

## Refining justifications for creative pedagogies in tertiary education

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### Research Domains

Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

### Abstract

This paper argues that interest in generic creative pedagogies to motivate and engage learners may miss their potential to foster strong subject situated learning habits. We present an argument to improve the quality of education in all subject areas through epistemic inquiry (Knorr-Cetina 1999) which draws on the apparently oppositional approaches of the practices of the sciences and of the arts and humanities. Whilst the former instils a disciplined approach to the subject, the latter promotes a culture of open exploration. An inquiry process which weaves the two together draws on the inherent creativity of that subject, inducting the student into the culture of the practices and discipline of the subject area.

### Full paper

Interest in the use of 'creative' approaches to pedagogy in all phases of education is not new, (Authors 2017; 2021; Abegglen et al., 2024). Despite limited evidence of causal relationships, rationales for such approaches tend to cite the value of transdisciplinary learning, increased motivation, meeting the needs of diverse learners, as well as simply stimulating and requiring more engagement by students (Kennedy et al., 2025; Wren et al., 2025). Our focus is also not a causal but a theoretical argument for more 'creative' pedagogies based on considering the importance of different ways of meaning making and pursuing knowledge within a broad range of disciplines and subject areas. We argue for two intertwined approaches to enquiry. The first more redolent of the sciences and the second more reflective of the arts and humanities. The first is often dominant and lauded in tertiary education and creative approaches to learning can, and often are, seen

as a means of bringing in the second approach to enquiry. We argue that this focus on the second approach is not only negative for the arts/humanities, but also for the sciences. In fact, taking of these two approaches in terms of disciplines is misleading – it reflects a decline in academic education. We discuss the need for both approaches to be embedded in all disciplines.

We begin by considering the term ‘creative’ (and related terms) as educative approaches arguing that the term/s should not be understood as relating to distinctive arts/humanities forms, but rather as a culture, a context which is characteristic of, and helpfully modelled by (rather than limited to) arts/humanities practices. Additionally, drawing on Elliott (1971), we argue that creative pedagogies are better understood not as a general approach but as situated, distinctive and inherent to different disciplines. Elliot identified two C20th concepts of ‘creative’, one related to the activity of artists, and a second related to the now commonplace understanding of creative as purposeful and novel or original activity, often problem-solving in character (NACCCE, 1999; Kauffmann and Glaveanu, 2021). He notes that we do not talk of a ‘creative artist’ as the concept of ‘creative’ is embedded in the concept ‘artist’. However, when we talk of a ‘creative scientist’ or ‘creative engineer’ the term ‘creative’ adds the idea, which might be alternatively phrased in contemporary times as ‘innovative’ or ‘entrepreneurial’.

A further foundational pillar, we argue, is that in tertiary education, a student is specialising in a field, becoming more cognisant of and immersed in the knowledge of that field but also in the distinctive practice of their area of study. As such, the pedagogy as well as the curriculum ought to reflect this (Ryan, 1998). This means that learning is an apprentice-like practice close to research because both involve knowledge (co-) creation; and to be done well requires students to draw on these two approaches to inquiry. We develop the argument using Eriksson and Lindberg’s (2016) account that a student is involved with *knowledge creation* not just *knowledge acquisition* and Knorr-Cetina’s (1999; 2001; 2007) socio-cultural analysis of epistemic practices. Knowledge production is an epistemic inquiry requiring both disciplined pursuit and the reflective, open-ended, socio-cultural behaviour of learning, a weaving together of the two (‘science’ and ‘arts/humanities’) approaches. This argument develops Knorr-Cetina’s account of epistemic practices, which were primarily related to knowledge development in the sciences but developed into a broader concern with knowledge societies across all disciplines where science comes to stand for disciplined enquiry. Our account continues this trajectory arguing for greater attention, in terms of epistemic practices, to the distinctive approach of more artistic and humanities forms of enquiry because they direct our attention to remaining open to new possibilities and understandings.

Present practice in many tertiary courses has a distinct imbalance between these two approaches with the consequence that students are ill-prepared from their studies to engage fully in learning/epistemic enquiries in their chosen areas of study. We conclude that all disciplines/subject areas necessarily require students to develop both forms of enquiry as the inherent creativity of their discipline, rather than as an additional concern 'shoehorned' into the subject.