Chapter 4

What do we mean by creativity?

Introduction

The key, in the end, is to reveal to students what is truly essential: the world of their own creation. What better gift could you make to a student than to render him sensitive to the art of invention – which is to say, self-invention? All education should strive to help those receiving it to gain enough freedom in relation to works of art to themselves to become writers and artists.

(Bayard, 2008: 184)

There are certain forms of communication which are deemed important, and this is irrespective of education, professionalism or research. More specifically, it is the forms in which writing is permissible, as students, as professionals and as researchers, that represents whether the communication has value – and this is further reinforced by reporting on what is observable or already known and established in written text. These texts are, in the vast majority, written literally as opposed to written in literary genres, and by this I mean that there is an insistence that professional, academic and research writing should remain objective and factual in order to be credible. And yet what is it that attracts us, and touches us at a human level, in art, literature and music that can in no way be matched by literal or factual text?

Anyone familiar with the film Rain Man will know the character ‘Ray’, played by Dustin Hoffman. Ray is an autistic savant. As such, he has near-genius capacity in calculating mathematical probability. Some real-life autistic savants have similar abilities in art, such as Stephen Wiltshire, who is well known for his detailed representations of complex cityscapes from memory; or in music, such as ‘Martin’, described in Oliver Sacks’ Musicophilia (2008), who is unable to tie his shoelaces or calculate simple
addition, yet can transpose any movement of a Beethoven symphony into any key.

Though highly developed in some areas, these people are unable to think abstractly, or to present their thoughts through complex forms of linguistics. In a sense, this is how we are expected to practise. As a product of our times, what matters to us professionally is that which is concrete. The current modern professional world is one which has difficulty in dealing in abstraction and linguistics, preferring the autistic savant world of what is there rather than what might be. This form of professional autism leads to those within professions feeling uncritical and unimaginative, and as such unable to engage with the notion of, or perceive themselves as, creative beings.

The epigraph from Bayard that opened this chapter is important because it provides the cornerstone for a new way of thinking about what is valid and the way it is communicated. It suggests that, as teachers, researchers and professionals, we can open up the ways in which communication takes place; and, as students, we can feel safe in representing ideas and feelings in ways other than the traditional and stifling forms of writing which currently govern what is acceptable and what is not. One might be forgiven for thinking that Pierre Bayard, as a professor of French literature in Paris, has a particular interest in creativity that differs from that of the scientific community, but this is not necessarily so. The physicist David Bohm (2004: 28) wrote passionately and with honesty about the creativity needed for scientific endeavour through the merging of art and science, and claimed that there will always be contamination of findings precisely because of the unavoidable involvement of the human psyche.

[Indeed], no really creative transformation can possibly be effected by human beings, either in nature or in society, unless they are in the creative state of mind that is generally sensitive to the differences that always exist between the observed fact and any preconceived ideas, however noble, beautiful, and magnificent they may seem to be.

Bohm, like Bayard, whose emphasis is on how we uniquely interpret, construct and understand what we read (or, more accurately, do not read, in Bayard’s case), saw self-knowledge and creativity as crucial in the scientific process. For Bohm, this process is beyond the purely mechanical, and any findings should provide consideration of the self and the ways in which the self may have influenced them, rather than
make a smoke-and-mirrors attempt at objectivity. This brings us to a
crucial question: What do we mean by ‘creative methods’?

Because we are a language-based culture, perhaps our starting point
should be with language itself. I will begin by discussing the work of
Ronald Carter, who cites a passage (Carter, 2007: 24) by Margaret Boden
(1994):

Creativity is a puzzle, a paradox, some say a mystery. Inventors,
scientists and artists rarely know how their ideas arise. They mention
intuition, but cannot say how it works. Most psychologists cannot tell
us much about it either. What’s more, many people assume that there
will never be a scientific theory of creativity— for how could science
possibly explain fundamental novelties? And if all this were not
daunting enough, the apparent unpredictability of creativity seems to
outlaw any systematic explanation, whether scientific or historical.

Many texts have been written on the nature of creativity, but rather than
focus on them in great detail I prefer to ground my discussion in examples
of creative works developed by participants in my own work, so in that
sense I make no apology for writing about what I consider creative
methods. The nature of this book means that I can give no examples of
performative creative methodologies, such as the way in which dance or
ethnodrama or music and song can be used in a physical sense, so I have
relied purely upon visual and literary forms of creative work. However, I
feel it is important to differentiate between that which is creative and that
which is novel. This is necessary because, whilst it may be applicable for a
research problem to be approached creatively, it may not be appropriate
to conduct a study which is ‘novel’; for, whilst such an approach may be
considered ‘innovative’, that does not mean it will be useful. By this I
mean that the novelty should not trump the enrichment of the research
itself, an idea that is reinforced in the work of Elliot Eisner (2008). In other
words, whilst creative forms of research can be pursued, they should not
lose focus of the utility of the method employed. If the novelty of the
approach outstrips its utility, then it has served no purpose other than to
be aesthetic. ‘Novelty, or should I say “near novelty”, is simply not going
to be enough to sustain interest and engender high regard amongst our
colleagues’ (Eisner, 2008: 24).

Returning to Ronald Carter (2007) on this subject, he makes an
interesting semantic link between creativity, originality and novelty. He
suggests that there is a semantic connection between the words ‘creative’
and ‘original’ in that the act of creating, in many modern cultures, is
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Invariably seen as new, novel and innovative, so whilst it is possible to be ‘novel’ in the use of arts based research, ‘novelty’ actually has two different meanings: simply new; and the type of ‘novelty value’ to which Eisner refers. Carter notes that in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Romantic period, the word ‘creative’ is linked to concepts of singularity and rarity in the way in which works of art are described. He then goes on to describe how contemporary views of creativity are connected to individual acts, and its resulting further associations with properties of the individual human mind. In this sense, he sees the link between human originality and creativity as being only a recent human development.

Eisner (2008) suggests that there should be equality between the utility of the research and its aesthetic qualities. In any arts based research there will be a desire to produce a ‘work’ which has aesthetic qualities – a sense of pleasing shape or form, or of words or music to which we are drawn – and to some degree the production of this work will promote understanding. Yet the work must also not lose sight of the world it is portraying, for we exist in a world of correspondence theory, where ‘truths’ (of a sort) have been gathered in particular forms of empirical ways, and it is a matter for consideration as to how the product of such research will be accepted by our colleagues. Eisner’s point of departure and mine, to a greater extent, is that we need multiple perspectives on what constitutes research, which do not aim to find ‘a truth’. Eisner (2008: 22) wants ‘multiple roads to multiple Romes. I don’t think there is one destination that several roads will lead you to, but that there are, rather, multiple destinations which require multiple roads.’ Being creative is therefore important, and as such the possibilities for research are endless, but the construction of such research methods should reflect an underpinning rigour, as they will end in failure if they do not.

Creativity, thinking and self-knowing

In my Christmas stocking, every year without fail, I receive a puzzle – a steel ball trapped inside a wooden frame that I have to get out, a series of steel rings that I have to separate, or a jumble of shapes that when pushed together in a certain way form another shape. In these puzzles I test things out, remove things, return them, and remember the steps I have taken to reach a current point, until at last a new shape emerges, or the rings separate, or the ball is liberated. Sometimes I am just lucky and the puzzle falls into place without any systematic endeavour (McIntosh, 2009). Perhaps this is part of the problem that Boden (1994)
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alludes to – the element of serendipity, luck, the unexplainable rather than the probable. In a way this book, and certainly this second part, is an example of this – a puzzle to be played with until a new shape emerges, for both the writer and the reader.

In relation to creativity and self-knowing, I would like to start with David Bohm (2004). His unique position as both a physicist and a philosophical thinker places him in an ideal position to consider the way in which self-knowing has been considered in science and art. Writing on the relationships of science and art, he first considers the science of psychology and its aims of self-knowledge, and the ways in which people adapt to be useful and productive members of a society. The issue here is that individuals increasingly feel a fragmentation of existence – living in societies that they do not understand and in which they are unable to lead meaningful and harmonious existences. It therefore becomes more difficult to generalise about self-knowing as many feel inadequate in adapting or adjusting to societal demands.

On art and self-knowing, Bohm (2004) notes that many artists have tried to give shape and form to states of confusion, conflict and uncertainty in order that they can somehow be mastered. Whilst these may give some short-term respite as illusions, Bohm suggests that they are also inadequate methods for resolving these kinds of conflict, precisely because they are illusions. He suggests that conflict can be dealt with only by being aware of the full meaning of what is being thought and what is being done. In this sense, he sees science as a gateway as it provides factual information about brain structure, its physiology and function, and how the mind works. From this a person can develop an art of self-knowing in which it is recognised that sensitivity to life and its experiences will always generate conflict and confusion. What Bohm refers to as art’s role in this is one of artistic spirit and sensitive perception of the individual himself or herself and the phenomena of their own psyche. If we return to the earlier discussion of how practitioners appear to have lost a sense of creativity in current practice, it is perhaps because the false split between ‘artistry’ and ‘science’ has caused them to fall into a particular camp upon which professional power is generated. This is an illusion, for it can be clearly argued that scientists deal in abstraction whilst artists deal in the concrete, or ‘what is there’. Furthermore, if it is art’s role to represent phenomena in ways which we find interesting, illuminating or beautiful, then these experiences occur equally in science. As Bohm suggests, beauty is a common notion of a subjective response of man – a pleasurable experience of what appeals to his fancy – but these responses can also be applied to science and the theories it generates – their coherence, order and harmony,
and the way in which they combine as a unified structure. They can be looked on then from two perspectives: first, that of beauty; and second, as a means to understanding the basic facts of science, with the goal of ultimately assimilating them into a ‘coherent totality’ (Bohm, 2004: 39).

Creativity in the sense that I am trying to portray is an attempt at constructing ways in which coherent totality can be achieved through a collaboration between that which is created through diverse forms of artistic media and the theoretical ideas which can be layered upon that which is created. And like a scientific theory, it is constantly subject to further development, for it can never be considered ‘true’, as ‘truth’ – in both scientific and philosophical meaning – ensures that further investigation is limited. What is important – indeed vital – is that whatever is formed has a coherence that is ‘true to itself’ (Bohm, 2004).

The question of truth and its connection to creativity can be further explored by including concepts of the imagination. Richard Kearney’s (1991, 1994) overview of the history of Western thought on imagination provides much food for thought in moving these ideas on, and it is useful to cite his work as a stepping stone for further inquiry:

I would like to identify three main questions which guide my inquiry throughout: (1) how does imagination relate to ‘truth’ – the epistemological question; (2) how does imagination relate to ‘being’ – the ontological question; (3) how does imagination relate to the ‘other’ – the ethical question. In seeking to respond to these three general questions of the imagination, I hope to shed light on the more general question of what it means to exist in this world at the present point of time and space.

(Kearney, 1991: 10)

Let us therefore explore imagination as the basis for human creativity and of our being in the world. It is also prudent at this point to re-establish the second dimension to this – that of the technical rationalist approaches to professional practices and the notion that empirical understanding is the only understanding that confirms the truth of phenomena. The work of Roy Bhaskar (1975) sets out an argument that suggests there is an ontological distinction between scientific laws and patterns of events, and this discussion forms the basis of a theoretical framework to discuss theories of science, both natural and social, in which constructs of imagination and aesthetics can take place. The influence of empiricism is therefore an important component for study and discussion, for the interdisciplinary nature of utilising an arts and science approach requires a sympathetic
understanding of how these disciplines are worked on and displayed as a ‘product’, which leads me to reflect back to the nature of language and cognition (as discussed by Carter (2007), above) within these domains. This has particular relevance to the predominance of textual language as a means of communicating and understanding, and the notion of a meta-text or meta-language that enables meaning to take place in a way which is equally ontological, aesthetic and empirical. Whether aesthetics can provide part of this meta-text, or whether what can be constructed through aesthetics can be developed into a structural form through the development of new, or within existing, models, is part of this discussion.

One way of furthering this is through Daniel Dennett’s view that things become conscious to us through a competitive process that takes place within our minds. Dennett (2001) argues that the human brain is like an echo chamber, storing and upgrading information, such as language, which allows us to recall, review and redesign our own activities. In extension to this, these mental contents become conscious to us by winning the competition against other mental contents for domination in the control of behaviour, and, as Dennett argues, we are ‘talkers’ and talking to ourselves is one of the ways in which mental content becomes influential and assumes a position in our ‘language drive’ (to use the computer analogy explored in Chapter 3). In relation to the unconscious and conscious, Kearney (1994) summarises the arguments put forward by Freud and Sartre by noting that for Freud the unconscious was a potential precipitating factor in the destruction of human civilisation, and for Sartre a denial of the human subject’s freedom and responsibility because it remains buried beneath the surface of what is individually and collectively known and thus is not acknowledged to exist. In other words Sartre suggests that because there is no hard ‘fact’ of the existence of unconscious we cannot be held accountable for it, or indeed our actions as a result of it. He then examines structuralism and post-structuralism. In this work, he suggests, there is a celebration of the disclosure of an unconscious system of language as a force to unravel the humanist imagination understood as self-knowing entity. Using a statement of Jacques Lacan, he outlines that ‘the unconscious is structured like a language’ (Kearney, 1994: 256).

One of the ways in which we can examine the nature of the ontological and the aesthetic in this context is through the use of myth. Paul Feyerabend (1999) discusses the idea of myth as true account, and asks fundamental questions of the empiricist’s understanding of myths through the recognition of the powerful forces that mythical structures can place on those believing in them, even though the evidence may be contradictory. Myths can then become true accounts of the universe, in
agreement with what can be seen to be the facts. A myth can also be a fact until it becomes consigned to history. As noted earlier, Georges Canguilhem’s (1988) work in the history of the human sciences asserts that we generally find where we were wrong rather than where we are right when furthering knowledge. This is echoed by the thoughts of others, such as Einstein, who saw their work merely as conjectures that would be superseded in the future. It could therefore be argued that we are ascribing a myth of truth to science because of the way it is located within our imagination and ‘language drive’.

For Gaston Bachelard (1994), imagination creates illusions of reality and virtuality – concrete and symbolic meanings created by thoughts and dreams. Memories and images are associated, creating mutual deepening – what he calls a ‘community’ of memory and image. Ways of being are experienced through the threads of narratives and stories, and the connection between experience, memory and image is augmented through value. The image itself has value, otherwise it would not be kept as memory, and the memory is located within experiences of protection, comfort or anxiety, for instance. Memory and imagination have solidarity in us, but the articulation of these phenomena provides us with challenges. Bachelard (1994: 6) uses the term ‘psychological elasticity’ of the image as a means for ‘moving us at an imaginable depth’. In his book on imagework, Edgar (2004: 1) writes in his introduction:

We are immersed in imagery. We have images of ourselves and images that we portray to the world. We rehearse future action and decision by imaging how things would be if we did this or that. We reflect on and evaluate the past through weighing up and sifting through our memories, just as with a set of old photographs. We can read intensity of mental image as compelling us to act, believe in ourselves in love or to be at one with the divine.

How we engage in this creatively, and in ways upon which these images become ‘live’, can occur through an arts based approach. The nature of the ‘artistic spirit’ as discussed by Bohm (2004) is something which Fish (1998) directs towards the caring professions. Fish discusses the idea that to enter into the traditions of the artistic paradigm, the (practitioner-) researcher does not need to produce real quality art, such as fiction or paintings. It is more important for them to have an interest in artistry, being willing to think like (or more like) an artist, attempting various portrayals of practice, themselves artistic investigations. It is not the quality of portrayals that is important, but the quality of insights across a number
of drafts that capture practice, and the critical commentary applied to them. For Fish, it is the sketching process itself that enables the researcher to discover why a subject has made an impact, and to learn from or refine it. Sketchbooks often contain a number of attempts at capturing an element of the subject – part of the process of problem-solving and depiction. Portrayals of practice are not an exact matter of fact; they are more a capture of tone, feeling and spirit.

Fish (1998) suggests that to see professional practice as artistry is a means of seeing its entire character, and further suggests that professional practice is increasingly recognised in the context of artistry, and the practitioner is seen as a maker of meanings, utilising language that essentially comes from, and reflects a critical appreciation of, the arts. Fish splits this appreciation of the arts into two components: seeing and reading, and watching and listening. Using literature, painting and poetry as examples of medium, Fish explores storytelling, narration and imagery utilising a range of interpretive practices which form the basis of the language of appreciation with all its variations and subtleties. Within this framework, she argues that from this point we are able to explore meaning in, and formulate a response to, specific ‘works of art’.

This response to art, not unreasonably, suggests that there must be a subject to appreciate it. In a professional context, this subject must come from practice. Fish (1998) focuses on the development of portraits of practice in words, seeing the production of narratives as draft portraits in conjunction with deliberations and reflective processes about them. Although these elements are intrinsically linked, they illustrate both practices and thoughts on practice, developing deeper and more reflexive understanding of procedural and propositional knowledge. In more detail, working drafts of one element may be necessary before refining them into a later painting. Key processes may require scrutiny of the drafts, a critical consideration of the artistry of professional practice, and an evaluation of the potential as the sketch evolves. Thus their evolution may need consultation to relevant theory to develop, or to be placed back within the context of the scene described, before any final portrayal of what has been seen and experienced is articulated. These working drawings are as important as the final portrait. They are the anatomy of practice.

Developing and refining these working drawings into holistic practices can then be seen as something organic, fluid, based on a jigsaw puzzle or theories of context, and, to return to the language of appreciation, can be seen from the viewpoints of portraiture (the process of adding to, layering or manipulating medium) or sculpture (traditionally the art of taking away materials, such as stone or marble, to reveal an object). Michelangelo’s
sketches illustrate this perfectly: parchments are scratched over and redrawn from various angles and perspectives using various materials, and he leaves notes upon the pages, messages to himself regarding technique and accuracy (see ‘Anatomical Studies of a Leg’ and ‘Serving the Florentine Republic’ in Hughes, 1997). Our appreciation of the subject therefore leads us through uncovering layers of knowledge and practices, revealing their meaning, or enables us to apply layers to the existing professional picture. For Fish (1998), it is significant that artists provide others with a means of seeing, and this is achieved through isolating and capturing interesting scenes, and centring the detail of these so that the interesting characteristics become clear. Edvard Munch talked of painting ‘what he had seen, not what he sees’ (Bischoff, 2000). In this sense he refers to the capturing of a moment that stretches beyond the physical composition, forcing an examination of interplays that would otherwise go unnoticed. These thoughts are echoed by Armstrong (1996: 77–8):

In such ways the painter can draw our attention to features of the visible world which in our haste and habit we tend to miss; the painter does this not simply by noticing and recording, but by employing the resources of the art-form to make such visible phenomena more apparent than it would otherwise be.

**So, what is creativity, exactly?**

This *bringing into conscious* is something I wish to explore further by stepping back in time to some of the seminal work which has focused on the phenomenon of ‘creativity’. Rollo May (1959: 57) asked a fundamental question: ‘What is Creativity?’ He attempts to distinguish between ‘creativity as superficial experience’ (aestheticism) and ‘actual creativity’: he defines the latter as ‘bringing something new into birth’ – the reality of something itself, as opposed to something which is merely an appearance or a ‘frosting’ to life. In essence this is the difference between something which is decorative and pretty, and that which represents reality itself. He makes a case supported by David Bohm – that any enduring description of creativity must not solely comprise ‘works of art’, but must be an explanation for the work of the scientist, the thinker and the technologist. It is, he suggests, the process of *making*, and of *bringing into being*.

In order for this ‘bringing into being’ to occur, there needs to be some sort of creative process. Carl Rogers (1959: 71) describes the creative process as one of ‘emergence in action of a novel relational product,'
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Growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life on the other. May (1959) outlines three stages in the creative process. The first is the Encounter. This is defined as a kind of discovery or confrontation—a discovery of a landscape and an absorption in it, or a scientific confrontation through an experiment—but it is not of an escapist sort, such as the decorative form described earlier. It is a discovery of a reality. Second, there is the Intensity of the Encounter, which is a heightened intensity of awareness, a heightened consciousness, where whomever is the discoverer becomes wholly engrossed in a state of creation. This does not mean that the individual is in this state only when 'at task', for there may be varying degrees of intensity that are not necessarily under conscious control. Those of us who have completed studies, written dissertations or conducted research will be familiar with the sudden emergence of an idea when we drift off to sleep at night or are driving to work. This is all part of the intense encounter. Third, there is Encounter as Interrelating with World. The question 'What is this encounter with?' becomes crucial. 'World' cannot merely be defined as the material world in which we appear to exist physically; it is more the pattern of meaningful relationships and the ways through which we participate, a cycle of world-self-world-self where neither can exist without the other. In this sense, May suggests that there is no such thing as a 'creative person'; we can speak only of a 'creative act'. In terms of the type of work I am proposing, this is vital, for it would be wrongheaded to suggest that creative methods are available only to those deemed 'creative', because it is not about the person. Rather, it is about the act and what is produced through it—a process, a doing.

More recently, Czikszentmihalyi (1997) has proposed that creativity—in line with Rogers' and May's thinking—is not a phenomenon that exists inside people's heads, but is captured in the interaction between their thoughts and a socio-cultural context. In other words it is a phenomenon which is inherently systemic rather than individual. Broadly speaking, this leads us to a construct by which what is constituted as 'creative' can be understood. Czikszentmihalyi (1997) refers to the original meaning of 'creativity'—that is, to bring into existence something which is genuinely new that has sufficiently substantial value to be added to the culture. The problem with this is that it is the culture which validates whether this new 'something' is genuinely new and therefore accepted into its fabric. It is therefore only 'creative' if it meets with the certitude of pre-ordained experts in its particular field, such as science, literature, art, etc. As part of an overall and fascinating discussion, Czikszentmihalyi does not ask what creativity is, but where it is. Leading on from the idea
that creativity is socio-culturally located rather than personal, he constructs a systems model, for he suggests that in order to have effect, the idea must be presented in ways that are accessible to others, must meet the stringent criteria of experts in the field, and must be included within the cultural domain to which it belongs. To this end, he identifies that creativity can be observed only from within the interrelations of a system made up of three main parts.

He identifies the first of these parts as the domain, which consists of a set of symbolic rules and procedures that are constituents of symbolic knowledge shared by a particular society or by human beings as a whole. Obvious examples at both societal and wider human levels are death and birth, but others include music or dance. The second element of creativity is the field into which it is introduced. This acts as the gatekeeper for its acceptance or non-acceptance, so in the field of art the gatekeepers are art critics, collectors, teachers, curators, etc. In effect, a ‘cultural body’ – people charged with the maintenance of high culture – makes the decisions as to what deserves to be recognised, preserved and remembered. The third and final component in this system is the individual person. Creativity occurs when an individual, using the symbols within the given domain, sees a new pattern or idea emerge and applies it in such a way that it is selected for inclusion within the appropriate domain. This, in turn, is utilised by following generations or others in ways through which it evolves and grows, and through its followers it has an impact, for they in turn act upon it creatively. For Csikszentmihalyi, then, the creative person is not necessarily any different from any other; rather, the novelty that he or she produces is accepted for inclusion within that particular domain. Definitively, Csikszentmihalyi (1997: 28) suggests that:

Creativity is any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one. And the definition of a creative person is: someone whose thoughts or actions change a domain, or establish a new domain. It is important to remember, however, that a domain cannot be changed without the explicit or implicit consent of a field responsible for it.

So what counts effectively is whether what is produced is accepted for inclusion in the domain, and although an individual may feel marvellously creative, if their view is not shared by the gatekeepers of the domain, their ideas will be deemed unoriginal or uncreative, adding nothing to the culture of that domain. Even having creative traits or talents, such as
musical ability, or a gift for sculpture, or scientific endeavour, is not enough if they do not meet with what is acceptable for inclusion.

At this point we can begin to unite some of the concepts outlined above. For instance, we can see the relevance of May’s (1959) three stages of creativity, and how an individual engages in a process of ‘being creative’. We can also see how the issues discussed by Della Fish (1998) in relation to the practitioner-researcher – with regard to artistry, thinking more like an artist, and the powers exerted by technical rationalism – can be used upon the rocks of what the gatekeepers of the domain of professional caring deem appropriately creative, and therefore inclusive of that domain, and what they do not. Whilst Fish’s work primarily relates to the caring professions it could equally apply to education and social science research, and so it currently remains on the margins, along with others of its type.

If we refer back to Part 1 of this book and its concentration on the value of ‘evidence’ and what it is constituted of through a primarily positivist approach, then the use of ‘art’ as a learning methodology and as a way of gathering and constructing knowledge may not necessarily be seen as ‘creative’ by the gatekeepers of the various domains to which they are applicable. To be creative is therefore not about plunging a domain into new and radical ways of seeing. As Czikszentmihalyi (1997) suggests, and as current utilisation of scientific theories illustrates, it is more an incremental process that builds on what is already in existence within a domain. That it can occur through the use and application of arts-based media is of real value, but if it is to happen it must be constructed within, and have appreciation of the scaffolding upon which the current domain exists. Therefore, in order to act with a greater application of ‘artistry’, it is necessary for individuals to surmount a number of obstacles in the way of being creative. They need to have a number of strategies which ease this path. One of the first major obstacles to overcome is the feeling of being ‘uncreative’.

I now want to introduce an image and an accompanying piece of text from a course that I run for health professionals which focuses on using artistic media to develop reflective practice skills – ‘Reflexivity in Professional Practice’.

These are two components of a portfolio produced by a student whom I shall refer to as Student B for the remainder of the book. They are the first in a series of images and prose which contribute to ‘a work’ necessary to complete a course of study, part of which is grounded in the use of artistic media, part of which is to construct a critical commentary which explores the development of their arts based portfolio. The author has deep concerns as to her creative ability. Her lack of creativity is a renowned
Figure 2  Student B
This module is so stupid. I feel so bloody cross that I have got to do this.
I just don’t think I can – I don’t understand it + I know that I can’t write poetry or draw.
I am the most uncreative person in the world – I can’t make that stuff – draw, sing, play music, knit, sew, cook, anything like that. Even other people tell me I’m uncreative – in fact my uncreativity is a renowned told.
What is making me feel is creative people telling me that I am creative – like it’s an untapped talent and they know me better than I know myself.
I have collected pictures + words expressing how stupid this assignment is. I don’t want to do it and I don’t think I can do it.

Figure 3 Student B

joke, she says. She identifies herself as an uncreative being lacking in any artistic talent and so avoids any activity that she believes to be creative. In reflecting upon this matter, she feels she cannot put it strongly enough into words. In order to illustrate her depth of feeling, she produces the collage (Figure 2). This interesting and wonderful paradox in itself opens up a whole field of possibility – both for the author and for those such as myself who have a deep interest in this area – for how can a self-professed uncreative being suddenly produce such a simple yet effective medium of communication? I want to link this piece with some words from Czirkszentmihalyi (1997: 344):

Without access to a domain, and without the support of a field, a person may have no chance of recognition. Even though personal creativity may not lead to fame and fortune, it can do something that from the individual’s point of view is even more important: make day-to-day experiences more vivid, more enjoyable, more rewarding.
When we live creatively, boredom is banished and every moment holds the promise of a fresh discovery. Whether or not these discoveries enrich the world beyond our personal lives, living creatively links us with the process of evolution.

Of course, some are more gifted than others in being able to portray and represent ideas and meanings. Their ability to use a pencil, oil paint, or sculpting tools may be something we can aspire to but are unlikely to achieve. Similarly, there are those who can structure words in vivid and authentic ways that we can only dream of, but this does not mean that they are the only beings who are ‘creative’. What I see here in Czikszenmtihalyi’s words is a two-way process. Engaging in the creative act can, in itself, be rewarding for us; but so can the product of that act, for it has the potential to enrich the lives of others. Figures 2 and 3 create a sense of unrecognised possibility for both their author and a reader/viewer: for their author, a bringing into consciousness of what exists beneath; and for the reader, the recognition that creativity is not necessarily about brilliance, but about what it can bring to understanding. Whether it is considered of ‘high quality’ or ‘limited quality’ is irrelevant, because it is the substance within that we are seeking. Our first strategy, therefore, is to separate artistic talent from creativity. The second is to acquire and harness our creative energy.

At the most basic level, Czikszenmtihalyi (1997) sees that to operate creatively is guided by external necessity – the actual time and energy available in our busy lives to devote to it – and internal protection – for, as was discussed in Chapter 3, the ego is constantly guarding against threats to the psyche. To free up creative energy, he suggests that we need to divert attention from the predictable goals that govern our minds, and use that which becomes available to explore the world around us – not just that which is evidently there, but that which may be there. Edward De Bono (1996: 87), for instance, talks of ‘the creative pause’. In this pause, he says, ‘I[f] you do not pay attention to something, then you are unlikely to think about it. The creative pause is an interruption in the smooth flow of routine in order to pay deliberate attention at some point.’ For De Bono, the creative pause is the simplest way to make a creative effort; it enables breaks in the flow of thinking, enabling a critical appreciation of that thinking, and allows an uncovering of ideas and patterns.

In taking a creative pause ourselves now, we can examine an example of a creative pause through the use of creativity by returning to Figures 2 and 3. For the author, there is a break in thinking that she is uncreative. Through the creation of the collage (Figure 2), she unwittingly breaks out
of her seemingly uncreative world. It is not until the image appears in its fullness that this awareness takes place. She may not be ‘an artist’, but she has creative energy, and in being provided with a ‘space’ both physically and psychologically so that she can produce something concrete without threat to her psyche, something of great value occurs. To return to the work of Hannah (2001: 7) on Jung: ‘It might be disagreeable, but it is really a great gain. The further we go, the more we realize that every widening of consciousness is indeed the greatest gain we can make.’

Some of us are by nature more curious than others, and some are more able, depending on personal circumstances, to drop their ego control and see what lies beneath. Being curious as a stand-alone activity is useful in developing our sense of creativity, but this, as Czikszentmihalyi (1997) realises, will be short-lived if it is not an enjoyable experience. Focusing our thoughts on whatever interests us in our lives, whether work or personal, setting goals for ourselves, enjoying what we do well are all things which can sustain our interest and enable creative pauses to take place. The creative pauses enable us to deepen the complexity of these interests and targets, which in turn become new challenges to our sense of knowing and being. These are forces of motivation which can be immensely creative properties when used to full effect, and it is possible that when beginning to have a greater degree of clarity regarding our personal traits and characteristics we will be able to ‘author’ our selves – within the boundaries of whatever we are: shy, quiet, exuberant, job role, etc. – through a kind of transformation and into a different kind of ‘being’.

An example of this kind of transformation is presented on pages 102–5. These images form part of a visual narrative presented by a nurse concerned with the ability of staff to engage in a clinical intervention, and the outdated state of the equipment used for this. Following a long period of inertia, she finally approached her newly appointed line manager, who suggested she conduct some research into the problem. To cut a long story short, she was ultimately asked to present her findings at a Hospital Trust Board meeting. Figures 4, 5 and 6 represent this. I will return to Figure 1 later.

Figure 4 is a representation of walking along the corridor to the meeting. The walls become narrower and more claustrophobic, and there is a fire in the room she is entering. Figure 5 is her view from the front of the room. There is a large table in front of her, and a series of eyes gaze at her. In the corner of the room there is a clock with both numbers and pound signs on its face. Figure 6 represents her feelings after the meeting – in which she has been told to resolve the problem and informed that whatever she requires as a resource will be made available to her. Although
Figure 1  Student A
Figure 4 Student A
Figure 5  Student A
Figure 6 Student A
Figure 1 is presented as the first image in this series, it was the last she created, for in her critical commentary on this event, she describes how she lived with this issue for over ten years but felt powerless to resolve it until a new manager was appointed. It therefore felt natural for her to place it as the first frame, but conceptually it was her last realisation. As a postscript, she writes in her commentary of constructing the next image in the series – her fear of new-found freedom. We will return to these images in Chapter 5 for a more in-depth approach to analysis, but the point of this illustration is to demonstrate the possibilities that exist for personal transformation – for her sense of self and esteem transcended through the development of the images and the commentary upon them – that can be harnessed through the use of artistic media as creative pause.

Winter et al. (1999: 180) argue that as professional workers (and indeed as human beings), we possess a general capacity for effectively representing our experience in artistic form; we suggest that in order to realise our capacity for reflection we can (and should) draw upon our intuitive grasp of aesthetic processes as well as our capacity for conceptual and logical analysis.

Below is another example of creative endeavour, this time literary rather than visual.

I will come back to this work later in terms of its value. Here, however, in work of this type and others, such as those above, we need to consider the kinds of relationship that exist between artistic expression and the general processes of understanding. And, more importantly, given the theme of this chapter, we need to assess what artistic creativity and imagination enable in the learning process. Drawing on a broad range of theory, Winter et al. (1999) make links between the imagination and creative capacity. They identify two typical imaginative activities which enable its creative power. First, it reconciles qualities which appear to be opposite or discordant – through such schemata as analogy or metaphor – and plays with what is the same and what is different, and determines how this can be used to best effect. So, for instance, a school or a hospital can be described as a ‘machine’ (Morgan, 1993) or as an organism – much as I described organisations as ‘autistic savants’ earlier. In this sense, creative imagination is found not only in discovery but in everyday activity. Second, imagination is activated from within – the general is seen as particular, as meaningful and symbolic. What is imagined is in fact more than what is observed, used, or experienced: for instance, the equipment of a critical care unit in a hospital may be a monitor, a suction aid, a crash...
Figure 7 Student C

I might look happy
but inside, I am screaming
out for help.
For I am lost,
not recently lost.
No, I've been lost
for years.

I don't exactly know
when I got thickshined,
it has been a
gradual thing.

I think that
slowly slipped away.
By the time I realized
it was too late.

I had gone.
I led on the other side.

I am behind the mirror
not in the mirror.
I am in the puddle,
Matter in the mud.
You cannot see me.
So you walk over me.

You cannot hear me
Yet sometimes
I dream all day.
I hear my head off.
I can't stop myself.
I arrive too late.
trolley, but its symbolic nature is much more than this for those who use it or are the recipients of its use. When it comes down to the artistic creation from these imaginative activities, it is not solely that they express powerful emotions but that they emerge from them.

We can see in the work presented so far that there are transformative expressions – the work goes beyond that which it portrays. Interestingly, Winter et al. (1999) point out that this effect is particularly noticeable when the emotion is a negative one. Some time ago I attended a creative writing course, and my tutor Erica Wildwood professed that ‘nice writes white’. In other words, happiness in literature is bland. It is much more engaging for the readers to immerse themselves in conflict and darkness, to engage in a conceptual and cognitive struggle before emerging out of the experience with a new feeling of consciousness. The images I present above are not ‘cheerful’, they are representations of conflict which demand to be viewed and read.

At the same time, we could ask the question of all the ‘imagery’ presented thus far: OK, but is it any good as ‘art’? Bearing in mind the comments of Csikszentmihalyi (1997), the gatekeepers of the humanities and the creative arts are ordinarily those who decide this on a grand scale, for they decide, as Winter et al. (1999) point out, which work is deservedly ‘classic’ and constructed by a true artist. Yet there is much ‘art’ in the public domain that could not be called ‘classical’, but is certainly popular – the amount of ‘chick-lit’ and crime fiction on the shelves of bookstores testifies to that. It would appear that ‘art’ in the current world is something which is provided to us by others who are skilled at something which is mysterious, to which we do not have access because of our perceived lack of talent. It is also something which we consume, as film, as music, as literature, as photography, etc. In this sense, these things become highly valued. As Winter et al. (1999: 209) suggest, ‘Literature is simply “highly valued” writing.’ Who, though, makes these value judgements? Is ‘I Might Look Happy’ (Figure 7) of any less value because it was created by a non-poet? Its value is in direct relation to the person valuing it. It may have no value, but it may also have immense value, so defining it in these terms is unsatisfactory as a conclusive ending. What is important is that these works have value in representing the capacity that exists in all of us for artistic creation. We may not only appreciate the established works that exist around us, and apply them in the way that Della Fish (1998) advocates, but also have the capacity to create works that are complex, carefully constructed, intricate and above all useful in developing and representing the ways in which we understand our experiences. As John Dewey (1958: 6) states: ‘artistic creativity is an aspect of common human experience, in
opposition to the “museum concept” of art’. Dewey goes on to describe the artistic structuring of such work – the making sense of its development; and this is true of those with whom I have engaged in this type of endeavour through workshops. They talk of ‘an intellectual process’ as the work comes into being: the way in which ‘objects’ are placed upon the paper or the page, the authenticity of the words used to describe, and what the images are designed to represent in the field of their professional reflections. Or, as Dewey (1958: 55) puts it more figuratively: ‘It involves giving a form to experience which expresses its integration, its organisation ... growth... development and fulfilment.’ This is not just a matter of representing an experience in the way that a reflective model creates description; it is more a grasping of the whole experience itself – a more complete and intensified experience (Dewey, 1958: 45).

In the work of Barone (2008) we see how creativity can be polarised into big C and small c values, and the ways in which they impact upon others. Barone cites Gardner (2004: 45), who posits that ‘Capital C change is the result of capital C creativity of capital C change agents.’ For his purposes, this relates to examples from the arts and sciences, for instance Picasso, Einstein and Freud, and from public policy, such as de Gaulle – all major players in using creativity for change. At the other pole (small c) are those with a lower-case mindset – teachers, parents, those in the local community, etc. – who have direct responsibility for a ‘mindful culture’. From this view, Gardner (2004: 132) credits Csikszentmihalyi (1994) in stating that while ‘most of us cannot hope to effect big C creativity, we might at least expect to be “middle C creators”’.

The work presented as images above, and they are constructed in Dewey’s and Winter et al.’s sense, fits within this concept of ‘middle C creation’, for it will not be distributed to the wider world as big C creativity is, but it has significant bearing when viewed from within its own field, and perhaps at a wider humanistic level. Csikszentmihalyi’s (1994) term ‘middle C creation’ provides a marker for all that stems out of it (it is rather apt that middle C is also the central key on a piano), for it suggests that we have the requirements to create in such ways that can be of benefit to others without needing high degrees of talent to achieve our aims.

Conclusion

The notion of ‘being creative’ is in itself problematic, for assumptions can be made as to what it is based on from one’s understanding of what ‘creativity’ means. A creative act can generally be assumed to be one of using the arts so that others can benefit from what is produced – a playor
Creativity and the practitioner-researcher

a painting to be enjoyed, for instance. Creativity is less understood as an act within experimental or theoretical science, or indeed in industry, but it is no less true that there are those in these fields who use the materials available to them and their knowledge of their subject to create something of use to others - a creation which emerges out of their knowledge, experience and imagination. Synthesising these two fields of creativity has been an aim of this chapter, bringing together the ways in which the creative arts and humanities can coexist alongside professional or social actions which are derived from practical and theoretical perspectives, and which lead to new ways of representing and understanding the experience.

Creativity and the tend to be perceived as having a primary role that centres on aesthetics, as discussed by Kollo May (1959) - a superficial experience through which we 'enjoy' or gain pleasure from that in which we engage. The 'actual creativity' he describes - the giving birth to something new - is more difficult to clarify. Indeed, when artists make such attempts to engage conceptually in their work they are often ridiculed as a result. (The Turner Prize in the UK is a good example, where often serious attempts at representations of experience are met with scorn in the popular media.)

Thus when we begin to examine the notion of creativity in relation to arts based research we need to consider it in the light of the theories that exist both in and around it: its production, its utility, its aesthetic quality, its 'novelty' both as innovation and as perceptions of 'novelty value' without substance. For instance, creativity would not exist if it were not for the capacity to imagine or visualise. For the purposes of research, it also relates to that which we experience, both internally and externally - both our inner and our material worlds in which we exist. It also relates to what is felt by those in power as to whether what is produced ticks the right boxes for that particular field and is therefore designated as a 'work of creativity', and this equally applies to individuals and how their actions set them apart as 'creative individuals'. It is fascinating that in the work presented in the images earlier, none of those individuals saw themselves as particularly reflective or creative. Yet, in the process of creating, an intellectual and reflective process took place which enabled the production of the work. It is not only the production of the work itself that is significant (it even could be argued that on its own it has little meaning), but what emerged from it - a sense of transformation. Whilst much of what is produced may not be considered by critics to be 'good art', that fact does not detract from its purpose, which is to generate new understanding of self and action through engagement in an intellectual and creative process.
As Eisner (2008) points out, arts based research must have utility beyond the aesthetic. In my view, it must also have value beyond means–end reasoning. It should not be used mechanistically, for instance as a data collection tool which is then discarded in favour of narrative. It is more methodological than that. In Chapter 5 I wish to take this further by exploring ways in which it can be developed methodologically, ways which are inclusive of analysis.

References

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