

TEACHING AND LEARNING SCHOLARS NETWORK REPORT

**PROJECT TITLE: ASSESSMENT PRACTICE IN THE CREATIVE ARTS:
DEVELOPING A STANDARDISED ASSESSMENT
FRAMEWORK**

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1. INTRODUCTION

I set out to develop an assessment framework that will inform assessment practice across the Faculty of Creative Arts (FCA). The challenge was to establish a standardised assessment and feedback document that would reflect the subject description and assessment criteria as articulated in faculty subject outlines, whilst maintaining a discipline specific relevance. As a starting point I drew on the current assessment and feedback document I employ in the Graphic Design and New Media program. This document has been developed based on my teaching experience, initial engagement with relevant literature, and AUQA driven reforms.

Assessment of creative work is problematic due to the 'creative' nature of the final artefact, as it does not conform to standard assessment practices established in other fields of education.

“Pressures for conformity with conventions of assessment in other fields of education, and reinforced by global quality assurance demands for objectivity, uniform standards and transparency reinforce focus of assessment on the demonstrable execution and the tangible product and preclude assessment of *creative ability*” (Cowdroy & de Graaff 2005, p. 511).

This report outlines the approach and activities completed during the scholarship. It also describes the outcomes of the scholarship, includes future directions for the research, and recommendations for consideration by the Faculty of Creative Arts (FCA).

2. APPROACH/ACTIVITIES

The activities I instigated and completed during my scholarship include:

- Commissioning a research assistant to undertake a literature review of assessment practice in the creative arts;
- Hosting a faculty seminar engaging with assessment in the creative arts with guest speaker Professor Lynne Hunt;
- Developing and leading an assessment practices workshop with faculty staff;
- Presenting my findings and outcomes at the UOW Teaching & Learning Forum 30/05/2006;
- Leading the development of a collaborative application for faculty research funding with other faculty staff;
- Developing and designing an assessment framework for consideration.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW - ASSESSMENT IN CREATIVE ARTS

Within this review of the academic literature of assessment practice in art and design education, very little practical guidance or articulation of generalisable practices emerged. Within the literature available there were a number of key themes that were identified.

Assessment has been acknowledged as an integral part of learning (Ehmann 2004, ; Gibbs & Simpson 2004, ; Drew & Shreeve 2005) and can drive student learning (Boud 1990, ; Rust 2002). The importance of feedback has also been highlighted (Cruikshank 1998, ; Stokrocki 2005).

Various tools have been proposed to monitor and evaluate student learning and development. These tools have been developed to accommodate practical discipline-specific skills and personal creative expression. Examples of these assessment tools include portfolios (Cho 1999, ; Blaikie, Schönau & Steers 2004, ; de Eça 2005, ; Lindström 2006), sketchbooks (Gilbert 1998, ; Jonson 2002, ; Parker 2005), and journals (Garner & McDonagh-Philp 2001, ; Brinkman 2005).

Specific ways in which educational goals in the creative arts differ from those in other academic disciplines was outlined. The primary distinction relates to creativity (Renshaw 2002, ; Brazil 2003, ; Milgram 2003, ; Cowdroy & de Graaff 2005), which in turn corresponds to a more-intensely personal relationship between students and their subject matter than is usually evident in the less creativity-oriented disciplines (Micklethwaite 2005). The more personal orientation of creative arts highlights the necessity of facilitating development of students' personal-identity within art education (Kárpáti & Kovaks 1997, ; Danvers 2003).

The recognition of learning as a process rather than an outcome or endpoint was another theme to emerge (Danvers 2003, ; Gurel & Basa 2004, ; Öztürk & Türkkan 2006). Similarly, insofar as the goal of creative art education is to produce 'practitioners', the element of practice, and especially reflective practice, has also been identified as an important component of the learning situation (Cunliffe 2005, ; Drew & Shreeve 2005).

Contributions to reflective learning that were identified include; self-evaluation (Macdonald, 2004-05), collaboration and dialogue (Oak 2000, ; Sagun, Demirkan & Goktepe 2001), development of the 'self' and individual expression (Addison 2005), awareness of the relationship between individual and collective identities and engagement with political and socio-cultural-economic contexts (Rifà & Hernández 1997, ; Cunliffe 1999). Such priorities in creative arts education and assessment could lead toward the goal of independent, 'lifelong', and self-directed learning in order to permit conscious participation in the practice of artistic creativity (Jones 1999, ; Ehmann 2004).

2.2 PROFESSOR LYNNE HUNT SEMINAR (SUMMARY)

Professor Lynne Hunt PhD is as a teacher, researcher and leader of learning and teaching at Charles Darwin University and previously Edith Cowan University. Professor Hunt is the recipient of three university-level awards for teaching excellence and the 2002 Australian Award for University Teaching in the Social Science category. In 2002 she received the Prime Minister's Award for Australian University Teacher of the Year. Professor Hunt is also a member of the Board of the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

2.2.1 Seminar Outcomes

- Professor Hunt delivered a paper titled “Teaching, learning and assessment in the performing arts”. Although this paper drew on material from a performing arts context, many of the issues highlighted had equal currency across the other creative arts disciplines;
- This seminar specifically engaging with Creative Arts pedagogy was the first of its kind in FCA Identified staff who are particularly interested in further collaboration;
- 10 staff attended from the faculty representing the disciplines of Visual Arts, Graphic Design, Music, and Performance;
- Professor Hunt highlighted that there is little literature specifically engaging with assessment in creative arts;
- The paper sparked an informative discussion between attending FCA staff;
- Have extended my network by remaining in contact with Professor Hunt, which has resulted in an invitation to join an email group of other academics interested in Creative Arts pedagogy.

2.2.2 Issues highlighted by Professor Hunt

Professor Hunt outlined three leading questions regarding assessment practice in creative arts pedagogy;

- How do academy staff recognise and define excellence?
- How do academy staff describe the teaching and learning processes that lead to excellence?
- How do academy staff assess learning in order to distinguish between excellent and those not so good?

Professor Hunt outlined the following key issues facing academic staff as they search for effective ways to assess creative work:

- There is little literature specifically engaging with assessment in creative arts;
- A cultural clash between traditional academia and Creative Arts;
- Assessment in the performing arts is authentic and situated;
- Assessment should include holistic (Briggs, 2003) and integrated capabilities;
- Subjectivity – “It’s always been called an ‘it’ factor in the industry. You know, that person had ‘it’ (interview response);
- Faculty under pressure to conform to traditional academy standardised assessment practices that do not appear accommodate the creative arts context;
- Is assessment about product or process? Or both?

- Creativity tends to be evaluated and assessed in terms of what is produced rather than the processes that led to it;
- When those notions of validity, fairness and reliability are codified into rigid assessment criteria, learning outcomes, marking frameworks, and assessment protocols, then it is less likely that innovative and original processes and products will be enabled and encouraged.

2.3 FCA ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP

2.3.1 Objectives

I ran a faculty staff workshop engaging with assessment issues with the following principle objectives;

- To involve staff in dialogue about assessment practice in the creative arts
- Provide a forum to share and inform staff ideas, approaches, and experiences
- Support staff to develop best practice approaches informed by the literature and the UOW Good Practice Assessment and Guide to Assessment policies documents

2.3.2 Staff in attendance

Potential participants were identified from the faculty assessment seminar. I sought to have a representative from each of the faculty disciplines. The staff that attended the workshop are identified below;

- Janys Hayes - Performance
- Lotte Latukefu – Music
- Marcus O'Donnell – Journalism
- Shady Cosgrove – Creative Writing
- Penny Harris – Visual Arts
- Marius Foley – Graphic Design
- Gerry Lefoe - CEDIR

2.3.3 Workshop format

I commenced the workshop by asking each of the participants to outline their fundamental approaches to assessment in their own discipline and identify the important issues that were emerging within their own teaching practice. This facilitated a broad ranging discussion uninhabited by formalised assessment policies, which effectively honed in on the experience of those staff at the coalface. I drew on my research to inform the dialogue and identify common themes, before finally directing the discussion towards the identification of future directions.

2.3.4 Approaches employed by faculty staff

The approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment that were identified by the participating staff are summarised below.

Teaching and learning approaches:

- project-based where the project drives the engagement with knowledge;
- industry context, eg. simulated news room, design briefs, work presented in public exhibition or performance contexts;

- team learning common.

Assessment approaches:

- portfolio-based assessment;
- performance-based assessment;
- journal, both in paper form and online.

Feedback provided through:

- mid-session review of work;
- formalised reviews and critiques with staff and peers;
- written feedback provided post completion of work.

Seeking to ensure transparency and consistency through:

- feedback sheets;
- use of published assessment criteria;
- panel assessment.

2.3.5 Issues identified regarding assessment in the Faculty of Creative Arts:

- Assessment as a means to enhance T&L objectives;
- Assessment of major work generally involves a panel of 2 or more staff;
- Concern raised about the amount of time and staff required to assess creative work;
- How can staff maintain quality of assessment while balancing other academic demands?
- Demanding due to diverse group of students (culture, experience, training, age);
- Students tend to develop very personal attachment to work.

Creative arts graduates should be:

- Industry practitioners;
- Critical thinkers;
- Linking theory with practice and practice with theory.

2.3.6 Future directions

The participating staff identified the benefit and an interest in continuing the discussion on assessment and other issues of pedagogy in a formalised forum within the faculty. They indicated they would like to see a forum that facilitates discussion of assessment practice and offers ways to frame practice within formalised assessment policy, or that may inform assessment policy.

2.4 TEACHING & LEARNING FORUM

The presentation outlined the material presented in this report. This included summaries of the literature engaging with assessment practice in the creative arts, the faculty seminar and workshop, reporting issues identified by creative arts academic staff regarding creative arts assessment practice, and the proposed assessment framework articulated in the form of an assessment and feedback document.

2.5 APPLICATION FOR FACULTY RESEARCH FUNDING

Funding from the FCA Research Grants scheme was successfully obtained in July 2006 to further investigate assessment practice in the creative arts. This involves four early career researchers from the disciplines of graphic design, journalism, and creative writing. Building on current research into teaching and learning, the project seeks to identify common threads that link assessment practices across these disciplines and publish these findings at the 2007 Evaluations and Assessment Conference.

3. OUTCOMES

3.1 ASSESSING WORK IN THE CREATIVE ARTS

3.1.1 Re-occurring questions

There are a number of fundamental questions that continue to re-occur when addressing creative work and assessment practice. These include, but are not limited to:

- What constitutes creativity?
- How can we assess creativity?
- Is the creative cognitive process essentially intuitive or essentially rational?
- Can or should creative ability be reduced to quantifiable parameters?
- Do the most important aspects of creative achievement reside in the initial thinking (invention of ideas), or in the subsequent process of development of the idea (making a work of art, design, etc) or in the end product (the work of art or design itself)?
- Are we assessing creative work or creative ability? (Cowdroy & de Graaff 2005)

3.1.2 What is creativity and how can it be assessed?

Cowdroy and de Graaff (2005) maintain creativity embraces a multiplicity of notions and articulate four aspects of creativity; conceptualisation (the development of ideas), schemata development (constructs, analogies, diagrams, planning), the physical execution of the concepts (the activity of making, performing etc), and the products that result from these processes, for example the artwork, manuscript, or performance. I have articulated these notions in figure 1 below.

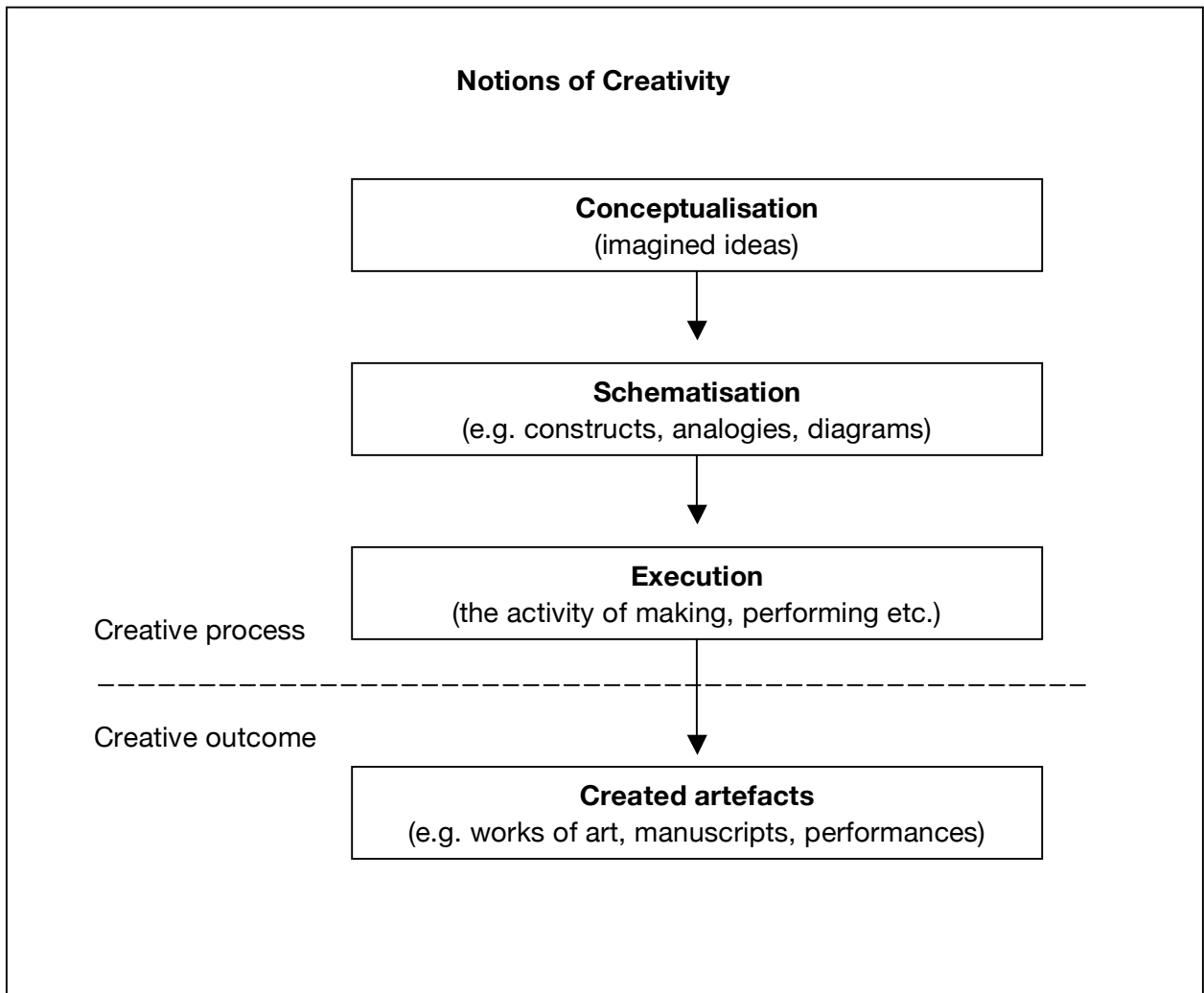


Figure 1: Notions of Creativity [Diagram derived from Cowdroy and de Graaff (2005)]

3.2 PROPOSED NEW ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK DOCUMENT

3.2.1 Draft assessment and feedback document

Drawing on the work of Cowdroy and de Graaff (2005) I have developed an assessment and feedback document (see figure 2). This proposed document incorporates a rubric assessment approach allowing staff to indicate how the student(s) has performed across the four distinct notions of creativity.

SUBJECT CODE	SUBJECT TITLE				
PROJECT NUMBER	PROJECT TITLE				
STUDENT NAME(s):					
Assessment Indicators	Inadequate	Adequate	Commendable	High	Exceptional
Concept					
Schemata					
Execution					
Project outcome					
Project specifications				YES	NO
Discipline specific					
Discipline specific					
PROJECT COMMENTS					

Figure 2: Proposed assessment and feedback document

The assessment indicators employed in the document reflect the key words as articulated in the performance grades & descriptors published in the Faculty of Creative Arts subject outlines. This allows staff to assess applying a graded approach (fail, pass, credit, distinction, high distinction) or a percentage approach. This approach could place staff/assessors in a position to identify for the student their strengths and weaknesses in a clear manner. For instance where a student might have a strong concept that has not been fully realised in the final project outcome. The proposed assessment document could allow the assessor to indicate at what stage of the

creative process the student did not sustain or maximise the full potential of the concept.

The project specifications section allows the inclusion of discipline specific aspects of the assessment task.

3.2.2 Issues arising from proposed assessment and feedback document

There are some concerns I have with this initial proposal that would benefit from further development including discussion with faculty staff and testing in situ. Concerns I have identified to date include:

- Research as an assessment criteria not clearly represented;
- Skills based projects not necessarily represented;
- Discipline specific aspects not necessarily represented;
- Creative project outcomes in the current format could be marginalised.

4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Develop a conference paper based on scholarship material for the 2007 Evaluations and Assessment Conference;
- Maintain the assessment dialogue with interested staff in the faculty in a formalised capacity;
- Seek and develop further funding opportunities, for example UOW ESDF and CARRICK.

4.1 FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR PROPOSED ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

There are a number of possible directions and developments that could be further explored. These include;

- Continue development of proposed assessment and feedback document. The proposed framework has been developed predominately within an art and design context and it is at the stage where it would benefit from direct engagement with faculty staff, particularly other creative disciplines, and trial application.
- Important to support staff and students if change to teaching and study approaches are required to incorporate the proposed assessment document.
- Separate the artefact/project and process into two discrete assessment tasks. This has the potential to avoid the risk of marginalising the creative project outcomes and incorporates research and skills as distinct assessment criteria.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish a FCA working party (or some other formalised group) to;

- Provide a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas and approaches focussed on the specific issue of assessment practice;
- Maintain the momentum generated by the T&L Scholars program;
- Formalise the involvement of interested staff;
- Test and refine the proposed assessment framework across the different creative arts disciplines.

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