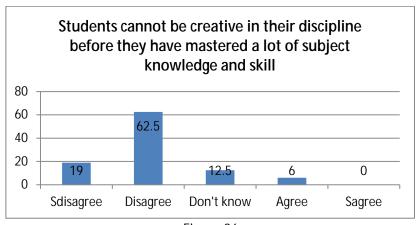


Figure 36

1.10 It's not possible to teach students to be creative

Consistent with their belief that creativity is accessible to most people, 75% of respondents disagreed with the proposition, suggesting that they believe creativity can be taught.

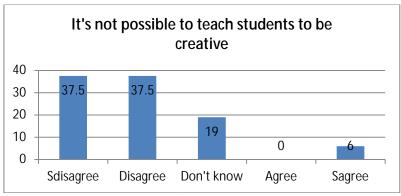


Figure 37

1.11 It's not possible to assess students' creativity

75% of respondents also believe that it is possible to assess creativity and no-one felt it is impossible to assess.

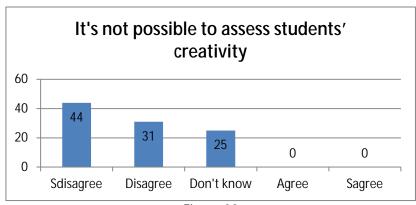


Figure 38

1.12 The role of a teacher is to help students understand their own creativity and help them make claims with the evidence that they believe is appropriate

The responses to the two questions above means that as far as these teachers are concerned there is much potential in higher education to promote, recognise and value students' creative development. Futhermore, 69% of respondents believe that it is a teacher's duty to help students understand and evidence their creativity.

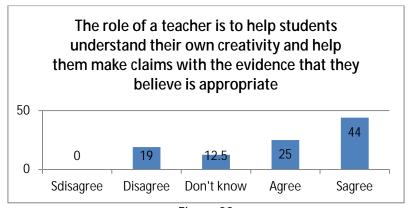


Figure 39

1.13 Effective use of creativity is dependent on other factors such as personal agency, disposition and having context relevant knowledge

88% of respondents believe that personal agency and disposition are essential to using one's creativity.

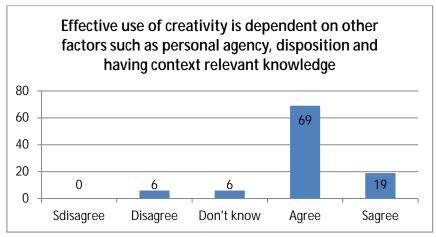


Figure 40

1.14 Comparative views on creativity and students' development

Figure 41 collates the responses to each of the 13 propositions. Whilst the variability in patterns may initially suggest contradictions in answers, it must be recalled that some questions were posed negatively and others positively. As we have seen, respondents are mostly consistent in their replies.

The figure reminds us that the issue which achieved unanimous agreement was 1.5, developing creativity should be an important element of HE. This was followed by 1.4, cultivating students' creativity is difficult. Taken together, these issues may indicate that creativity presents a considerable challenge for these teachers/support staff. If they are typical of their role holders, creativity may be a significant source of professional stress.

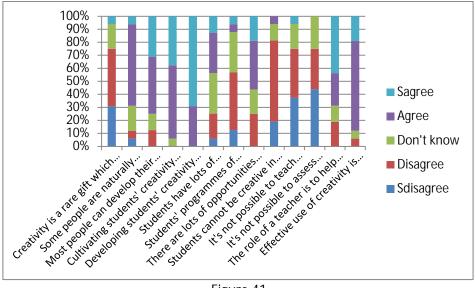


Figure 41

2. How important are these skills, qualities and capabilities to being creative in your disciplinary field?

For the dimensions in this question, respondents used the scale 1 = not at all important to 5 = very important to assess skills and capabilities in the context of their discipline.

2.1 Being imaginative – to generate new ideas and see new possibilities

Respondents were unanimous in believing it is important to be imaginative in their field, irrespective of what their field is.

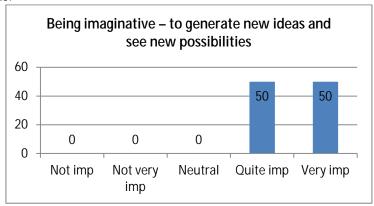


Figure 42

2.2 Being original - to make new things or do things no one has done before

Responses were more nuanced in their views on the importance of doing/making new things. Nevertheless, the majority (62.5%) felt this to be important.

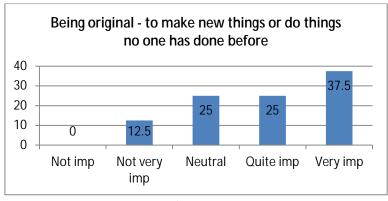


Figure 43

2.3 Being inventive with someone else's ideas - adapting, contextualising, combining

Consistent with views expressed in other questions, respondents see the importance of adapting the ideas of others.

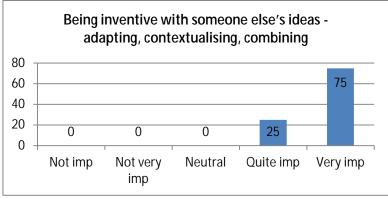


Figure 44

2.4 Being resourceful – using whatever knowledge and resources are available to tackle a problem Respondents agree unanimously on the importance of being resourceful.

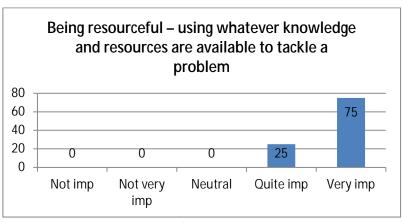


Figure 45

2.5 Being able to combine, connect, synthesise complex and incomplete data/situations /ideas/contexts

Views are more diverse on the importance of being able to combine and make connections, though the majority (81.5%) did see this as important.

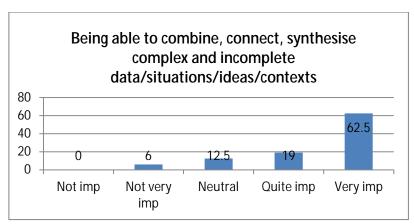


Figure 46

2.6 Being able to think critically and analytically to evaluate ideas and possible solutions and make good decisions

Only one respondent did not see critical thinking as important.

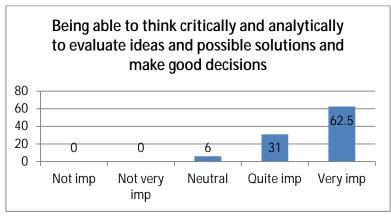


Figure 47

2.7 Being able to represent ideas and communicate ideas to inform and persuade othersOnly 2 respondents (12.5%) did not feel it is important to be able to communicate ideas in order to inform or persuade others.

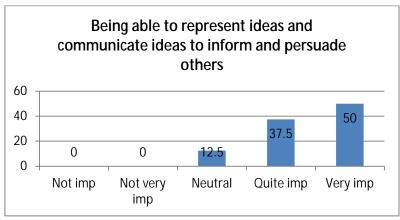


Figure 48

2.8 Having an enquiring disposition - being curious, willing to explore or experiment There was total unanimity on the importance of having an enquiring disposition.

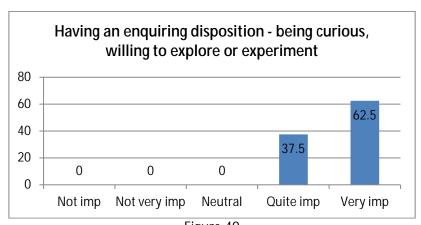


Figure 49

2.9 Willing to take risks - to tackle unfamiliar problems in unfamiliar contexts or situations With a single exception, respondents believe it is important to take risks, though this only quite important for 50% compared with very important for 44%. This is an interesting set of responses given the generally risk averse culture in higher education. The response to 4.12 is also relevant.

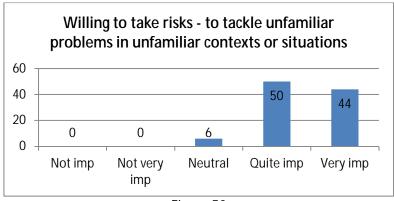


Figure 50

2.10 Able to cope with uncertainty

Only 75% of respondents felt it important to be able to cope with uncertainty, with 25% being neutral. This is perhaps surprising given the fast-changing world of the 21st century.

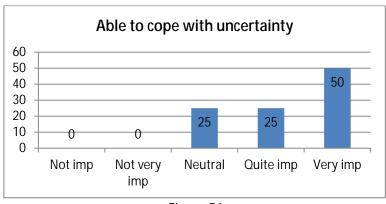


Figure 51

2.11 Able to cope with complexity - information, relationships, situations

Slightly more (81%) saw the importance of being able to cope with complexity. No-one disagreed.

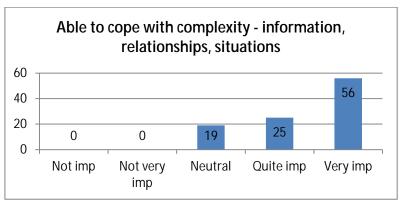


Figure 52

2.12 Willing to persist and try again if not successful

Respondents were again unanimous in see the importance of perseverance. For 62.5%, this was deemed a very important disposition.

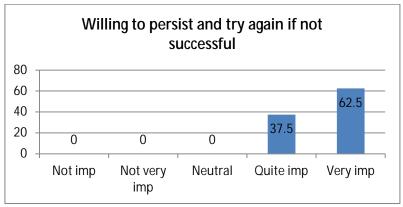


Figure 53

2.13 All these things are important

Despite variations in their individual responses, 87% of respondents said it was important to possess all these competences with 56% saying it is very important. Two individuals (12.5%) were neutral but no-one disagreed.

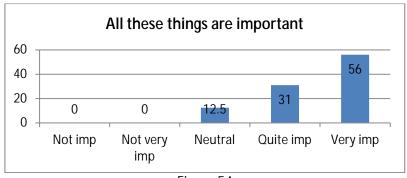


Figure 54

- 3. What other skills, qualities, capabilities and dispositions are necessary in order to be creative in your disciplinary field? This was an open-ended question, which respondents could choose to respond to. The suggestions made were:
 - The attitude of wonder is integral to being creative for phenomenologically oriented psychotherapists the capacity to bracket off preconceptions, tolerate uncertainty and perceive newness.
 - Space and time to be creative within the bureaucratic constraints that exist.
 - Self awareness, accepting 'failure' and learning from it to try again.
 - Collaborative skills are really important.
 - Meta cognitive abilities, mental imagery (visual object imagery and spatial imagery).
 - Being resilient and having patience.
 - Space and Time are also crucial.

Some of these elements had actually being included in question 2 (e.g. resilience/perseverance), and it is noticeable that the significance of time and space is raised again.

- 4. Please indicate the extent to which these characteristics are supported in the curriculum in your disciplinary area. Characteristics were assessed using the scale 1 = not at all supported in the curriculum, to 4 = comprehensively supported.
 - 4.1 The curriculum gives learners the opportunity to develop detailed knowledge about the subject and the skills to use and apply the knowledge

As might be expected, all respondents reported significant or comprehensive curricular opportunities to develop subject-specific knowledge and skills.

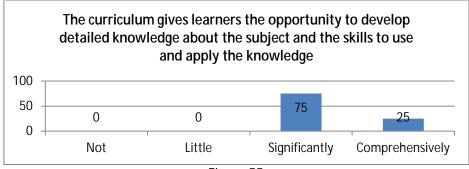


Figure 55

4.2 The curriculum encourages learners to develop an enquiring disposition and create their own learning processes

It is perhaps more surprising that 31% of respondents feel their curriculum does not encourage enquiry.

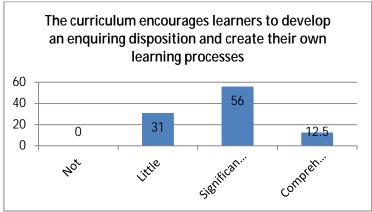


Figure 56

4.3 The curriculum gives learners the opportunity to immerse themselves in challenging situations that inspire, engage and develop them

An even greater proportion, 37.5%, of respondents say that their curriculum gives learners little opportunity to engage in challenging situations. Only 19% say they offer comprehensive opportunities.

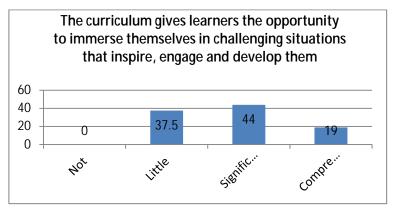


Figure 57

4.4 The curriculum provides learners with experiences of working in uncertain and unfamiliar situations where the contexts and challenges are not known.

50% of respondents say that their curriculum provides little or no experience of working in unknown circumstances, suggesting the graduates may be ill prepared for this reality.

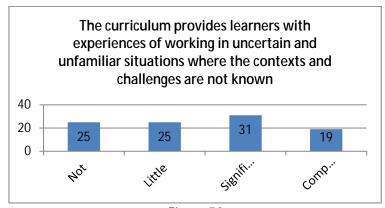


Figure 58

4.5 The curriculum encourages learners to be creative, enterprising and resourceful Again, it is concerning that 31% of respondents do not feel their curriculum encourages learners to be enterprising, given the nature of modern day life and work.

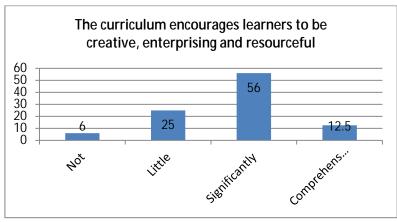


Figure 59

4.6 The curriculum enables learners to develop relationships that facilitate collaborative learning

It is perhaps also surprising that (25%) of respondents should feel the curriculum does not enhance collaborative learning which is known to be very important in work environments.

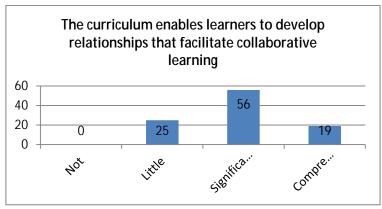


Figure 60

4.7 The curriculum enables learners to develop and practise the repertoire of communication and literacy skills they need to be effective in a modern culturally diverse world

As with the previous response, the fact that 31% of respondents do not believe their curriculum to develop wide communication skills must be a matter of concern.

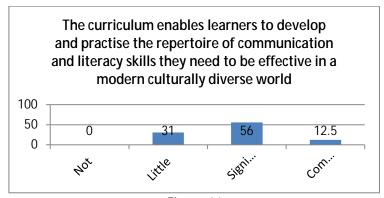


Figure 61

4.8 The curriculum supports learners when they participate in situations that require them to be persistent and resilient

Nearly half (43.5%) of respondents do not think their curriculum supports the development of persistence and resilience, characteristics which can enhance both personal and professional life.

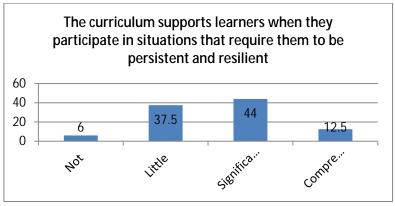


Figure 62

4.9 The curriculum encourages and enables learners to be wilful, self-directed, self-regulating, self-aware and reflexive

Given their importance in professional life it is also surprising that 37.5% of respondents do not think the curriculum encourages self-direction and reflection.

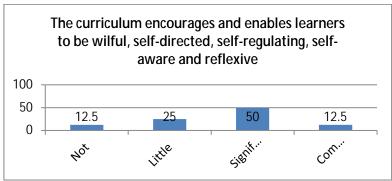


Figure 63

4.10 Problem solving involves problems that permit a range of possible solutions rather than single right answers

In contrast to the previous responses, it is more hopeful that 75% of respondents believe their curriculum supports problem solving of a more open nature.

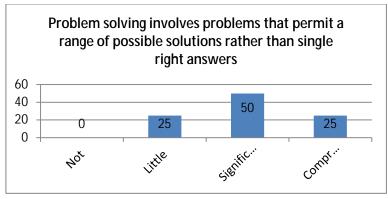


Figure 64

4.11 Novel solutions are rewarded as well as standard answers are

Somewhat contradicting the last response, 31% of respondents do not agree that their curriculum rewards novel solutions.

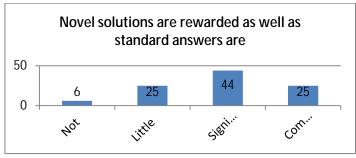


Figure 65

4.12 Students are encouraged to take risks without being penalised if they are not successful

It is disappointing that unsuccessful risk-taking should be penalised, with 56.5% of respondents saying this is the case. There are clear implications for under-use of creativity in the workplace.

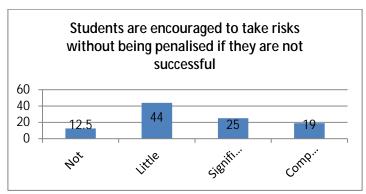


Figure 66

4.13 Collated views on creativity and the curriculum

Figure 67 collates the data for the 12 dimensions of creativity in the curriculum. It is apparent that the curriculum remains focused on traditional disciplinary knowledge and skills (100% agree) whilst the more nebulous but important competences such as risk taking are undervalued. Responses raise awareness of some of the ways in which the curriculum would need to change to be more supportive of students' creative development.

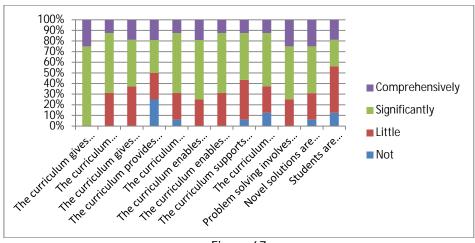


Figure 67

F. FACTORS WHICH DISCOURAGE STUDENTS' CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT

What are the main factors that discourage teachers in your department from designing programmes or teaching in ways that encourage students to use and develop their creativity?

The following points were made in answer to this question:

- Ensuring the student fits in university assessment criteria.
- Assessment in that some faculty (sic) do not think outside of the box when designing tools to assess student learning.
- Adhering to professional standards and regulations.
- I am not based within UL and so don't have much involvement in programme design, however, [the course I am associated with] is quite experiential. The sessions themselves are very interactive and students are encouraged to be creative but the assignment requirements are quite rigid.
- Time
- The current management structure and culture limits creativity.
- Lack of formal system to encourage it. Most creative solutions have to fit or try to fit within that system. Feeling that it is hard to change the system.
- Module outlines, resources, the grading system
- One approach to teaching is encouraged and others are derided.
- Miss knowledge, motivations
- Nothing, if they want they can do it, but it usually involve additional work
- Requirement to cover the syllabus for the professional bodies (for exemptions) facilities skill
- Over assessing students-too many projects. Too many integrated assessments where modules are shared with too many supervisors
- The need to cover a significant amount of material in a short space of time.
- We must cover a syllabus that is dictated by the requirements of the professional bodies. Thus, we do not have autonomy in choosing content for modules.

In short, these comments indicate that the biggest obstacles are the constraints of assessment and time. Cultural attitudes and organisational structures are recognised as ingrained and difficult to change.

G. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

What are the most important things that could be done to improve students' creative development in your curriculum area?

The following suggestions were made:

- More innovative opportunities for online collaboration for students who can't meet due to geographical distance
- Collaboration between colleagues & new ways of thinking about what is important for students to know and be able to do.
- As per E above. I think we could make the assignments more 'creative'.
- Freedom to be allowed do so in current climate of measuring distinct outputs by approved means
- Design curriculum from the students perspective; not a faculty perspective.
- Cross departmental and cross curriculum knowledge sharing
- Incorporate enjoyable practical tasks within lectures and labs so that the students learn about topics in an understandable and memorable way.

- Flexible approach to learning and assessment is required.
- Play games, act out in class
- More practical example when students should apply their knowledge, or see and recognise lack of knowledge
- Encourage more innovative and creative methods of encouraging self directed learning. Also potential for creativity in assessment
- · Qualification of teaching
- Making use of technology
- Lateral thinking
- Meta-cognitive awareness
- Time management skills
- Project management skills
- I believe lecturers need to do more to inspire self belief in their students.
- Developing more elective choices.

These ideas include practical suggestions for changes to pedagogy, the curriculum and teaching partnerships. They imply an understanding of what could or needs to be done, but respondents have already pointed to the institutional and other constraints which make effecting such changes so difficult.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank everyone who participated in the survey. The data will be combined with the first working paper and developed, with Professor Jackson, as a chapter for the Creativity in Development e-book which is being published under a Creative Commons Licence at http://www.creativityindevelopment.co.uk/

Version 1 28/04/04