

# **Some notions of artistic creativity amongst history of art students acquired through incidental learning**

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## **Abstract**

*In the West, creativity may be admired and valued but what it means can be elusive. Rather than being the subject of discussion in the classroom, meaning generally develops incidentally. We elicited twenty, final year history of art students' beliefs about artistic creativity in England using a questionnaire and interviews. The responses provided qualitative and quantitative data about these students' notions of artistic creativity. Beliefs and clusters of beliefs were identified. Together, these were similar to those of Western artists and art academics but clusters of beliefs showed there were also narrow and deficient notions regarding the product, process and locus of creativity. Teachers in Higher Education should be aware that students' responses may give the impression that their beliefs about art are sound when, in reality, they are unsound or narrow. This could have implications for employment, especially in a widening global economy.*

## **Introduction**

In the West, art education has been justified on various grounds over the last one hundred years. The experience of creativity it can offer has been one of them, although not always the main one and not always meaning quite the same at all times (Lanier, 1975; Fleming, 2008). A study of nineteen countries' aims of art education, including those of Europe, Asia, the Americas, and Africa, has shown that governments increasingly see value in creativity (Sharp and Le Métais, 2000) and UNESCO (2006) argues that it provides an opportunity to develop each person's creative potential and cultivate a sense of creativity and a fertile imagination. The value of these is in their ability to empower that person by enabling an informed participation in cultural and artistic activities (Eisner, 1965, 2002; Lanier, 1975; Shillito *et al.* 2008). The opportunity art offers to explore possibilities, exercise imagination and self-expression and resist cultural homogeneity can also be seen as fostering democratic behaviours (Siegesmund, 1998), at least as this is defined in the West.

Creativity is also seen as 'the ultimate economic resource' (Pink, 2005) and as 'creative capital' with the potential to enhance economic competitiveness globally (Sharp and Le Métais, 2000). While creativity has more than instrumental value and the arts are about more than creativity (Fleming, 2008) those who show themselves to be artistically creative and those who can recognise it could have significant opportunities in the so-called creative industries (e.g. Collins, 2010). Some would go as far as to say creativity is an essential life skill (Craft, 1999; Shaheen, 2010). That most people have the potential to be creative, regardless of location, is attractive to those who think in terms of global economies (Ward, 2011). Culture, however, determines the value placed on creativity and the socialisation processes which shape its expression. Niu (2009), for instance, contrasts the West's emphasis on individual attributes and East's attraction to collective influences, Sofowara (2007) points to some African cultures' expectation of passivity and knowledge absorption in the classroom, severely limiting opportunities for more open-ended kinds of learning, and

Al-Karasneh and Saleh (2010) describe creativity in an Islamic context as a spiritual goal, rather than a material one. On this basis, UNESCO's view of creativity is a Western one and could give the impression that other views are somehow deficient when the value, purpose and expression of creativity are different (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2006). From a Western perspective, then, UNESCO (2006) has highlighted the need to explore the links between art education and creativity and it is from this viewpoint that this study was made.

Allowing that art education is, in part, to empower people through their experience of artistic creativity, what it does for their notions of artistic creativity matters. However, probably few students of art develop a conception of creativity through direct instruction but build it incidentally as a by-product of whatever engagement they have with it. Many students, particularly in higher education, follow courses which study artistic products without engaging in the practice of art. The qualities of such students' notions of artistic creativity can be important. Their teachers may assume that they all have the same conceptions and that these are acceptable, or that acceptable beliefs develop along the way, without the need to address them directly. Later, these students may take their conceptions to careers which involve working with creative people or helping those who would be creative. Learning something about the notions of such students is potentially of value to the teacher, to the students and to learning about art: this is the object of the study.

#### *Artistic creativity*

Carruthers (2002: 226) has described the ability to create as 'one of the most striking features of the human species', becoming evident in a creative explosion some 40,000 years ago in, for instance, the production of art, ornament and decoration. Today, creativity has been described as 'the wellspring of human adaptability and social development' and the *raison d'être* of art and design in education (Dineen and Collins, 2005: 44). However, Picasso is reported to have said that he did not know what creativity is (Swanger, 1990) and, for Cézanne, art was simply work, and hard work at that (Osborne, 2003). Nevertheless, there is a consensus that, while artistic creativity may be somewhat elusive, it is neither a mystical nor an ineffable event of undirected spontaneity (Wright, 1990; Osborne, 2003). Instead, it comprises learned and practised activities that are directed towards purposeful, expressive ends, often involving 'a slow groping for a way to articulate something' (Wright, 1990; Claxton, 2006), a view which readily captures Cézanne's comment about hard work. This hard work, however, does call for imagination (Gaut and Livingston, 2003) and Carruthers (2002: 226) has pointed out that 'anyone who is imagining how things could be other than they are will be thinking creatively.' Imagination enables the generation of something original and worthwhile (Dineen and Collins, 2005). Here, originality implies the deliberate manipulation and integration of materials until they capture what is to be expressed (Eisner, 1993; Seefeldt, 1995; Wolcott, 1996) and, hence, creativity involves choice and decisions, both on a micro and macro scale and not necessarily or entirely conscious or without constraint (Sternberg, 2006; Elster, 1993). Matisse, for instance, appeared to paint in a fast, continuous flow. Film taken of his painting and run in slow motion, showed him to hesitate before each brush stroke. Each hesitation was when various possibilities were considered and a decision taken, more or less unconsciously (Merleau-Ponty 1964). From this point of view, originality is less a property of the artistic product and more one of the process (Hardy 2006). Hence, while the style of a product may not be new, the acts which produced it

may have involved imagination, search, experimentation and selection (Elster 1993; Sennett, 2008). In this way, the process is purposeful, often slow, potentially difficult and, given the limitations of imagination and skill, uncertain. It is not a blind following of rules or a direct replication of what already exists (Eisner, 1965; Best, 1982). At the same time, it is not a case of anything new goes (Humphreys, 2006); there has to be what Siegesmund (1998) has called a 'rightness of fit' and Csikszentmihalyi (1996) 'appropriateness'. When something has this rightness of fit, it is a surrogate for experience with the potential to communicate ideas, feelings and emotions perceived to be of value (Langer, 1976; Seefeldt, 1995). Creativity is not, of course, confined to the artist but extends to viewers who must construct personal meaning or significance from what they see in a work of art (Hirsch, 1967; Thomas, 1991).

#### *Some beliefs about artistic creativity*

Although Renaissance artists such as Raphael, da Vinci and Michelangelo were understood to have a sense of their independence and as realising visions rather than imitating nature, in general, only poets were described as creative before the nineteenth century: artists were popularly believed to copy or mimic the world. A potential for creativity was allowed them during that century and, later, the 'creative arts' more broadly. Now, most areas of human endeavour are recognised as offering opportunities for creative activity of various kinds (Tatarkiewicz, 1980; Euster, 1987) but, popularly, creativity is often still largely associated with the arts (Claxton *et al.*, 2006; Prentice, 2000). At the same time, being creative may also be seen by some as skilled but reproductive manufacture, an everyday connotation of the term (Newton and Newton, 2010).

In the USA, Stricker (2008) collected beliefs of art teachers about artistic products. Broadly speaking, they believed a product demonstrated creativity if it was at least a little novel, broke with tradition to some extent, combined elements in unusual ways or commanded attention. Craft skills mattered but were not seen as being a *sine qua non*. That there could be a social element in which something is considered to be creative when others judge it to be so (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) was not seen as relevant. Beattie (2000) also described some popular beliefs about creative products in art in the USA: they are those which are new, unusual and appropriate and reflect a personal, original approach. Glück *et al.* (2002), working in Austria, successfully contrasted notions of creativity held by professional artists and architects. Drawing on work by O'Quin and Besemer (1989), they constructed a Definitions of Creativity Questionnaire which asked their respondents to rate the importance of various potential attributes of the creative work of art. As a consequence, they were able to contrast the relative emphasis artists and architects placed on 'Originality', 'Function' and 'Impression'. It is difficult to find labels which suit a wide variety of contexts but in the context of art, these labels could be said to describe non-mimetic activity, a rightness-of-fit with aims, and, how a piece of art is perceived, respectively. The artists in Glück *et al.*'s study considered the importance of Originality and Impression to be roughly the same while that of Function was slightly less important than the others. Popularly, creative processes are seen as any innovative or effective, surprising techniques or procedures which forever change the way at least some art is made, conceived or reflected upon critically, historically or philosophically and which may or may not result in a novel product (Beattie, 2000). The final form of the

product, however, need not be fully developed in the artist's mind before the work begins.

Creativity has been seen somewhat romantically as the possession of an exceptional, inspired, even heroic, gifted few and has acquired the status of a virtue or moral imperative (Osborne, 2003). In recent years, there has been some demythologising of the notion of creativity but it may still be coloured by such views (Boden, 2004). Beattie (2000) has described some generally accepted beliefs about creative artists. For instance, traits of creativity popularly include: an ability to transform things, curiosity, flexibility, fluency, originality, preference for novelty, tolerance of ambiguity, intuitiveness, complexity, perceptual alertness, observation, keen awareness of senses, ability to abstract and move from wholes to parts and a spirit of adventure or risk taking. Glück *et al.* (2002) found that artists believed creative people to be imaginative, talented, risk takers, unconventional, intellectual and hard workers. Stricker (2008) could add that artists' work was considered to be solitary, inhibited by competition and encouraged by following personal interests. While some may be born with the potential for artistic creativity, this innate ability may benefit from experience, practice and instruction (Craft, 2002; Stricker, 2008).

Many of these notions bear some resemblance to those of experts in the field, described earlier, but that could be expected given that they are largely the beliefs of artists and art teachers engaged directly in the practice of art. What of those who study art but do not practise it? Do they have a sense of artistic creativity?

### **Aim**

This study aimed to collect some final year art history students' notions of artistic creativity and compare them with those described above to form a view of the students' sense of artistic creativity.

### **Method**

#### *Data collection*

Following the approach of Glück *et al.* (2002), we constructed a questionnaire which began with a general question asking, 'Where is the creativity in Art?' and provided space for an extended response, followed by a question about the extent to which artistic creativity was considered to be 'something you are born with'. Subsequent questions focused in turn on the attributes of creative artistic products, processes, artists and art viewers. For the creative product, students were asked to rate the importance of various attributes on a seven point scale ranging from not important to very important. According to Glück *et al.*, the attributes *original*, *radical*, *surprising* and *unusual* relate to Originality; *useful*, *fulfils its purpose*, *functional* and *well-crafted* relate to Function; *elegant*, *logical* and *understandable* relate to Impression. To each category, we added a possible synonym to extend the list (*novel*, *appropriate* and *attractive*, respectively). For the creative process, we asked students to rate similarly the terms: *intention*, *novelty*, *appropriateness*, *elegance*, *honesty*, *wisdom*, *craft skills*, *aesthetic value* and *unusual*. For the creative artist, they rated: *assertive*, *self-confident*, *decisive*, *self-controlled*, *intelligent*, *knowledgeable*, *has taste*, *inventive*, *imaginative*, *tolerant of frustration*, *diligent*, *love of one's work*, *talented*, *unconventional* and *takes risks*, all drawn from Glück *et al.* (2002). As potential descriptors of artistic creativity on the part of the viewer of art, the students rated: *intention*, *novelty*, *appropriateness*, *elegance*, *honesty*, *wisdom*, and *aesthetic value*.

Some descriptors have more relevance to art than others but including all gave students the opportunity to choose those they prefer.

We also had follow-up interviews with a random sample of students. These lasted up to about 30 minutes each. These were structured by the students' responses to the questionnaire and explored those in more depth. For instance, the interviewer (one of the authors) might ask, 'I see you rated "useful" as not important for a work of art. Why do you think that?' Sometimes, contra-instances were used to stimulate further discussion in a devil's advocate approach.

### *The students*

The questionnaire was issued to 45 final, third-year students who had taken history of art modules in each year of their undergraduate studies at Durham University in England. In the final year, one of these modules involves the writing of a dissertation of 15,000 words on an art history topic. Students who take this module are generally those who have taken the maximum number of two art modules each year. The history of art modules these students had followed provided an introductory overview in the first year then focused on Western art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, each module lasting 20 weeks. They included lectures, seminars, essay writing and a written examination.

Twenty such students responded to the questionnaire, even though they were in the midst of dissertation writing and were about to begin their final examinations. Of these, six were interviewed. Those interviewed were representative of the students who completed the questionnaire in that they spanned the attainment range, confirmed later by examination results. We saw no other significant differences between those who did and those who did not respond to the questionnaire. All except one student were educated in England where students in schools follow a National Curriculum regardless of location. As England is small, travel between town and country for school, work and entertainment is common and young people's cultural opportunities tend to be similar. One student, however, had some early education in Hong Kong. Performance in final school examinations can enable entry to a university to study for a first degree. Durham University demands very high grades for entry so these students could be described as academically very able. In common with similar art courses in the UK, most students (18) in the sample were female.

### *Data analysis*

The questionnaire offered both qualitative and quantitative data. This was supplemented by responses in the interviews. The scores on the rating scales provided some descriptive statistics and enabled clusters or groups of students who had endorsed the rating scales in similar ways to be identified. (The groups were suggested by the cluster analysis software of Minitab® (Minitab, 1994) then inspected for coherence and meaning. Although the process could be done manually, this approach was effective and economical with time.)

## **Results**

The findings from the questionnaire and interviews are presented together as the interviews enabled us to check our interpretation of the questionnaire responses and add to them. Broadly speaking, the responses indicated beliefs about the artist and creativity in art as described above. This gave at least some confidence that students'

responses were relevant. We begin with these beliefs and also consider them in more detail.

### **Collective notions of artistic creativity**

#### *Where is the creativity in Art?*

Eleven responses to the question pointed directly to the opportunity art provides for originality and using the imagination. For example, one student wrote, 'Using one's creative and imaginative faculty to make something new.' Another wrote that art is the formation of 'something totally new that has never been created before.' Five clearly recognised that creativity could be in the process. For instance, one wrote that creativity was in art's 'originality, not necessarily of thought, but of process and production.' One pointed to the freedom s/he perceived there to be in art because there are 'no right or wrong' answers. In short, the majority identified originality as important and several were explicit about tying it to the process. None mentioned 'rightness-of-fit' directly but, of course, absence in response does not necessarily imply absence in thought. For instance, one believed that artistic creativity 'requires a certain amount of discipline' to achieve the desired ends. Subsequent questions, however, addressed this more directly.

#### *Some attributes of the creative work of art*

Scored of some importance (average scores for the group) were *unusual* (2.7), *surprising* (2.4) and *novel* (3.0), terms associated with Originality. Similarly, *fulfils purpose* (2.5), *purposeful* (2.3) and *well-crafted* (3.1) were seen as of some importance. Glück *et al.* associate these with the category they called Function. The term *understandable* (2.5), associated with Impression, was similarly seen by these students to be of some importance. This pattern of response is like that of the practising Austrian artists and is unlike that of the architects who placed more emphasis on Function (essentially, practical function for them). Here, the term, *functional* received an average score of only 0.9. The terms *elegant* and *attractive* were also seen as relatively unimportant (1.0, 1.5 and 0.9, on average). As these students had studied art which was often not conventionally attractive, this response is not unreasonable.

Comments in interviews confirmed that evidence of creativity in products was predominantly related to the imaginative expression of an idea, executed with some skill. For example, one student said that s/he liked to see:

'things expressed in a different ways, in an aesthetic and intellectual way that is different from the words I use everyday in speech and see in my reading . . . a refreshing perspective where sophistication in the use of the material, the medium, or the technique is evident.'

#### *Some attributes of the creative artistic process*

The questionnaire offered students terms relating to requirements of the process of artistic creativity. For instance, *intention* was rated at 4.1, important, on average. In other words, the creative process was not generally seen as depending on accident or chance. Two students indicated that this intention is the driving force behind the deliberate manipulation and integration of materials to achieve particular ends. For example, one said it stimulated, 'the bringing together of components' to produce the artist's desired ends. Originality in the process, as indicated by average responses to

*novelty* (3.0) and *unusual* (2.7), was believed to be fairly important. If *craft skills* are associated with achieving Function, it was also seen as fairly important, scoring 3.5, on average. This seems reasonable if *craft skills* were interpreted in this context to be what enables the artist to realise desired ends or 'rightness-of-fit'. One student explained that craft skills are important but not for achieving 'realism' or mimicry but for producing an effective composition which makes the viewer think. Regarding Impression, the students felt the process involved a consideration of *aesthetics* to some extent (3.2, on average) but not a striving for *elegance* (1.4, on average), presumably because, in their experience, art does not have to be pleasing to the eye. It was generally felt that the process called for *honesty* and, to a lesser extent, *wisdom* (3.8 and 2.7, on average, respectively). One student, for instance, felt that artists had to be 'true to themselves'.

#### *Some attributes of the creative artist*

Traits of the creative artists seen as most important were *talented*, *inventive* and *imaginative* (4.1, 4.8 and 5.6, on average, respectively). But it takes more to realise that potential and *takes risks* was also considered to be fairly important (4.8, on average). An earlier question was essentially about nature versus nurture in relation to the possession of artistic creativity. There, the responses suggested that most students believed that while innate ability was a significant determinant of artistic creativity, it could be nurtured. In the interviews, students said that artists are born with a more or less creative and imaginative 'faculty' which can be trained to an excellent level if 'encouraged and inspired'. Although not unimportant, *has taste*, *decisive* and *unconventional* were generally considered to be the least important of the traits offered (scoring 2.3, 2.7 and 2.7, on average, respectively).

#### *Some attributes of the creative viewer*

Viewers of art were generally believed to need at least some sensitivity to the creative artist's *intention* (2.8), the presence of *novelty* (2.8), the *unusual* (3.0) and *craftsmanship* (3.4). *Honesty* (3.8), *wisdom* (3.1) and an *aesthetic* sense (3.3) were also believed to be relevant traits. There were indications that at least some saw that viewers of art needed to be creative themselves. In particular, viewing art was seen as an active process of 'interpretation of [the artist's] work', an ability which is open to development. A student summed this up for us:

'I think from the artist's perspective it's much more about the creative aspects of it, you know the making of it, the actual artistic input into the thing itself whereas from the observer's perspective it's a different thing that's required, it's more of an artistic understanding than perhaps an artistic ability, different things that are required, but I think both require artistic empathy if you like, some sort of a connection is required on both sides.'

Another expressed the view that, 'creativity in art is partly in the artist and partly in the imagination of the audience that interprets it'. Not everyone, however, responded in this way. Indeed, three students were puzzled by linking the viewer and creativity and requested clarification about how creativity could be attributed to such a person, even though they had been that person throughout the course.

Taken together, this suggests that these students believe artistic creativity lies more in the process than the product and involves intention, originality and some concern for the impression of the product. Function is generally of lesser importance. This pattern is similar to the beliefs of artists described by Glück *et al.* (2002.) and, in its inclination towards process, tends to be nearer the views of authorities on the subject than the popular beliefs described by Beattie (2000). The students also believe that creativity is largely innate but can be developed and, to some extent, calls for the taking of risks. While some recognised that the interpretation of art was itself a creative act, this was not something which was foremost in the beliefs of others. An account of collective tendencies, however, can conceal significant differences: beliefs may not simply vary around a common theme. In reality, an account based on averages may describe no-one. This is explored next.

### **Clusters of like-minded students**

The above account could give the impression that the students' beliefs were simple variations of the general theme. A cluster analysis of the responses, however, showed this to be untrue. It identified groups of students who saw the relative importance of Originality, Function and Impression very differently. The subgroups are now listed with some brief comments. Terms seen as the most important are included in brackets.

#### *1. Notions of the creative artistic product*

Three clusters were evident:

- Group 1.1 (9 students) scored terms associated with Originality (i.e. *unusual, surprising, novel*), Function (*fulfils its purpose*) and Impression (*understandable*) as important.
- Group 1.2 (4 students) scored Originality (*unusual, surprising, novel*) and Function (*well-crafted*) as important. The other terms were seen as of minor or no importance.
- Group 1.3 (7 students) scored only Function (*well-crafted*) as important.

The broad, more or less balanced notion of the first subgroup is similar to that described by, for example, Dineen and Collins (2005) and by the artists of Glück *et al.* (2002) and the art teachers of Stricker (2008). The students' course work was largely about modern art. One explained that art has 'an intention, a meaning and a message', another felt that 'its purpose is to help educate others' and a third thought that it was 'to make you think', all notions which explain the attraction of *understandable*. Originality could lie in, for instance, the 'surprising perspective' that such a work offered. Common to all subgroups was the importance of Function. A well-crafted product, particularly valued by the second and third subgroups was more likely to make you think. It was not necessarily one which produced aesthetic satisfaction in the viewer, something which was generally not seen as of great importance. Effectiveness in stimulating a productive response was more important, something which, as one student pointed out, came largely from the composition and representation of the content. In the first, broad notion subgroup, a product needed to be well-enough crafted to achieve its ends while, in the others, it was a high level of craft skills is what achieved those ends.

#### *2. Notions of the creative artistic process*

Four clusters were identified:

- Group 2.1 (12) scored terms associated with Originality (*novelty*), Function (i.e. *craftsmanship*) and Impression (*honesty*) as important. This, the largest of the subgroups,
- Group 2.2 (5) scored only terms associated with Function (*appropriate, craftsmanship*) and Impression (*aesthetic*) as important.
- Group 2.3 (1) scored only terms associated with Function (*craftsmanship*) as important.
- Group 2.4 (2) scored no terms associated with the above attributes as being particularly important.

In addition, all subgroups rated *intention* as important. A belief that the process has direction is interesting as Craft (2002) has described a popular tendency to see it as undirected, aimed simply at producing something novel without regard for rightness-of-fit. This was not evident here. Similarly, craft skills were at least fairly important for most of the students and were tied to achieving intentions. One said that it was ‘the artist’s skill in depicting the meaning, in making the painting accessible to the viewer’ which was important’.

‘the thinking process is important, so as to make something that is creative also impactful, moving. I think it is really the effort that moves me, which makes ‘well-craftedness’ important. I think to make something that is well-crafted requires intellectual thinking.’

Aesthetic for some meant this ability to ‘move the viewer’, something which could be enhanced by what one called ‘originality in production’. Another believed that the thought underpinning the production, however, had to be ‘sincere’, that is *honest*..

The final subgroup, however, should not be overlooked as it represented one in ten of the students who, here, seemed to find none of the terms offered of relevance for the artistic process.

### 3. *Notions of the creative artist*

Two clusters were evident:

- Group 3.1 (12) tended to score everything highly. The value of *self-confidence* was often linked with *inventiveness* and a capacity for *risk-taking*.
- Group 3.2 (8) were more selective and tended to focus on *inventive, imaginative, diligent* and *takes risks* highly while rejecting *self-confident, self-controlled* and *has taste*.

That the largest subgroup should see all attributes as associated with the creative artist is, perhaps, unsurprising; the list included popular descriptors of creative people which, even when stereotypical, might contain an element of truth. For instance, one student said:

‘I think you have to have a confidence in your ability if you approach subjects, go against what is normative, so an ability to think that you are able to say something from another standpoint, it’s quite important to be able to separate yourself from other things, be decisive, different, or confident in a sense.’

What seemed to be forefront in the minds of the students in the other subgroup was the need to be *imaginative*, the ability to consider ways in which something might be other than it is, particularly when, as several students indicated, they conveyed ‘an idea or concept in a light I have never seen before’. At least one student considered *self-confidence* not to be necessary for imagination:

‘I don’t think that you have to be assertive or self-confident, you could be not self-confident and still be creative, I didn’t see how these things could be related to what I find creative ... I guess its because I have such a narrow definition of what would be creative.’

Like *self-confidence*, however, diligence and risk-taking, were often considered to be attributes of the creative artist. As Colvin (2008) points out, it takes more than talent to realise potential.

#### *4. Notions of the viewer*

Responses regarding attributes of the viewer varied widely and no distinct clusters were noted other than one of three students who found it difficult to see that a viewer is creative, noted earlier, and another for the other students who felt more comfortable with the notion.

We noted no clear differences between the students which might explain the different clusters of notions. Nor could we comment reliably on differences in the responses of male and female students as the former were so few in number. The student with some early Hong Kong education responded to the questionnaire like those in the majority clusters described above.

### **Discussion**

Taken together, these students’ beliefs about artistic creativity parallel several of the notions of artistic creativity found in Austria and the USA. For instance, there was a general belief in creativity being purposeful (cf Eisner, 1965; Best, 1982) and more in the process than the product (cf Hardy, 2006). Originality, Function and Impression were believed by many to matter in much the same way as artists and art teachers in Austria, (cf Glück *et al.*, 2002). Artists were often seen as talented, unconventional, hard-working risk-takers (cf Beattie, 2000; Glück *et al.*, 2002). Artistic talent, although it could be innate to some extent, was believed to be open to development (cf Stricker, 2008). These students’ beliefs also showed signs of being shaped by their experience of modern art. In relating to a product, for instance, they generally sought to construct meaning, to find ‘encoded meaning’, to see things in a new way and to learn something new. The artist’s craftsmanship was seen as supporting that process but was not tied to replicating aspects of the visible world or to producing comfortable responses in the viewer. Nor was it always a *sine qua non* (cf Stricker, 2008). These students could be said to have, collectively, some sense of Western artistic creativity insofar as the views of experts and practising artists reflect such a sense. Accordingly, the group as a whole could be said to be ready to participate in an informed way in art-related activities.

A collective account, however, can conceal subgroups with diverse notions of artistic creativity. While some of these students clearly had views which related well to those

of experts and artists, some also had simple misconceptions, as with those who found it difficult to see how a viewer is creative (cf Hirsch, 1967; Thomas, 1991). Others were probably more complex, as with those who showed no signs of seeing importance in Function in the product (cf Siegesmund, 1998). More puzzling are those who saw no importance in Originality in the process (cf Glück *et al.*, 2002) although all indicated a belief that artists are imaginative and inventive. All that concerned them were craft skills used to achieve some desired end. Either they have different notions or the words have different connotations for them or their notions were less accessible than those of others. Teachers need to be aware of this: directing their attention at what seems to be a general tendency may be less productive than eliciting and exploring the diverse conceptions held by their students and the nuances of meaning they give to the words we use. It is possible that a sense of artistic creativity may not be as widespread in a class or as shared as might be assumed from collective responses.

Do such notions matter? As instrumental knowledge, it probably matters more for some than for others. Unsurprisingly, these students were interested in a variety of careers, including teaching, advertising, publishing and the performing arts, all based in the West. In teaching in UK schools, for instance, they would be expected to foster creativity in Art (and across the curriculum generally) (DfES, 2003; Newton, 2005; QCA, 2005). But what one teacher sees as central to that experience could easily be different from what another would emphasise. Also, at a time of increased world-wide migration and movement of people, there could be significant differences in beliefs between what the teacher values and what the parents of the children value. Such differences may not be considered in teacher training (Newton, 2011). Looking at other kinds of employment, such as in advertising and publishing, some employees could be expected to recognise creativity in the products of others. Again, incidental learning may have produced some with only a partial sense of artistic creativity, at least at the conscious level. Where concern is with success in a global economy, all these views may be overly narrow. Globalisation calls for a new way of thinking about creativity and art education. Widening students' learning to include an understanding of artistic creativity in other societies could complement and enrich notions of creativity and creative behaviours in West. It is, however, important to avoid implanting simplistic cultural stereotypes and over-generalisations - there are variations within cultures as well as between them (Radclyffe-Thomas, 2011).

From a less instrumental point of view, art education could facilitate a creative spark between students and the art products they study, enabling them to activate it and access its potency. Narrow notions, however, could result in narrow or unsuccessful interpretations. Students may, for instance, dismiss a product because it appears unskilled or value it simply because it is novel. At the same time, a failure to see that understanding is not transmitted from a product to a viewer but is constructed by the viewer could lead to a failure to recognise the potential validity of diverse interpretations. Indeed, notions of artistic creativity may support a liberal education by enabling someone to see value in, appreciate and, at times, be enlightened by a piece of work while not expecting everyone to see the same value in it.

The study focused on attributes of artistic creativity. Few studies could claim to plumb the depths of people's beliefs: we can never be sure what has been left unsaid. These students' responses pointed to those we have described but their responses may

simply be what were foremost in their minds at the time. Perhaps further probing may have revealed more but there is always the risk that probing itself generates beliefs not previously held. There are also other aspects of creativity, such as its social value, desirability and expression, where differences between students might have been observed. The beliefs described here are those of a particular group of students after a particular Western university's art course. Although these students had surveyed developments from Ancient Greek to contemporary art, the focus of the course was on the development of Western Modernism. It could be that such a course tends to emphasise novelty in artistic products and a feeling of awe rather than a wider reflection on the creative process and product. A further point is that these students had no recent direct experience of art production. Such experience could affect beliefs. Art also covers a wide range of activities and beliefs may vary from one kind of activity to another. And, of course, the experience which generated the beliefs described here cannot be said with certainty to have come from the course alone or even at all. All that is certain is that these notions are what this group of able students had at the end of their course. Their responses, however, often referred to the art products studied so it seems likely that the course provided at least some of that experience. Variation in beliefs may, therefore, stem from diversity in how that experience was processed but also in the quality and quantity of these students' informal experience of the arts through, for example, the media and the internet. Art teachers in Higher Education and elsewhere may find various diverse beliefs amongst their students and relate them usefully to what was found here (for the useful concept of relatability, see Bassey, 2001).

### **Conclusion**

We acquire a lot of knowledge through incidental learning, much of which may not reach the level of consciousness. Nevertheless, this knowledge can shape thought and action, albeit indirectly and sometimes unconsciously. These students, after studying the history of Western modern art, were found collectively to have notions of artistic creativity which were much like those who had both practised and taught art in the West. To this extent, they could be said to have a sense of artistic creativity like those of practising artists. Nevertheless, notions of artistic creativity were not simply dispersed around a mean but showed signs of being diverse and complex. Sub-groups of students held different notions, broad and narrow yet probably coherent in themselves for those who held them. One implication is that teachers of art should not assume general tendencies in a class but should elicit whatever sub-groups of beliefs are present and give attention to each, taking care to explore nuances of meaning. Another implication is that having followed an art course is not a guarantee that particular students will have acquired beliefs about creativity which are appropriate for application in the so-called creative industries or in teaching. At the more general level of the global economy, incidental learning may not be sufficient to prepare students in a given culture for conceptions of fundamental terms like creativity as they are found in other cultures. Art educators may wish to address such conceptions directly.

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