

# **Cultivating Creative Capacity in Communication Studies**

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## **Abstract**

The response by Australian universities to rapid technological change and industry dissatisfaction with graduate competencies has been, at least, to identify transferable skills that support lifelong learning. Creativity is a core competency in higher education policy and curriculum frameworks, but is rarely made explicit at the level of learning outcomes, activities and assessment. In this paper we will draw on revisions to *Bloom's Taxonomy* (1956) to argue that we need to develop the creative capacity of Communication Studies graduates more explicitly. We will focus on explaining the significance of providing an environment that fosters the creative dispositions of graduates in the twenty-first century.

## Introduction

Rapid, ongoing changes to communication technologies and an exponential growth in online data is providing twenty-first century Communication Studies graduates with unprecedented employment opportunities. They will be mobile and will likely freelance, work part-time on contract or be self-employed. Our graduates will be expected to demonstrate highly developed communication skills, adapt to evolving communication technologies and policies and be adept at generating content that uses voice, sound, text and image. They will also need to understand, apply and evaluate areas of knowledge entirely new to them. In other words, because we cannot teach our students what they will need to know, they will need to have developed a highly functioning disposition for learning (McWilliam and Taylor, 2012). This is acknowledged by the university sector. Over a decade ago, it responded to Government and industry dissatisfaction with graduate skills by identifying transferable skills or competencies for lifelong learning (DEST, 2002). However, despite the introduction of graduate attributes, skills or competencies, these are still not evenly understood or embedded within curricula. In this paper, we focus on one graduate competency: creativity. We will argue that cultivating an environment that fosters the creative dispositions of our graduates is central to developing a highly functioning approach to learning. We will draw on Anderson and Krathwohl's *Revised Bloom's Taxonomy* (2001) and Andrew Churches' 'Bloom's Digital Taxonomy' as tools to help teachers embed creativity in a purposive and deliberate way within curriculum.

## Creativity in the Twenty-First Century

Creativity has been the subject of a flurry of global research that highlights its significance as a personal and professional asset that is highly regarded by employers and vital to the fortunes of cities, states and industries (EUA, 2007; Florida, 2005; McWilliam, 2008; Pink, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Landry, 2000). The European University Association report (2007: 6) calls for 'creative, forward-looking individuals and groups who are not afraid to question established ideas and are able to cope with the insecurity and uncertainty this entails'. Policies such as the *Creativity in Higher Education Report on the EUA Creativity Project 2006-2007*, Australia's *Building a Creative Innovation Economy* (2008) and the new national cultural policy *Creative Australia* (2013) wholeheartedly endorse the centrality of creativity to productivity and sustainability in the twenty-first century. The new *Creative Australia* policy, for example, states that it 'is informed by the belief that a creative nation is a productive nation in the fullest sense of the word—empathic, respectful, imaginative, industrious, adaptive, open and successful' (27). This imagining of Australia as a 'creative nation' is new, but not entirely new. Paul Keating's *Creative Nation* (1994) preceded Tony Blair's uptake of 'Cool Britannia' and the Creative Industries Task Force (1997). Keating and Blair's policies emerged in response to a growing awareness of the depletion of natural resources; to economic, social and political changes associated with post-industrialization and to globalization. Where creativity had formerly been associated with the fine arts (painting, architecture, sculpture, music and poetry) and the performing arts (music, dance and drama), industries such as advertising, animation, TV, radio, film, photography, printmaking, installations, design, fashion, digital media, software, video games, toys, publishing and R&D are now also widely accepted as creative.

The Creative Task Force Mapping Document (2001) defines creative industries as those 'which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property'. Colin Leadbeater (2000), John Howkins (2001), John Hartley (2004), Stuart Cunningham (2006) and Terry Flew (2012) also focused attention on the economic significance of creative

industries. However, Richard Florida (2002) notes that the technological, cultural and economic manifestations of creativity also mean that there is now more creative *employment* outside the creative *industries* because it is embedded across many sectors. He identifies the emergence of the *Creative Class* as the most rapidly growing sector in the workforce, with members earning more than those in the service and managerial sectors. This class emerged with a shift to what Pink (2005) has called the ‘Conceptual Age’, powered by scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs and artists who have the ability to solve problems and create new opportunities, ideas and products. With the advent of digital technologies and the emergence of complex social networks, their creative capital has moved from the margins of economic life to the core as a social, political and cultural imperative. Florida (2002, 2005) and Charles Landry (2000) have also led to a rethinking of cities as hubs for developing a more creative economy. Together, this research highlights the significance of creativity as a personal and professional asset that is highly regarded by employers and vital to the fortunes of cities, states and industries; it also highlights an important shift in the way that creativity is understood.

Erica McWilliam (2008: 28) outlines the recent shift in thinking about creativity. Table 1 clarifies the shift from understanding creativity as a mysterious individual process associated with artiness, to understanding it as a collective practice, and ‘a necessity for all’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006: xviii).

Table 1: First and Second Generation Creativity  
(Adapted from McWilliam, 2008: 10).

<b>Creativity</b>	<b>creativity</b>
Luck	Economic imperative
Individual	Collaborative
Spontaneous	Environmental
Outside box	Rules, bounds
Arts based	Crosses disciplines
Natural innate	Learnable
Can't be taught	Teachable
Can't be assessed	Assessable

Historically, creativity has been understood as a process of magical or divine origin, and traces of this remain within contemporary imaginings of the phenomenon as a mysterious process and/or an attribute associated with genius or madness. Attended by the enduringly romantic image of the depressed and lonely artist in the garret, this notion of creativity as an innate individual attribute is fixed, confined to artistic types, and aesthetic judgements and therefore cannot be developed or assessed. However, since Guilford’s Presidential address at the American Psychological Association in 1950 significant research has focused on ways to measure, develop, predict and harness creativity. Psychology remains the leading field, but education, business administration and economics, sciences, engineering, social sciences and humanities have contributed valuable insights, particularly in the past decade (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). Despite the myriad competing research questions that focus on creative individuals, products and processes, this paper will draw on the accepted idea, first used explicitly by Stein in 1953, that creativity is a process that results in a product that is original *and* appropriate or useful. This process also always involves an agent and emerges from a particular social, political and economic milieu. The result is a product, idea, theory or approach that has a new element, property or possibility that interests, excites, provokes and/or perceptually pleases. The idea that creativity offers something surprising or unexpected (Bruner, 1962; Simonton and Damien 2013) also typifies the moment of

illumination when new connections are made and an original idea makes its way into consciousness. This ‘aha’ or ‘eureka’ moment, which is commonly conceptualised by the ‘lightbulb’ metaphor, is an individual experience, yet creativity is a social construction that is determined by internal and external factors: the sum of our experiences and knowledge offers the necessary preparation; however, verification, or what counts as creative, is always determined by time and place. Negus and Pickering (2004) argue that creativity is an inherently social process. Before we explain how to cultivate an environment that fosters the creative dispositions of graduates in the twenty-first century, we will identify the broad characteristics associated with creative people.

In trying to understand the characteristics associated with creative people there is broad agreement about a range of values, beliefs, attitudes and habits of mind common to people whose work is widely acknowledged to be ‘creative’ (see Simonton, 2012; Florida, 2002; Sternberg, 2006; Csikszentmihalyi, 2006). A creative disposition is characterised by a curiosity and openness that tolerates uncertainty and embraces intellectual risk-taking, an intrinsic motivation that provides the drive to focus and persevere, and an agility to move between knowledge systems (McWilliam and Taylor, 2012; Cropley and Cropley, 2009; Pink, 2005). Creative people tend to wonder and to ask questions. This may only be evident in one domain or area of interest, but curiosity is a fundamental disposition that provides the appetite for knowledge that drives the desire to observe, to question and to listen closely (Sawyer, 2007; Schell, 2008). Creative people are also open to new ideas, attitudes and experiences; they are less constrained by established ideas or ways of doing things and more inclined to ask the ‘silly’ questions. They tolerate ambiguity, ambivalence and contradiction and are more likely to seek and offer alternate perspectives. These attitudes, values and habits of mind reflect an independence to question norms and assumptions, at least within their domain of interest, which allows them to take intellectual risks. Tolerating risk requires courage to step out of a comfort zone and is crucially linked to the determination needed to persist in the face of failure and its attendant pressures. Creative people are intrinsically motivated by the joy and satisfaction of solving problems, and have the passion to work hard and persevere in the face of challenges. They experiment with ideas and possibilities and engage in *serious play* (Kane, 2005). Creative people also share a disposition for intense concentration, at least in their area of interest, which Csikszentmihalyi (1975; 1998) has termed ‘flow’. This state signifies a letting go of conscious thought or of what we already know. This is significant because ‘what we already know’ can cause us to make assumptions and leap to conclusions, which reduces our ability to see alternatives and to ask questions. This ‘letting go’ allows for unexpected connections between unrelated ideas and different knowledge systems, and it is this ability to make connections that lies at the heart of creativity.

Employers of university graduates have routinely identified creative capital as the most valuable asset of the twenty-first century (McWilliam, 2008: 46; McWilliam and Dawson, 2008; McWilliam and Hauka, 2008). Our review of Australian universities confirms McWilliam’s (2009) findings, and Jackson et al.’s (2006) findings of curricula in the UK, that creativity is one of the competencies routinely identified as an important graduate attribute and learning outcome. The significance of developing, and intention to develop the creative capacity of graduates is ubiquitous in higher education policy and curriculum frameworks, but little is expressed explicitly at the level of learning, teaching and assessment. As a result, teachers struggle to demonstrate the development of those skills and students are unlikely to be aware of them. Revisions to Bloom’s Taxonomy (1956) provide valuable tools for making creativity explicit at the level of learning, teaching and assessment.

## Higher Order Thinking Skills

Pedagogically, higher education has focused on developing graduates who can demonstrate higher order thinking skills. Bloom's Taxonomy has been the standard reference for classifying the processes of thinking and learning in education for over half a century. Benjamin Bloom edited the handbook, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals* (1956), but it was the result of discussions between educational psychologists who wanted to improve the assessment of learning objectives and curriculum design. They classified learning objectives within three hierarchical domains (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) to provide a more holistic focus, but 'Bloom's taxonomy' refers only to the domain of cognitive processes. It was significantly revised during the 1990s by Lorin Anderson and David Krathwohl, who led cognitive psychologists, curriculum theorists and specialists in educational measurement. Anderson was a student of Bloom while Krathwohl was Bloom's partner on the original Taxonomy. Figure 1 below shows the cognitive processes of Bloom's original taxonomy and the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (2001).

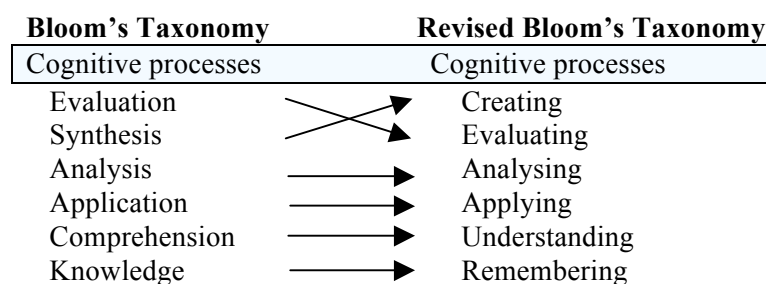


Figure 1: Bloom's Taxonomy and Bloom's Revised Taxonomy.  
(Adapted from Bloom 1956 and Anderson and Krathwohl 2001)

The Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (RBT) made changes to terminology, structure and emphasis to reflect the need for significant changes to curriculum design and the way we assess learning outcomes in the twenty-first century. Figure 1 shows the shift in terminology from using static to active orders of thinking. Most importantly for this paper, the RBT replaces 'synthesis' with 'creating' and puts it as the most complex level of thinking. We would also like to mention that the RBT adds a second dimension: knowledge. Table 2 below shows the visually concise matrix that is intended to help design and align intended learning outcomes, activities and assessment. This matrix clarifies the levels of thinking and types of knowledge that are required for each aspect of the revised taxonomy.

Table 2: The Knowledge and Cognitive Domains from Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. (See Krathwohl, 2002: 216).

Knowledge Domain	Cognitive Domain					
	Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyse	Evaluate	Create
Factual Knowledge						
Conceptual Knowledge						
Procedural Knowledge						
Metacognitive Knowledge						

A valuable extension to the RBT has been 'Bloom's Digital Taxonomy' (Churches, 2007). It takes account of the shift to digital technologies and collaborative online practices to map a

digital dimension onto the RBT. Churches' intention is to make the RBT practically relevant for the twenty-first century classroom practitioner (2007: 2). For example, Churches extends the RBT's domain of 'creating' (designing, constructing, planning, producing, inventing, devising, making) to add four new digital categories: programming; filming / animating / videocasting / podcasting / mixing and remixing; directing and producing; publishing (2007: 32). This is particularly relevant for Communication Studies students who need conceptual, procedural and metacognitive levels of knowledge to understand, apply, evaluate and create new products. The RBT and Bloom's Digital Taxonomy are valuable tools for making creativity explicit at the level of learning, teaching and assessment. This is highly relevant to curriculum development in Communication Studies, which has always drawn on a range of disciplines. Now, more than ever, our graduates are required to demonstrate a disciplinary agility that is a core characteristic of creative people. Our students need to acquire a depth and breadth of knowledge and skills and to understand the interconnected nature of knowledge and knowledge systems. Developing communication graduates who are independent and have a disposition for life-long learning therefore involves developing the highest order thinking skills. However, this requires an environment that fosters the creative disposition of Communication Studies graduates.

### **An Environment for Fostering a Creative Disposition**

Cultivating an environment that fosters creative capacity is about valuing and providing opportunities for students to take intellectual risks, to work collaboratively and to self-manage their learning. Communication Studies graduates will need the agility to move between knowledge systems, and they will need to be able to make connections by selecting and combining existing ideas and skills in new ways. The classroom offers a unique opportunity for students to share ideas and seek feedback from peers. We can encourage students to make connections that build information and gather knowledge to foster a creative environment (Rhodes, 1961; Schaper and Volery, 2011; Sawyer, 2007). Siemens (2005) advocates applying this 'connectivist' approach to learning because knowledge is now generated through network thinking. A connectivist approach therefore encourages individuals to make connections by gathering and building knowledge, but it also acknowledges the significance and central importance of pooling specialist knowledges with other people. In other words, this type of approach helps to cultivate an environment that generates a depth and breadth of ideas. Csikszentmihalyi's (1999) insistence that community, rather than the individual, is the key to fostering creativity also suggests that, in a learning environment, we need to value collaborative teamwork in our learning objectives, activities and assessments. Developing creative capacities therefore involves providing an environment that values teamwork, collaboration and connectivity.

When making connections between knowledge systems, students also need to be intellectual risk-takers. This is difficult to achieve in a system that is regulated by performance goals (the university) and emphasises standard outcomes of its graduates. The focus on student performance goals therefore encourages students to avoid error or failure. However, taking risks and experiencing the implications of mistakes is essential to developing a creative disposition or, as Baillie argues, 'avoiding risk-taking is one of the biggest barriers to creative thinking' (2010: 12). To develop a healthy learning disposition, Carol Dweck (1999) argues that our assessments need to indicate that learning through error is more important than quick solutions. Learning outcomes, activities and assessments that give more weight to processes than solutions therefore avoid encouraging students to leap to conclusions. Griffith University's 'Creativity and Innovation Toolkit' (2004) is a useful teaching resource that also

highlights the significance of fostering a safe learning environment for risk-taking. It provides the following key actions that we can all practice in the classroom: ‘raising students’ awareness of their own and others’ creative processes, preparing them for the possibility of failure, providing clear guidelines about giving and receiving feedback, giving students plenty of practice in presenting and defending their work [and] recognising and rewarding risk-taking’ (29). As teachers we can provide explicit learning goals that students can own and we can help them to find strategies to tolerate errors so that they are willing to find ways to achieve their learning goals.

Finally, to help Communications Studies students embrace their curiosity and take intellectual risks we need to provide an environment that encourages trust, openness, flexibility and imagination. Providing opportunities to experiment with ideas and possibilities reconfigures the importance of mistake-making and empowers students to take control and to self-manage their learning. Kane (2005) first used the phrase *serious play* to describe this strategy. He argues that ‘play will be to the 21<sup>st</sup> century what work was to three hundred years of industrial society – our dominant way of knowing, doing and creating value’ (ix). McWilliam (2008: 88) uses the phrase *meddlers in the middle* to describe the active intervention of teachers who are ‘mutually involved in assembling and disassembling cultural products...making mistakes alongside students’. Together, these strategies can minimise student anxiety and fear of failure, which is the most significant block to creativity. On the other hand, since creative people wonder and ask questions, providing opportunities that allow students to remain in a state of ‘not knowing’ offers a tension that is conducive to creative solutions. Such an environment allows students to engage in learning with enthusiasm and passion and to develop the range and depth of skills required of graduates.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that we need to develop the creative capacity of twenty-first century Communication Studies graduates more explicitly. We have argued the need to shift creative thinking from the margins to the core of learning outcomes, activities and assessment. We have demonstrated that creativity is central to the needs of our graduates and that we need to develop their creativity. We drew on the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy and Bloom’s Digital Taxonomy as tools to help teachers foreground the development of creative capacities. We explained the significance of providing an environment to foster the set of dispositions central to the development of creative capacity. Such an environment is connectivist, would raise students’ awareness of creative processes, prepare them for failure, encourage them to focus on explicit learning goals, find strategies to tolerate uncertainty, risk failure and learn through experimental play. Finally, we argued that this environment develops the following creative dispositions: intellectual risk-taking, a tolerance for uncertainty and an agility with which to move between knowledge systems, connections between existing ideas and skills.

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