

Robbins, D. (1998) *The work of Pierre Bourdieu: recognizing society* (Milton Keynes, Open University Press) (Original work published 1991).

David James, University of the West of England, UK

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Developing creativity in higher education: an imaginative curriculum

Norman Jackson, Martin Oliver, Malcolm Shaw and James Wisdom (Eds), 2006

London, RoutledgeFalmer

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If there is one message that stands out from this book, it is that creativity is an elusive, contested concept. Is it therefore worthy of consideration within a higher education context? The contributors of this volume make a convincing case that it is. This edited collection grew out of the Imaginative Curriculum network project, funded by the Learning and Teaching Support Network's Generic Centre and later the Higher Education Academy. The contributions are not just 'musings' on creativity, but are mainly research-based and theoretical essays on the potential role of creativity in higher education. What these contributions prompt while reading it is a great deal of reflection about the notion of creativity. What is creativity, how can it be fostered, how do we recognise it and how can it be assessed?

There is a fair amount of consensus throughout the research evidence in this book that in fact creativity is understood in similar terms across different disciplines. Key concepts that arise throughout the book in conceptualisations of creativity are originality, imagination, innovation, making connections and links, and risk-taking. The question is whether the higher education system's emphasis on employability, predicted learning outcomes and norm-referenced assessment methods creates tensions in relation to developing a creative ethos. Perhaps not surprisingly, some of the evidence presented suggests that creativity is not highly valued in the dominant discourses of higher education. As one example, an analysis of the Quality Assurance Agency's subject benchmarks by Norman Jackson and Malcolm Shaw reveals, there is little emphasis on creativity as a desired outcome of curricula.

There are several points that stood out for me from reading this fascinating book. Firstly, the fostering of creativity requires a particular environment. As Margaret Edwards and colleagues state in their chapter on academics' perspectives on creativity: 'A stressed academic, like a stressed student, is rarely creative' (p. 73). The undoubtedly negative influence of the dominant research culture on developing imaginative curricula is noted by James Wisdom (p. 184), and he also draws attention to the pressing need for a climate more conducive to critical reflection in relation to teaching. As someone familiar with the current climate in UK higher education, I feel much sympathy with these concerns. It is difficult to imagine how most academics would be able to carve out the thinking space necessary for truly creative curricular developments, even though many would agree about its importance.

In relation to the students' experiences of creativity, there is an implicit message in this book that an environment of respect and trust needs to be embedded in the culture of the course and even the higher education institution itself. As Marilyn Fryer's survey of National Teaching Fellows found, the teachers understood that fostering creativity depended on empowering students to build their self-confidence, and 'tapping into each individual's dreams, needs, aspirations, curiosity and motivation' (p. 83). These objectives require an atmosphere of respect for the students as individuals in order that they can take risks. Norman Jackson and Christine Sinclair use the notion of cognitive apprenticeship (p. 130) in order to suggest how tutors might act as role models in fostering creativity amongst their students. Again this raises issues for me about the current climate in which it can be difficult for teachers to act as appropriate role models given the pressures they are under to perform well in research at the expense of teaching.

However, help is at hand: practical advice in terms of what to do and how it can be done is provided from chapter 10 onwards. The assessment of creativity is undoubtedly a huge challenge. How can creativity be 'measured' and assessed? Fortunately, there are two very useful chapters in relation to this issue, by John Cowan and Tom Balchin. My favourite quote from the book, however, appears in the chapter by Martin Oliver and colleagues on students' perspectives on creativity: 'Students made it clear that it was easier to assess the creativity of the dead ...' (p. 47). The idea behind this statement is sound, given that post-mortem analyses of someone's creative potential are developed over time, but it does pose a particular challenge to higher education teachers.

Creativity, then, is perhaps an outcome of an ideal higher education. Ideally, teachers should be encouraged to foster the kinds of risk-taking in their students that result in creative outputs for their own sake. Creativity could help build the self-confidence of students and, through encouraging them to make unexpected links and synergies, also enable them to become the types of critical thinkers that we want them to be. These types of results are not immediately tangible and are not given enough value in the contemporary higher education system. This book offers a convincing argument as to why we should take note of this lack of attention.

Kelly Coate, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland

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Educational failure and working class white children in Britain

Gillian Evans, 2006

Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan

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This book reminds us of how much has been forgotten by educational sociology since its linguistic turn. It also indicates how much has changed in the last 30 years and how much has remained the same.