

Watson, Jan S. (2014) Assessing creative process and product in higher education. *Practitioner Research in Higher Education*, 8 (1). pp. 89-100.

Downloaded from: <http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/1494/>

*Usage of any items from the University of Cumbria's institutional repository 'Insight' must conform to the following fair usage guidelines.*

Any item and its associated metadata held in the University of Cumbria's institutional repository Insight (unless stated otherwise on the metadata record) may be copied, displayed or performed, and stored in line with the JISC fair dealing guidelines (available [here](#)) for educational and not-for-profit activities

**provided that**

- the authors, title and full bibliographic details of the item are cited clearly when any part of the work is referred to verbally or in the written form
  - a hyperlink/URL to the original Insight record of that item is included in any citations of the work
- the content is not changed in any way
- all files required for usage of the item are kept together with the main item file.

**You may not**

- sell any part of an item
- refer to any part of an item without citation
- amend any item or contextualise it in a way that will impugn the creator's reputation
- remove or alter the copyright statement on an item.

The full policy can be found [here](#).

Alternatively contact the University of Cumbria Repository Editor by emailing [insight@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:insight@cumbria.ac.uk).

**Assessing creative process and product in higher education**

Practitioner Research  
 In Higher Education  
 Copyright © 2014  
 University of Cumbria  
 Vol 8 (1) pages 89-100

Jan S. Watson  
 University of East Anglia  
 Jan.Watson@uea.ac.uk

**Abstract**

This article examines how Education undergraduates explored their creative processes through the planning and presentation of an artwork. In particular, it addresses how they negotiated the demands of an assessment method which focused on both the reflective process and the finished product. This investigation is part of a more extensive study of creativity and engagement in Higher Education; it is underpinned by the idea that all students have the potential to be creative if they are provided with innovative learning experiences and open-ended assessment tasks. The empirical data was obtained from semi-structured interviews (n=30), students' reflective sketchbooks and observations. The findings support the view that students are more motivated and engaged when they have access to alternative, creative assessment opportunities which involve experimentation and risk-taking in a supportive learning environment. The data shows that they value assessment methods which enable them to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills in different ways. However, concern about the perceived subjectivity of such an assessment process, and the emphasis placed on meeting the learning outcomes, initially presented a barrier to creative development. One implication is that the conflict between creativity and assessment might be partially resolved if students played a more active part in both the formulation of summative assessment criteria and the on-going formative assessment process.

**Keywords**

Creativity, creative assessment methods, art-based assessment.

**Introduction**

With Higher Education (HE) experiencing so many rapid changes and challenges, including a shift to a 'market-driven' system and a much larger and more diverse student population, there is a need to re-evaluate the undergraduate experience. The rise of consumerism which, according to Scott (2010), is partly the result of deliberate policy interventions such as the National Student Survey (NSS), has meant that students have higher expectations of their HE experience and are more openly critical and demanding. Some student experience survey responses in the UK may be interpreted as responding directly to the 'tumultuous' changes in the sector (Gibney (2013); students appear to be reassessing issues that previously had been taken for granted. One example of this is the rise in the number of students asking for coursework to be second-marked, if they feel that the grades awarded do not reflect their expectations; what used to be a rare occurrence is becoming common practice. It is understandable that, following the introduction of higher tuition fees, students want a good return for their financial investment but, as evidenced by my own experience, there is a tendency for them to associate 'value for money' with high level degree classifications. There is much scope for the whole

**Citation**

Watson, J.S. (2014) Assessing creative process and product in higher education, *Practitioner Research in Higher Education Journal*, 8(1), January, 89-100.

student experience to be enhanced and developed (Dollinger et. al., 2005; Ramsden, 2003) but the assessment process, which is increasingly seen as an important measure of the quality of provision in HE institutions (Merricks, 2006), requires immediate attention. One of the key issues highlighted in the 2003 Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) report was the narrow range of assessment methods used in HE, many of which were deemed inappropriate for such a wide-ranging student body. This supports the point made by Gibbs (2006) that many assignments fail to engage students with appropriate kinds of learning activities; he advocates the use of 'larger, more complex and open-ended' assignments that 'require performances of understanding' (2006:33) and encourage a deeper approach to learning (Biggs, 2003). Much has been written about the substantial shifts in assessment policy and practice over the last decade (Boud and Falchikov, 2006; Brown, 2003; Bryan and Clegg, 2006); as assessment greatly affects how students spend their time and where they focus their effort, innovations are not seen as merely desirable but as crucial and essential. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the aims of HE – these are explored elsewhere (Dearing, 1997; Taras, 2002) – but, with increased emphasis being placed on the employability skills agenda and lifelong learning, students need to be able to demonstrate that they can plan and monitor their own learning. With the focus on measurable performance it is 'easy to lose sight of the pedagogic role that assessment can and should play in improving learning' (Bryan and Clegg, 2006:3); as Dochy, Segers and Sluijsmans (1999) remark, assessment practices need to do far more than just produce very knowledgeable graduates.

### **Creativity and assessment**

As Craft (2003) points out, 'creativity is becoming part of a universalised discourse in the Western world'; its inclusion in educational policy documents and curriculum frameworks has given it relatively high status, particularly in schools. In a fast moving world of economic and technical change, there is an urgent need for a workforce which will respond creatively to innovative developments (Cunningham 2005; Hartley, 2004) and question conventional ideas (Barell, 2003). In addition to the political and economic imperatives, creativity is viewed as a significant aspect of personal and social development (Amabile, 1983; Jeffrey and Woods, 2003). However, although the importance of developing creative pedagogies and practices has been highlighted by many educationalists and researchers (Craft, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Kleiman, 2005; McWilliam, 2005), there is a feeling that creative initiatives in HE are often undervalued and even thwarted (Dollinger et al., 2005; Kuh, 1996). Kleiman (2005) points out that this may be partly due to the problems associated with defining creativity; despite the wealth of literature about creativity in education (Craft, 2003; Cropley, 2000; Jeffrey and Woods, 2003), there continues to be a lack of consensus about the meaning of this multi-faceted and complex term. Gardner (1995), for example, considers creativity to be a combination of subject knowledge, intrinsic motivation and specific cognitive skills, such as flexibility and a willingness to try out counter-intuitive approaches, whereas Byron (2007) defines it more broadly as a new and appropriate response to an open-ended task. Schools in the UK tend to support the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education's suggestion that creativity is 'Imagined activity fashioned as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value', (NACCCE Report, 1999), although what is considered 'original' and 'valuable' is open to question. The fact that assessment of student creativity is recognised as being both complicated and controversial (Beghetto, 2005; Elton, 2006; Loveless, 2002), also helps to explain some of the negativity towards creative practices in HE. In order to develop their creative thinking skills, students need to experience non-traditional teaching methods and approaches to assessment that 'challenge the habitual ways in which they approach their learning' (Watson, 2012:443). As the creative process, which involves risk-taking, experimentation and freedom of choice, is unpredictable and difficult to capture, traditional assessment methods are not only unsuitable but counterproductive to creativity. It could be argued that the current policy priorities and assessment processes of

performance-driven HE institutions are in direct conflict with creative development (Watson, 2013). As Cole et al. (1999: 281) point out, 'traditional education systems have allowed students to feel more comfortable by not being creative'; authentic, practice-oriented assessment tasks may be more engaging (Brown, 2003) but students are, understandably, unwilling to take risks that are perceived as having a negative impact on their final grade. Mindful of current recruitment issues and the focus on driving up standards, I would argue that practitioners should have opportunities to experiment with and discuss creative methods that *enhance* rather than replace existing assessment practices.

### **The research study in context**

The study involves undergraduate students on a three year degree in Education at the research-intensive University of East Anglia (UEA); although it is not marketed as a teacher training course, the majority of students aspire to be primary teachers. In recognition of the diverse employment opportunities in education and the highly-competitive nature of applying for Initial Teacher Training (ITT) places, the course aims to provide all undergraduates with a range of stimulating, challenging learning opportunities which encourage creative, critical and conceptual ways of thinking. The optional '*Creativity and Learning*' module, which was specifically designed to provide Year 3 students with alternative, creative learning experiences, reflects the view that everyone has the potential to be creative; this 'democratic' approach, referred to by Craft (2003) as 'little c creativity', supports the idea that creativity can be taught and developed. Rather than identifying and selecting 'creative' individuals to undertake the module, the focus is on introducing pedagogical approaches that aim to help students develop some of the characteristics and abilities associated with creativity. With reference to the four categories of personal creativity characteristics identified by Treffinger et al. (2002), students are encouraged to use their imagination to generate and explore ideas, respond to new situations in a novel way, make connections and become more aware of their creativeness (Watson, 2013). Over a twelve-week period, students explore and gain insight into the theory and practice, philosophy and policy of creativity in education through formal lectures, interactive seminars and independent study. They also engage in practical, self-reflective creative learning activities and explore their own creative processes through the planning, creation and presentation of an art piece. The different, but complementary, modes of delivery reflect some of the multiple factors considered essential to the understanding of creativity (Amabile, 1983); these include subject knowledge, motivation, learning styles and personality traits. Drawing on definitions which focus on cognitive processes (Seltzer and Bentley, 1999; Torrance, 1980), personal development and product (Gardner, 1995), the importance of addressing how these impact on the creative experience has been acknowledged.

### **Aims and rationale**

In order to meet the module outcomes, students are required to submit both a traditional essay and a creative portfolio, each of which accounts for fifty per cent of the summative grade awarded. Debates about alternative, pluralistic approaches to assessment are well documented (Birenbaum and Dochy, 1996; Craddock and Mathias, 2009) but there is a dearth of literature focusing on creative assessment practices in HE. This study aims to readdress the balance by examining how students responded to the open-ended art-based element of the assessment; this task, which culminates in the production of an art piece, is supported by the on-going documentation of ideas and a short reflective overview of the process. The whole portfolio is assessed on the last day of the module, when the students present their work as a peer group exhibition in the Art Centre studio.

The shift from course development to research study was in response to positive module evaluations; comments such as '*I found the work refreshingly stimulating and engaging – it was so different from*

*anything we had done before* inspired me to delve deeper into the students' perceptions of alternative approaches to learning and assessment. The study builds on the findings of two small-scale exploratory investigations that focused on: students' responses to working in the creative learning environment of an art studio (Watson, 2012) and how they used the experience to interrogate their self-knowledge, construct new meanings and explore their personal and professional identities (Watson, 2013). It was evident from the data that 'students benefit from being exposed to alternative learning and teaching approaches which put them under pressure and shake up their preconceived ideas about what it means to be an education undergraduate' (Watson, 2012, 457), but the findings led to a reconsideration of the module outcomes and assessment criteria. The current study is predicated by the idea that all students have the potential to be creative if they are provided with innovative learning experiences and open-ended assessment tasks; it is underpinned by the principles and values of experiential, reflective and collaborative learning (Jacobson and Ruddy, 2004; Moon, 2004). As Knight (1995) points out, how we choose to assess students' work reflects what we value: I was keen to make the assessment process an active, integral part of the learning experience for both individuals and the whole group in a supportive setting. This supports the idea that creative processes and products are socially situated and constructed (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999) and that students should have opportunities for risk-taking and making mistakes in a non-threatening environment (Craft, 2003). These underlying pedagogical principles are reflected in the assessment criteria which required evidence of the following: exploration, experimentation and risk taking with ideas and materials; the development of a unique and personal line of enquiry through critical reflection; process documentation, content and execution; individual presentation and participation in peer critique and the exhibited art piece (idea and meaning, form and execution).

### **Research methodology and data collection methods**

This qualitative investigation, which is part of a more extensive action research study of creativity and engagement in HE, was conducted within an interpretive social-constructivist conceptual framework. As in the previous study (Watson, 2013), the reflective methodology employed enabled participants to record and discuss their 'lived experiences' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) of working both individually and collaboratively in the Arts Centre studio. Twenty Year 3 '*Creativity and Learning*' students and ten Primary ITT postgraduates, who had undertaken the module in the previous year, participated in the study. Having gained ethical approval from my institution, all participants were informed of the purpose and structure of the research study; before they signed the consent form, it was made clear to the undergraduates that the data collection process and findings would have no bearing on their summative assessment grades.

The empirical data, obtained from preliminary questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations and students' reflective sketchbooks, was collected over a fourteen week period between January and April 2013. The multi-method approach adopted reflects the definition of assessment proposed by Treffinger et al. (2002, 23): 'a process of "taking stock" of an individual (or group) by drawing together information from a number of sources and attempting to organise and synthesise those data in a meaningful way'. As these authors point out, 'the complex and multidimensional nature of creativity cannot be captured effectively and comprehensively by any single instrument or analytical procedure' (2002, 25). The questionnaires were administered at the beginning of the module in order to obtain an overview of students' expectations about the practical element of the work; these initial responses helped to inform the interview questions. Early interviews with the undergraduates, which took place in a quiet room next to the studio, were incorporated into the practical sessions; this meant that participants were able to discuss how they approached and responded to the art-based assessment in

the context of the actual learning environment. Common themes and issues emerging from the transcripts were explored in the more in-depth interviews conducted at the end of the module; as this investigation focused on students' perceptions of the assessment process, further interviews were carried out after they had received their final marks and summative feedback sheets. The two focus group interviews, which took place in February 2013, were conducted in an open conversational style (Kvale, 1996); former students were invited to reflect on and discuss their perceptions of being assessed in a different way and consider if the experience had impacted on their personal and professional lives. The observation notes provided a detailed overview of the practical sessions from a different perspective; it was interesting to compare these with the students' reflective accounts and extrapolate issues to explore in the interviews. Although the experiences were unique to individuals, it was possible to identify common themes emerging from the data.

### **Findings and discussion**

This section provides an overview of how students responded to the challenge of exploring their creative processes through the planning and presentation of an artwork; in particular, it examines how they negotiated the demands of a different type of assessment, which focused on both the reflective process and the finished product. With reference to literature focusing on creativity and assessment in HE, the discussion draws on empirical data, collected over the four month period.

Although many students found the initial experience daunting and, in some cases, intimidating, there was an overwhelmingly positive response to the art-based task, once they gained in confidence. Evidence from the preliminary questionnaires and early interview transcripts showed that most students embarked on the module feeling more comfortable with a didactic, linear approach to learning: one said, *'As we are used to being told what to do and having everything organised in advance of the taught sessions', I found the whole idea of experimentation hard to accept at first'* and another commented on how previous *'downplaying of self-discovery and risk-taking'* had made her feel *'passive and demotivated but safe'*. One student said, *'I began to think more freely and creatively when I made a conscious effort to forget about the familiar ways of learning and become more open-minded to unusual ideas'* and another commented on how excited and motivated she felt when, *'after a long period of self-doubt and despondency', she could see how her 'random thoughts and ideas gathered from reading came together'*. This participant went on to explain how she *'felt on a roll'* – what Csikszentmihalyi (1999), refers to as 'the flow' – when she could see where she was going with her work but, like many others, had to experience periods of discomfort and uncertainty before reaching that stage. Several students admitted to having their most productive ideas when they felt vulnerable and unsure of themselves; this supports Maslow's (1976) view that although many people fear self-knowledge, they are more likely to discover their true potential as they become more aware of their creative freedom, a point which emerged from previous studies (Watson, 2012; 2013). Others valued having the opportunity to explore ideas when they chose to do so; *'if I was not feeling particularly creative in the studio', remarked one student, 'I would use the time for thinking, even daydreaming, and work on my art piece later'* and another said *'As I often had my most inspirational ideas outside the timetabled sessions, it was frustrating not having access to the studio'*. Kleiman (2005, 7) points out that those of us involved with educational provision need to be aware that *'individual states of intuition, rumination, reverie, even boredom play a role in creativity and problem-solving'*; this means allowing time and space for deep thinking and reflection. As students were encouraged to experiment with ideas and resources and explore tangential avenues of thought, most of them began to embrace uncertainty and ambiguity after a few sessions in the studio; this contradicts Sadler's (1989) criticism of *'trial and error learning'*, which he considered to be random and inefficient. The evidence showed that some students were surprised to

find that creative learning experiences could be *'well-structured, thought-provoking and intellectually challenging'*; however, for those who had anticipated *'a soft option'* this was not necessarily a welcome discovery.

When asked about the task of producing an art piece, it was evident that the majority of students were pleased there would be an actual product to physically represent all their hard work; one said, *'I think that having a final result will make me feel that I have achieved something worthwhile – it will mark the end of a long but worthwhile personal journey'* and another said she was proud of her final piece but regarded it *'as more of a summary of [her] creative ideas and thought processes than as an item for the public to view'*. The majority of students were aware that the artworks represented a culmination of the creative process – the following extract from a reflective sketchbook encapsulates the general feeling about the linking of process and product: *'Creativity is about making connections between the ideas, thoughts and feelings explored over the last twelve weeks and turning these into something visual that others can interpret as they wish'*. Evidence from the interview transcripts and observation notes indicated that having to work on the exhibition as a team encouraged a wider view of creative development; as one student remarked, *'I used to think that creativity was just about improving certain skills and qualities but I now see it as part of a process that leads to a tangible outcome'*. The following comment demonstrates the great sense of achievement felt by one student when she realised how her artwork contributed positively to the whole exhibition: *'although the piece crystallised my own thoughts and feelings, it also reflected the creative ideas of the group and the influences of working in an art studio'*. These remarks support the view that creative ideas and products need to be recognised by others and draw attention to how the actual learning environment plays such an important part in the creative development of individuals (Kleiman, 2005). Given the wide range of factors that influenced how individuals approached their work in the studio, including their experiences, interests, attitudes, strengths and emotions; the way in which they responded to their peers, the artist and the learning environment and the extent to which they drew on the theoretical sessions and research, it is not surprising that each piece of art represented a unique combination of process and product. However, the point that *'Not all cultures regard creativity as an individualised response, some preferring to see it as a collective, collaborative phenomenon and as an event which may be publicly performed and evaluated'* (Carter, 2004: 48), is reflected in the findings.

This leads on to an exploration of students' perceptions of the demands of the assessment process at different stages of the investigation. Most of them felt that *'it made a refreshing change to be challenged and assessed in a variety of ways'*; they were pleased that *'the different assessment methods respected [their] individual creative capabilities'* and enabled them to demonstrate a *'wider knowledge and understanding of creativity in relation to their interests and experiences'*. This reinforces the point that there needs to be *'greater emphasis on assessment instruments that measure not just recall of facts, but also the students' abilities to use the material they have learned in live situations'* (Brown, 2004:82). However, some found the new approaches challenging; one student said, *'It's been such a shock to the system as the last two years have been very structured, with a focus on essays – we have had to adapt quite quickly to a different way of thinking'* and another remarked that she felt she would have benefited from being introduced to creative assessment methods earlier in the course. One of the postgraduates said, *'I do think you should be able to learn for learning's sake but, unfortunately, our society has created a situation where final results count for everything'*; he went on to say, *'I did want to be creative but was always thinking about what was going to get me a good mark – I was so driven by what I wanted to do (teaching) that I had to get that 2:1'*. This participant, who has just secured a post in a primary school, freely admitted that he spent time in the practical sessions trying to work out what the

artist (as one of the assessors) appeared to value; this concurs with a point made by Gibbs (2006: 24) that, for some students, studying is 'an exercise in selective negligence', based on their perceptions of what the assessment system requires. Another student said, *'although I was encouraged to explore my own ideas, I sometimes felt compelled to follow up the artist's suggestions, in order to get a good mark'*; although she went on to acknowledge that this uncertainty may have reflected her reluctance to take risks, the comment highlights the potential conflict between the aims of the pedagogical process and the pressure of grades. These remarks also draw attention to 'hidden messages' that underlie learning objectives and assessment criteria; as Gibbs (2006) points out, there may be a gap between what is presented in course documentation and what students actually experience in their studies.

The findings showed that despite the assessment criteria and grade descriptors being made transparent and explicit, in relation to the learning outcomes, some students found it difficult to understand how these translated into practice. Comments like *'I welcomed the open-ended nature of the task but was unsure of what to include in the sketchbook to achieve a high grade'* and *'it was suggested that I critically engage with the work of artists who had studied my chosen theme but I didn't really know what this entailed'*, demonstrate that terms used freely in assessment documentation may be read and interpreted in different ways. Evidence from later interviews showed that the majority of students valued the individual tutorials that took place halfway through the module, as they were able to discuss ideas with the artist/assessor and use insights gained to make progress with their art pieces. This reinforces the importance of providing immediate feedback throughout the process (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Hattie and Timperley, 2007) – feeding forwards rather than at the end of the module when is too late to act on constructive advice offered. However, some students responded negatively to advice, if they considered it to be a personal criticism; one student said, *'I was pleased with the direction my work was taking until the artist suggested I address wider issues'* and another said that she *'felt deflated'* when she was advised to move beyond her comfort zone and explore the work of an unfamiliar artist. Orr (2007) points out that, as creativity is linked to expressions of emotion, it is difficult to separate students' artwork and their identities; urging them to change their usual ways of thinking, which may imply criticism of their thought and ideas, could have a negative impact on learning.

Although the summative assessment task was generally well-received, there was some concern about the marking and grading process; one of the postgraduates, who had not performed as well as expected said, *'achieving a relatively low mark for my art-based work made me feel despondent and insecure as, despite the encouraging written comments, it implied that I was less creative than my peers'*. Gibbs (2006, 27) makes the point that 'any feedback that focuses on an individual's overall performance (in the form of a mark or grade), rather than on their learning, detracts from learning'; he feels that this kind of assessment practice may actually discourage creativity. Another participant in the focus group expressed concern about the perceived subjectivity of the assessment process; she said, *'as creativity is so individual, it must be difficult, if not impossible, to assess it against criteria – I enjoyed working alongside my peers but there was an element of tension and competitiveness on the day of the final assessment, as we wondered how final marks were awarded for such different pieces of work'*. This concurs with the view that 'creativity can be a contentious and confrontational as well as a cooperative and collaborative act' (Carter, 2004, 210) and highlights that the 'tacit professional expertise' on which students' work was judged in the past (O'Donovan, Price and Rust, 2004) is open to question in the current HE climate.

Evidence from the focus group interview transcripts indicated that some trainee teachers had regarded the assessment day as a transient experience, with the true value of the creative process only being

realised after they had graduated – what I have come to term ‘deferred creativity’. The following comment supports the view that creative assessment practices can enhance employability skills and help to foster life-long learning (Boud and Falchikov, 2006), even if this is not recognised at the time:

*‘Looking back, I suppose I just wanted to get a good grade and move on to something else - it was not until the middle of my teacher training year that I began to reflect on the creative experiences that led up to the final assessment and think about how I could make use of these in my teaching; it seems like I was putting my creative development on hold until I could see the relevance.’*

One postgraduate remarked that, although she had not paid much attention to the summative feedback at the time, she found it useful to revisit the comments when applying for jobs:

*‘As I didn’t get a particularly good grade, I presumed I wasn’t considered to be a creative person’, she said, ‘on reflection, I should have paid more attention to the encouraging comments as I think going through the creative process made me a much more imaginative, open-minded person.’*

When asked to enhance on this, she said it was *‘unfortunate that so much importance is placed on the final grade when the emphasis in the studio was always on the process’*; another member of the group thought that the situation could be improved by allowing students to draw up the assessment criteria and play an active part in the assessment process.

### **Implications**

The findings support the view that students are more motivated and engaged with their learning when they have access to alternative, creative assessment opportunities which enable them to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills in different ways. However, with so much emphasis placed on performance indicators, it is not surprising that some students are reluctant to pursue creative ideas, if they think these might have a negative impact on their final grades; the need to provide clear learning outcomes and specific, explicit assessment criteria at the beginning of the process, whilst encouraging creative experimentation and risk-taking, was highlighted as a paradoxical situation. This conflict could be partially resolved by embedding meaningful self-assessment tasks into the practical sessions and encouraging students to consider how the learning outcomes relate to their personal goals. It is evident from the data that those who had really thought about what they wanted to achieve from the module, in addition to getting a good degree, were more actively engaged in learning activities leading to the summative assessment. These students, who had high expectations and a clear sense of direction, demonstrated an ability to manage, direct and assess their own creative development in relation to the criteria. However, as Taras (2002) points out, placing more responsibility on the students requires careful consideration; it is unrealistic to expect them to have well-developed self-management and reflective skills, if these have not been taught throughout the course. Cunningham, O’Reilly and Lester (1999) feel that encouraging students to manage their own learning, and then subjecting them to a rigorous external assessment process, is contradictory; they make the point that attempts by HE institutions to support the idea of the self-managed learner are often undermined by inconsistent approaches to assessment.

It is evident from the findings that more thought needs to be given to presenting and explaining the assessment criteria and standards; the fact that the number of students expressing concern about these increased when more detailed guidelines were provided, reflects the view that, on their own, these do not help to improve understanding (O’Donovan, Price and Rust, 2004; Ecclestone, 2001). The findings

support the idea that engaging in discussions *about* the criteria, in relation to personal learning goals, should encourage individuals to monitor and reflect on their progress in a more informed, meaningful way. For example, when discussing the documentation of the creative process, it would be helpful to enhance on specific elements of the assessment criteria and relate these to creative characteristics being developed. As students would be less likely to be surprised by their marks and comments, if levels of progress were made explicit throughout the process, this should result in fewer complaints about final grades. Moon 2004 (2006: 194) points out that assessment only contributes to learning 'when learners and teachers share an understanding of the purposes of the assessment and the criteria for marking and grading' but it is important to consider appropriate ways in which this knowledge may be transferred. Students need to have access to what Taras (2002) refers to as the 'guild knowledge' that is in the minds of their tutors, if they are to understand what is required to narrow the gap between their current performance and their goals; this may be partly achieved by building in opportunities to discuss feedback and identify next steps. However, as the students receive their final marks and comments weeks after the module has finished, there is no evidence that they read, let alone address, advice offered; this has implications for course design. Introducing modules that span the academic year would enable tutors to incorporate meaningful formative assessment tasks into their programmes and, as Claxton (2000) suggests, allow more time and space for students to experience different stages of the creative process and develop their ideas.

This findings support a point made by Merricks (2006) that there is a need for staff development, if assessment is to be regarded as a useful part of teaching and learning. It is important that the appropriateness of new methods, such as those presented in this paper, are discussed in relation to different learning situations; as Carter (2004: 210) states, 'Creativity is always contextually framed and conditioned'. Course tutors need time to engage in professional dialogues about creative pedagogy and practice as the definition of creativity adopted will help determine the characteristics to be assessed, and by what means (Treffinger et al., 2002). Inger (1995) points out that 'performance' assessment methods, such as art-based portfolios, are particularly useful in measuring outcomes that are not easy to quantify by traditional methods. However, if these are to be embraced by HE institutions, practitioners need to revisit learning objectives and work together to review the whole assessment process. Rather than just providing evidence for summative assessments, tasks relating to the on-going documentation of the creative process - what Brown (2003) refers to as 'practice-oriented' assessment-should actually count towards the final mark. Although this would have implications for staffing, making a pedagogical decision to involve more people in discussing and assessing students' work would help to address the issue of subjectivity referred to earlier. Orr (2007) makes the point that moderation usually takes place for regulatory purposes and that anonymous marking demonstrates a lack of interest in individual students and their preferred ways of learning. Final grades will not disappear in the foreseeable future but it is important to stress to students that these do not represent a fixed classification of their creative abilities.

### **Conclusion**

This study supports the view that 'innovation in assessment is no longer an option in higher education' (Taras, 2002, 501); in particular, it promotes the use of innovative, creative assessment tasks designed to improve students' learning and engagement. However, as Craft (2001) points out, the relationship between promoting creativity and the bureaucratic arrangements for quality assurance needs to be investigated. As radical changes to current assessment policies and practice would necessitate a complete paradigm shift, the suggestion is to enhance rather than abandon traditional assessment methods. Providing opportunities for colleagues to engage in constructive professional dialogues about

creativity and assessment, and encouraging them to work together to provide meaningful, accessible information about the assessment process, should result in a more positive, consistent approach. Involving students in both the formulation of assessment criteria and the development of on-going formative assessment tasks throughout the course should help to resolve the conflict between creativity and assessment.

As Craddock and Mathias (2009) state, there is a need to develop an evidence base for the impact of different types of assessment methods employed; the next stage of this research will involve interviewing a wider range of former students to find out to what extent the ‘*Creativity and Learning*’ module has impacted on their personal and professional lives. There are plans to build up case studies of individuals’ unique responses to the art-based assessment task which, hopefully, will strengthen educational policies and practices, in relation to creativity assessment, and demonstrate that creative development and high performance are not mutually exclusive.

### Acknowledgements

The author would like to credit Bryony Graham (artist and co-teacher) and Becca Sturgess for co-ordinating the workshops at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts.

### References

- Amabile, T. (1983) *The Social Psychology of Creativity*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Barell, J. (2003) *Developing more Curious Minds*. Alexandria, USA: ASCD.
- Beghetto, R. (2005) Does assessment kill student creativity? *The Educational Forum*, 69, 254-263.
- Biggs, J. (2003) *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.
- Birenbaum, M. and Dochy, F. (ed.) (1996) *Alternatives in Assessment of Achievement, Learning Processes and Prior Knowledge*. Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic.
- Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (1998) Assessment and classroom learning, *Assessment in Education*, 5 (1), 7–74.
- Boud, D. and Falchikov, K. (2006) Aligning assessment with long-term learning, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 10, 225-235.
- Brown, S. (2003) *Assessment that works at work*, The Newsletter for the Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, 11, 6-7.
- Brown, S. (2004) Assessment for learning, *Higher Education*, 1, 81-89.
- Bryan, C. and Klegg, K. (ed.) (2006) *Innovative Assessment in Higher Education*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Byron, K. (2007) *Defining Boundaries for Creativity*. Keynote presentation at the Creativity or Conformity? Building cultures of creativity in higher education conference, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff. 8-10 January.
- Carter, R. (2004) *Language and Creativity: the art of common talk*. London: Routledge.
- Claxton, G. (2000) The anatomy of intuition, in Atkinson, T. and Claxton, G. (ed.) *The Intuitive Practitioner*. Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Cole, D., Sugioka, H. and Yamagata-Lynch, L. (1999) Supportive classroom environments for creativity in higher education, *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 33, 277-293.
- Craddock, D. and Mathias, H. (2009) Assessment options in higher education, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 34 (2), 127-140.
- Craft, A. (2001) *An analysis of research and literature on creativity in education*. Report for Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).
- Craft, A. (2003) The limits to creativity in education: dilemmas for the educator, *British Journal of*

- Educational Studies*, 51 (2), 113-127.
- Craft, A. (2006) Creativity in schools, in Jackson, N., Oliver, M., Shaw, M. and Wisdom, J. (ed.) *Developing Creativity in Higher Education: An imaginative curriculum*. London: Routledge.
- Cropley, A. (2000) *An Analysis of Research and Literature on Creativity in Education*. Report for Qualifications and Curriculum Authority.
- Cross, K. (1996) Improving teaching and learning through classroom assessment and classroom research, in Gibbs, G. (ed.) *Improving Students Learning: Using research to improve students learning*. Oxford: Oxford centre for Staff Development: 3-10.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1999) Implications of a systems perspective for the study of creativity, in Sternberg, R. (ed.), *Handbook of Creativity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cunningham, S. (2005) Creative enterprises, in Hartle, J. (ed.) *Creative industries*. Oxford: Blackwell: 282-298.
- Cunningham, L., O'Reilly, D. and Lester, S. (1999) *Developing the Capable Practitioner*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Dearing, R. (1997) *Higher Education in the Learning Society: Report of the national committee of inquiry into higher education*. London: HMSO.
- Dochy, F., Segers, M. and Sluijsmans, D. (1999) The use of self-, peer and co-assessment in higher education: a review, *Studies in Higher Education*, 24 (3), 331-350.
- Dollinger, S., Dollinger, S. and Centeno, L. (2005). Identity and creativity, *Identity*, 5, 315-339.
- Ecclestone, K. (2001) "I know a 2:1 when I see it": Understanding criteria for degree classification in franchised university programmes, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 25, 301-313.
- Elton, L. (2006) Assessing creativity in an unhelpful climate, *Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education*, 5, 119-30.
- Gardner, H. (1995) Creativity, *RSA Journal*, 143 (5), 33-42.
- Gibbs, G. (2006) How assessment frames student learning, in Bryan, C. and Klegg, K. (ed.) *Innovative Assessment in Higher Education*. London: Routledge. 23-36.
- Gibney, E. (2013) The Student Experience Survey. Available at: [www.timeshighereducation.co.uk](http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk) (Accessed: 13 February 2013).
- Hartley, J. (2004) *Higher Education in the Learning Society: Report of the national committee of inquiry into higher education*. London: HMSO.
- Hattie, J. and Timperley, H. (2007) The power of feedback, *Review of Educational Research*, 77 (1), 81-112.
- Inger, M. (1995) *Alternative Approaches to Outcomes Assessment for Postsecondary Vocational Education*, Available at: [Ncrve.berkeley.edu/CenterFocus](http://Ncrve.berkeley.edu/CenterFocus) (Accessed 30 June 2013).
- Jackson, N. (2006) *Creativity in higher education: creating tipping points for cultural change*. Scholarly Paper 3 – Surrey: Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education, University of Surrey.
- Jeffrey, B. and Woods, P (2003) *The Creative School: A framework for success*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Jacobson, M. and Ruddy, M. (2004) *Open to Outcome: A practical guide for facilitating and teaching experiential reflection*. Oklahoma City, OH: Wood 'N' Bones.
- Kleiman, P. (2005) Beyond the Tingle Factor: creativity and assessment in higher education, the ESRC Creativity Seminar, University of Strathclyde. 7 October.
- Knight, P. (ed.) (1995) *Assessment for Learning in Higher Education*. London: Kogan Page.
- Kvale, S. (1996) *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, Sage.
- Loveless, A. (2002) *Report 4: Literature Review in Creativity, New technologies and learning*. NESTA: Futurelab.
- Maslow, A. (1976) Creativity in self-actualising people, in Rothenburg, A. and Hausman, C. (ed) *The*

- Creativity Question*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- McWilliam, E. (2005) Unlearning pedagogy, *Journal of Learning Design*, 1, 1-11.
- Merricks, L. (2006) Assessment in post-compulsory education, in Jarvis, P. (ed.) *The Theory and Practice of Teaching*. London: Routledge, 191-204.
- Moon, J. (2004) *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning, Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE), (1999) *All our futures: creativity, culture and education*. Suffolk: DfEE.
- O'Donovan, B., Price, M. and Rust, C. (2004) Know what I mean? Enhancing student understanding of assessment standards and criteria, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 9 (3), 325-335.
- Orr, S. (2007) Assessment moderation: constructing the marks and constructing the students, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 32 (6), 1-12.
- Quality Assurance Agency (2003) *Learning from Subject Review 1993-2001: Sharing good practice*. Gloucester: QAA for Higher Education.
- Ramsden, P. (2003) *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Sadler, D. (1989) Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems, *Instructional Science*, 18, 145-165.
- Seltzer, K. and Bentley, T. 1999 *The Creative Age: Knowledge and skills for the new economy*. London: Demos.
- Taras, M. (2002) Using assessment for learning and learning from assessment, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 27 (6), 501-510.
- Torrance, E. (1980) Assessing the further reaches of creative potential, *Journal of Creative Behaviour*, 14 (1), 1-19.
- Treffinger, D., Young, G., Selby, E. and Shepardson, C. (2002) *Assessing Creativity: A guide for educators*. Sarasota, Florida: Center for Creative Learning.
- Watson, J (2012) Comfortably uncomfortable: a study of undergraduate students' responses to working in a creative learning environment, *Learning Landscapes*, 6 (1), 443-461.
- Watson, J. (2013) Creative development or high performance? An alternative approach to assessing creative process and product in higher education, *4<sup>th</sup> Assessment in Higher Education Conference*. Birmingham, 26-27 June.
- Whitehead, J. and McNiff, J. (2006) *Action Research, Living Theory*. London: Sage.