

# FOSTERING CREATIVITY: A DIAGNOSTIC APPROACH FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND ORGANISATIONS

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This book is founded on the beliefs that creativity is essential and beneficial to a society that continually needs to innovate to survive and prosper and higher education is not doing enough to encourage students' creative development. The authors' contribution to the solution of this problem is to *create* a text that will help people, particularly education professionals, to understand what creativity is in a practical sense and through the principles elaborated in the book, adapt their own teaching practices to promote students' awareness and creative capability. This book makes a positive and useful contribution to what I have called the 'wicked problem' of creativity in higher education<sup>1</sup>.

The book is in two parts: Chapters 2-8 are concerned with building a psychological framework for a more differentiated model of creativity based on the well known 4 P Model of Creativity –Person, Process, Product and Press with two extra P's added by the authors – Problem and Phase. Chapters 9-11 are concerned with applying this knowledge to the question of how to foster innovation in organisations using the practical example of higher education..

The focus and philosophy for the book are set out in the first chapter. We are told that the focus of interest is not the producers of sublime creativity or everyday folk who apply their creativity in their everyday relationships and actions, but the 'coal face creatives and thought leaders' – the large group of people who are the backbone of organisations and education who make a contribution to generating effective novelty on a day-to-day basis.

Creativity is conceptualised as a system for generating and evaluating novel ideas while innovation is when novel ideas are implemented and result in effective novelty – new products and modifications that add value to existing systems. The authors argue that although creativity and innovation mean different things in different disciplinary contexts, the basic principle that they result in the introduction of effective novelty, applies to all fields. Agreeing what is creative is always tricky and

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson N J (2008) available on-line at:  
<http://imaginativecurriculumnetwork.pbworks.com/f/WICKED+PROBLEM+OF+CREATIVITY+IN+HIGHER+EDUCATION.pdf>

two useful criteria suggested for recognising the products of creativity are elegance, summed up by '*why didn't I think of that*', expression, and *generalisability*, ideas/products that offer possibilities beyond the contexts for which they were originally intended.

Chapters address: the issue of generating effective novelty and the ways in which novelty can come about by accident and by design; the creative process, extending the well known four phase model of creativity – involving preparation, generation, illumination and verification – to seven stages by the addition of activation, communication and validation; the personality traits and dispositions associated with being creative, and the institutional/organisational influences on creativity. Practical advice for key stakeholders drawn from the content, is helpfully summarised in a table at the end of each chapter. There are also chapters on the techniques and methods used to facilitate creative thinking and the evaluation and assessment of creativity. The authors own guidelines for assessing the creativity of a product is one of the most useful aids in the book.

### *Where is the effective novelty in this book?*

Books on creativity written with the higher education practitioner in mind are rare, so this introduction to creativity and the way the concept might be implemented within the conceptual frameworks utilised by the authors, is itself novel. The advice and stimulation it provides should also ensure that it is effective in achieving its goal of influencing thinking and practice.

The book synthesises and connects a lot of literature about creativity and brings concepts alive with some interesting and memorable anecdotes about real people doing creative things or reflecting on the origin of their ideas. The authors clearly set out to add value to existing concepts and achieve this by extending the well known 4 P and four phase models of creativity. In Chapter 10 they bring their ideas together providing a concrete example of how an instruction-based curriculum, in this case a second year engineering class, could be created to develop students' understanding about creativity and encourage them to apply their creative ideas to the solution of a problem and the creation of a product. A weakness of the book is in not taking this example beyond the engineering discipline as this discipline is perhaps the easiest to imagine how the approaches advanced by the authors could be operationalised. I can imagine teachers in other disciplines asking, 'yes but how will it work in my situation?'

The authors state quite clearly that this is not a 'how to do it' book but I feel the step between conceptual knowledge and principles to new educational practice may be too great for some potential readers.

One important area under-represented in the book is the idea that creativity in the real world of work, the world we are preparing our students for, is usually a collaborative affair. One of the problems with higher education is its preoccupation with individual learning and achievement whereas the real

world of work outside higher education is much more concerned with collective enterprise.

For someone wanting to explore more traditional views of what creativity means, this book provides a very readable and understandable account. The authors make explicit the principles that they believe are important and these could be used by curriculum designers and teachers to help them think differently about their practices and the opportunities they have for inventing new educational practices.

But the authors could have gone further in their generation of effective novelty. The conclusion I draw is that they treat creativity as a complicated personal and social change phenomenon rather than the complex emergent phenomenon it usually is in the real world.

The basic difficulty I have with the approach to developing a systematised model of creativity is the seemingly algorithmic way in which creativity is treated. You only have to look at the work of Greene<sup>2</sup> (2009) to appreciate the way in which a person's creativity is integrated into their expertise, identity, behaviours, wilfulness, purposes and meaning making to realise that the pathway cannot be defined through a single formula that we faithfully follow when we engage in creative thinking and performance. Cause and effect are often not clear and the pattern emerges through action and experience rather than being defined in advance.

So for me the book does not go quite far enough in explaining the phenomenon of creativity at both individual and group level in real world contexts and then drawing out of this the practical consequences for the design of higher education experiences. But that is perhaps another journey and another book. One disappointment from a UK perspective is the fact that there is no acknowledgement of all of the work undertaken in the UK to address this very problem<sup>3</sup>.

Overall, I believe that this book does make a valuable contribution to our understanding of how we might encourage the further development of creativity in higher education. The authors are to be applauded for building and elaborating a coherent philosophy and showing how principles derived from their philosophy can be used to inform curriculum design and learning and teaching strategies. The book is well worth a read.

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<sup>2</sup>Greene R (2009) A model of 42 models of creativity available on-line at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/2149673/A-Model-of-42-Models-of-Creativity-by-Richard-Tabor-Greene-20june06-PDF-for-Global-Distribution-FINAL>

<sup>3</sup> <http://imaginativecurriculumnetwork.pbworks>